# 6

# The *Summa Lamberti* on the Properties of Terms

## [1. General Introduction]

(**205**) Because the logician considers terms, it is appropriate for him to give an account of the term itself and its properties, for the person who is to consider something as a subject must consider its properties also. [ . . . ] because *signification* is, as it were, the fulfillment of a term, and the properties of terms are founded on signification, for the sake of clarity in what follows we must at the outset consider what the *signification* of a term is, and how it differs from *supposition*.

## [2. Signification]

### [2a. Definition of signification]

The signification of a term is the concept of a thing, a concept on which an utterance is imposed by the will of the person instituting the term. For, as Aristotle maintains in the first book of *De interpretatione* [*On Interpretation*] (16a3–5), utterances are signs of states in the soul – i.e., in the understanding – but concepts are the signs of things.

### [2b. Explanation of the definition]

In order to understand this, it is essential to know that four things are required for an utterance to be significant: a thing, a concept [or some understanding, *intellectus*] of the thing, an utterance, and the union of the utterance with the concept of the thing. What we are calling the thing is something existing outside the soul, which is apprehended by the soul by means of an idea of it – e.g., a man, or a stone. What we call the concept of the thing is the idea [*species*] or likeness of the thing, which exists in the soul; for according to Aristotle in the third book of *De anima* (III, 8, 431b30–432a1), not the stone but rather an appearance [*species*] of the stone is in the soul; and it is by means of the appearance that the soul grasps the thing. The utterance is that which is put forward along with the concept [or understanding] of the thing; in that case [i.e., when the utterance is made with some understanding of a

thing] a signification is united to the utterance and the utterance is made significant.[1] And although both the concept of the thing and the utterance are natural in the same way (since they are formed by natural sources), the utterance is nevertheless said to signify by the will of the person instituting it, because the union of the concept of the thing with the utterance is effected by the will, and it is in that [action] that the imposition of the utterance consists.[2]

In this way, therefore, an utterance is primarily – in itself – and directly the sign of a concept of the thing; but in addition it is indirectly the sign of the thing. For just as we say that whatever is a cause of the cause is a cause of the thing caused, so we can say that in its own way whatever is a sign of the sign is a sign of the thing signified. Thus, since an utterance is a sign of a concept, and a concept is a sign of a thing, in this way [the utterance] is a sign of the thing as well. An utterance that is a sign of a sign – of the concept – will be a sign of the signified – i.e., of the thing; it is, however, a sign of the concept directly but a sign of the thing indirectly.[3]

### [2c. The difference between signification and supposition]

Now signification differs from supposition in that signification is prior to supposition. For the signification is the concept of the thing represented by means of the utterance, and before the union of it with the utterance there is no term; rather, a term is constituted in the union of that concept of a thing with an utterance. Supposition, on the other hand, is a certain property of a term that has been constituted in that way.

There is another difference, because signification extends only to the thing the term is imposed to signify; supposition, however, extends not only to the thing signified by means of the term but can extend to supposita contained under that thing. For example, the signification of 'man' extends only to *man*, not to the things contained under *man*; for 'man' signifies *man*, not Socrates and not Plato. 'Man' can, nevertheless, supposit for Socrates, and for Plato, and for *man*.[4]

1 The point here simply is that a meaningful utterance, such as 'man' or 'stone' in English, is different from some meaningless articulate sound, such as 'biltrix' (Boethius' classic example of a meaningless utterance), precisely on account of the fact that the former is uttered with some understanding that it is supposed to convey, whereas the latter is not.

2 That is to say, although both the utterance and the concept are natural things (the utterance is some sound produced by speech organs and the concept is an act of understanding of the mind), it is only the concept that represents the thing conceived by it naturally, the utterance signifies it only on account of being related to the concept by convention, as a result of voluntarily imposing the name on the thing conceived by the concept.

3 This is a classic statement of the Aristotelian "semantic triangle": words signify things, but they do so only through the mediation of concepts, for they only signify the things that are represented by the concepts they directly signify.

4 Clearly, *man* here, as opposed to the individual humans, such as Socrates or Plato, is the universal nature signified by the term 'man' and represented by the concept that his term directly signifies. So, the signification (or meaning) of this term extends only to this universal nature, the direct object of the concept of humans, although, on account of this signification, it can be used in a sentence to stand for the individual humans who have this nature. The function of the term of standing for these individuals in a sentence is its property that is called "supposition" (which is why this property is often compared to the modern notion of reference, as it is contrasted with meaning).

## [3. Supposition]

### [3a. On 'supposition']

Next, as regards supposition. [ . . . ][5] Supposition is said to be the acceptance of a term for itself, for its [signified] thing, for some suppositum contained under its [signified] thing, or for more than one suppositum contained under its [signified] thing.

### [3b. Broad and Strict Supposition]

It is important to know, however, that the supposition meant here is talked about in two ways: broadly and strictly. Supposition broadly speaking is, as has already been said, the acceptance of a term for itself, or for its [signified] thing (as when one says '*Man* is a species,' '*White* dazzles'), or the acceptance of a term for some suppositum or for supposita belonging to its [signified] thing (as when one says 'A man is running,' 'A white thing is running'). For when one says '*Man* is a species,' [the term] 'man' is taken for itself or for its [signified] thing, and not for any suppositum; whereas if one says 'A man is running,' it is taken for a suppositum. Likewise, when one says '*White* dazzles,' then [the term] 'white' is taken here for itself or for its [signified] thing; for that predicate applies to *white* not by reason of a suppositum but by reason of its form. When, however, one says 'A white thing is running,' it is taken for a suppositum.

Supposition broadly speaking is divided into supposition strictly speaking and copulation. For broadly speaking both substantival and adjectival terms supposit; strictly speaking, however, supposition is attached to substantival terms and copulation to adjectival terms.

Supposition strictly speaking is the acceptance of a term representing a thing that is stable and stands on its own, an acceptance in accordance with which the term can be taken for its [signified] thing or[6] for a suppositum or any supposita contained under its [signified] thing.

### [3c. Copulation]

Copulation is the acceptance of a term representing a dependent thing, an acceptance in accordance with which it can be taken for its [signified] thing or[7] for a suppositum or supposita contained under its [signified] thing. [ . . . ]

### [3d. Syncategorematic words][8]

Some words, such as syncategorematic words, neither supposit nor copulate.

5 In the omitted passage, the author distinguishes four different senses of the term 'suppositio' as it was used in contemporary grammar and logic. Since the other three senses he dismisses as irrelevant, it is only his description of the fourth sense that is provided here.

6 The Latin text contains 'non' here, which is correctly rendered by Norman Kretzmann's translation as 'not'. However, for doctrinal reasons, a 'vel', that is, 'or' is more fitting here. For the text as it stands would *exclude* the possibility of a substantive standing for its individual *supposita*, which is certainly not what the author means. Also, the correction seems to be quite justified by the parallel construction of the immediately following paragraph, which is characteristic of this type of texts.

7 This is the clear parallel of the construction of the previous passage.

8 Such are words that taken in their proper significative function cannot be subjects or predicates of sentences, but rather have the function of affecting the semantic functions of subjects and predicates or other units of speech, such as 'not', 'or', 'and', 'every', 'to', 'for', etc.

[3e. Signification and property of a term]

From the things already said it is clear that supposition is both the signification of a term and a property of a term, and copulation likewise. Nevertheless, 'supposition' is taken differently ((om. *supponitur vel*)) depending on whether it is the signification of a term or a property of a term, and so is copulation, as we have seen. And our concern here is with the supposition and copulation that are properties of terms, not insofar as they are the significations of terms.[9]

[3f Supposition and substantives, copulation and adjectives]

Again, if anyone asks why supposition is appropriate to substantives and copulation to adjectives, it is clear from the things that have been said what we must say. For suppositing belongs to what stands on its own and to what represents its stable [signified] thing, but to stand on its own and to represent its stable [signified] thing is a property of substantives. Copulating, on the other hand, belongs to what adjoins [something else] and to what represents a dependent thing, but to adjoin and to represent a dependent thing is a property of adjectives. Therefore, speaking strictly, supposition belongs to substantives, but copulation to adjectives.

[3g. Divisions of supposition]

[3g(i). Natural and accidental]

Supposition is divided first in this way: One sort of supposition is natural, the other accidental.

Natural supposition is what a term has on its own and by its nature. A term is said to have this sort of supposition when it is used by itself – i.e., when it is not joined to any other. But a term having that sort of supposition supposits not only for the things that share its form, but instead for all the things that share, [have shared, and will share] its form – i.e., for present, past, and future things [of that form]. And this supposition is called natural because it is not an extrinsic but an intrinsic propensity; for whatever has an internal source is natural.[10]

Accidental supposition is what a term has from what is adjoined to it, and a term supposits in this supposition in keeping with the requirement of that to which it is adjoined. For if someone says 'A man exists,' ['man'] supposits for present things because it is adjoined to a present-tense verb; if someone says 'A man existed,' for past things; if someone says 'A man will exist,' for future things. And this supposition is called accidental because it inheres in a term extrinsically; for what inheres extrinsically in something is accidental to it.

9 In this passage, the author relates the difference between supposition and copulation as they are the properties of terms to the difference between substantival and adjectival signification (i.e., the kind of signification whereby substances are signified and the kind of signification whereby accidents are signified) distinguished in a previously omitted passage.

10 Note that this remark is not in conflict with the conventionality of the signification of an utterance: for a term is conventionally constituted from an utterance and its relation to a naturally representative concept. Once the conventional connection between utterance and concept is established, however, the term constituted by this connection naturally has the ability to stand for whatever is naturally represented by the concept.

[3g(ii). Simple and personal]

One sort of accidental supposition is simple, the other personal.

Simple supposition is the kind according to which a term is taken for itself or for its [signified] thing, without relation to the supposita contained under it. The supposition that is in the term by reason of its form is called simple; and it is because form is of itself simple and indivisible that the supposition that is in a term as a result of form is called simple. [ . . . ]

It should be noted, however, that [a term's] having no relation to the supposita can occur either in such a way that there is no sort of relation to them, neither determinately nor indeterminately, or in such a way that there is a relation to them, not determinately, but indeterminately. It is on that basis that one can say that there is a certain sort of simple supposition in which the term is in no way related to the supposita but is interpreted only for its [signified] form. The term 'man' has this sort of supposition when one says '*Man* is a species,' and this is simple supposition speaking strictly. But there is another simple supposition in which a common term is not related to the supposita determinately and yet has a relation to them indeterminately. The term 'man' has this sort of supposition when one says 'I know there is a man in England'; similarly, the term 'pepper' when one says 'Pepper is sold here and in Rome.' This, however, is called simple supposition less strictly than the first sort.[11]

Personal supposition is [the sort] according to which a term is interpreted for a suppositum or for supposita. It is called personal for the following reason, however: in the case of rational substance a suppositum or individual is the same as a person. For Boethius (*Against Eutyches and Nestorius*) defines person in this way: a person is an individual substance belonging to rational nature; for an individual in the case of rational substance is a person. And because in the case of other things individuals are picked out in accordance with an analogy drawn from rational things, the supposition in which a term is interpreted for supposita or individuals is called personal – not because all individuals are persons (for only individuals that have to do with rational substance are persons, certainly not other sorts of individuals); but all individuals either are persons or are picked out by analogy with those that are persons.

11 In these sentences, the terms in question apparently cannot be taken to stand for the individuals falling under them. For no singular man is a species, and it may not be true of this man that I know him to be in England, and it is not true of that man, etc., listing all singulars (if I know nobody in England), and it is not true of any single pepper that it is sold both here and in Rome. At any rate, these were classic examples that realist logicians took to illustrate the cases when terms are taken to stand not for singulars but for universals. Nominalists, on the other hand, provided different interpretations for these sentences. In the first place, they would claim that the term 'species' applies to singular acts of understanding representing several singular things indifferently. Likewise, they claimed that even if it is not true of this man that I know him to be in England, and it is not true of that man that I know him to be in England, and so on for all singular men, it is still true that I know this man or that man or that man, etc. to be in England, where there is no need to refer to a universal. Again, they would say that although it is not true of a single pepper that it sold both here and in Rome, it may be true that some pepper is sold here and some pepper is sold in Rome, and this is the sense of the sentence, without reference to any sort of universal entity. In brief, the nominalists following Ockham interpreted cases of simple supposition in the strict sense as reference to concepts (understood as singular acts of understanding), and they treated the "less strict" cases of simple supposition presented here and elsewhere in realist logic as analyzable in terms of personal supposition, eliminating the apparent reference to universals. This strategy of "elimination by paraphrase" is also the "weapon of choice" of the nominalists of 20th-century philosophy (for example, Goodman, Quine), when they seek to eliminate unwanted reference to "abstract entities". But these 20th-century developments are historically unrelated to the similar medieval developments.