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Luther’s Doctrine of Christ: Language, Metaphysics, Logic

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Abstract

Luther addresses Christological issues throughout his career in a variety of contexts and genres. Despite the prevalence of Christology in Luther’s thought, scholars have not reached a consensus on central points of Luther’s Christology. A prevailing opinion holds that Luther has no interest in philosophical theology or speculative dogmatics in Christology. This view, I argue, has a particular history in the Luther Renaissance and is determined by the neo-Kantian presuppositions held by Luther scholars in the early twentieth century. Laying aside analytical concepts shaped by neo-Kantian thought, this dissertation approaches Luther’s Christology through the lens of late medieval nominalism. I argue that Luther uses philosophical tools borrowed from late medieval nominalism in his Christology, drawing on medieval understandings of language, metaphysics, and logic to resolve Christological problems. The key texts analyzed in this work are two of Luther’s late disputations that focus on Christology, the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:19) and the Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ.

This dissertation surveys interpretations of Luther’s Christology and the historical background of the disputations in the first chapter. I point to the theological questions at stake and how Luther addresses theological method to resolve Christological problems. In the second chapter I show how Luther distinguishes between theology and philosophy to defend the divinity of Christ. I argue that Luther understands philosophy and theology as distinct regions of inquiry so that he can use philosophical tools while addressing theological problems. These tools include certain conceptions of logic and epistemology. I argue that Luther uses suppositional logic and frames faith as an epistemological category
as he defends the divinity of Christ. The third chapter shows how Luther frames a new theological language to resolve the question of Christ as a creature. I argue that Luther uses nominalist semantics to craft a new theological language. In particular, he draws on medieval conceptions of concrete and abstract terms, real and nominal definitions, and connotative terms within a theory of mental, written, and spoken language. I conclude that the language Luther uses to resolve Christological problems is not performative speech but an understanding of words as signs with conventional signification. In the fourth chapter I analyze Luther’s concept of the communication of attributes in light of metaphysics. I put Luther’s use of the communication in conversation with medieval receptions of John Damascene, particularly on the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature. John, the scholastics, and Luther all use metaphysical concepts of person and nature to account for the communication of attributes. I demonstrate that Luther’s use of the communication of attributes follows Biel’s rules for Christological predications. Luther works with philosophical tools, notably metaphysics, semantics, and logic, as he formulates correct expressions of the communication of attributes. I conclude by pointing to the ecumenical significance of Luther’s Christology and its significance for the problem of faith and reason.
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Abbreviations


Dedication

To Tabitha
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Methodology

1.1 Disputing the Person of Christ: 1539–1540

On January 11, 1539, Luther served as the sole respondent in a disputation at the University of Wittenberg. He was not merely looking to fill idle time. As he left his study and entered the room for the disputation, he put other pressing matters aside. At the time he was writing *On the Councils and the Church* as a background study for the looming question of a church council. The work was just one of Luther’s contributions to the political and ecclesiastical negotiations surrounding a general council.⁴ Closer to home, Luther was in the midst of two controversies at the University of Wittenberg. The Cordatus controversy raised questions about justification and its relation to the study of philosophy in the university. The controversy had begun in 1536, arose again in 1538, and would not be settled until later in 1539.² At the time of the disputation Luther was also deeply involved in the heated antinomian controversy. This controversy began in 1537, when the Wittenberg professor Philipp Melanchthon and Johann Agricola first sparred over the place of the law in the Christian life. Despite numerous disputations, publications, and attempts

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² In late 1538 Phillip Melanchthon feared that the controversy would become heated again. Martin Brecht argues that the settlement was merely an external pacification and that Luther’s opponents continued to hold different private opinions. The split, in Brecht’s interpretation, impaired the intellectual climate at the University. Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church*, 148–152.
at a settlement—many of them involving or written by Luther—the antinomian controversy raged until 1540. The same month of the disputation one of Luther’s writings on the controversy (Against the Antinomians) appeared. The bitter dispute ended only when Agricola secretly left Wittenberg for a position in Berlin. Besides these controversies, Luther regularly preached in Wittenberg, sometimes frustrated with the resistance to his preaching. At home Luther was busy with family and household affairs besides managing his own failing health. All of these problems placed legitimate demands on Luther’s time and energy. Yet on January 11 Luther set everything else aside to lead a disputation. His attendance suggests that he found the exercise and the topic important enough to set aside other pressing duties.

Luther’s comments to open the disputation show the value Luther placed on disputations. He addressed the other faculty and students from the University of Wittenberg gathered for the event, including scholars from the arts and philosophy faculties. They were interested in the theological topic of the disputation: the incarnation of Christ. They were accustomed to these academic exercises. Since 1536 quarterly disputations were held at the University of Wittenberg, besides disquisitions held at the

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4 Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 156–171.
5 When the Elbe flooded in April 1539 Luther declared that this was God’s judgment on the sins of Wittenberg. Clearly Luther was frustrated that his preaching bore little fruit in reforming the morality of the congregation at Wittenberg. Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 256.
6 Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 229–248.
7 While the records do not list all those present, the names that do appear in the record indicate that the arts and philosophy faculties were represented along with theology faculty members. Master Veit Winsheim and Veit Amerbach from the arts faculty are named, along with Johannes Saxo and Heinrich Schmedenste von Lüneburg from the philosophy faculty. Justus Jonas and Caspar Cruciger from the theology faculty are also identified. WA 39/2:13C.30, 16B.18, 18B.28, 19B.21, 22B.20, 23B.15. A certain M. Battus and a “Comes Polonus” are also named. WA 39/2:9C.31, 27B.16.
promotion of students. On this occasion they listened as Luther spoke about the importance of disputations. Given time and strength, he insisted that he would dispute all articles of doctrine. Such attention to doctrine was necessary because Wittenberg was in the eyes of the world as the center of new theology. The faculty and students needed to be prepared to defend their theology against opponents both present and future, and disputation were an excellent means of preparation. Luther identified the particular opponent for the day as the Sorbonne, the theology faculty at the University of Paris.

Luther had prepared theses for the day on the incarnation of Christ. The scholars would debate whether it is true that “The Word became flesh” in philosophy. Luther put out for debate the claim that while it is false in philosophy, in theology it is true that the Word became flesh. Once the prefatory comments were complete, the disputation on this question began. The participants followed the rules of disputation common to medieval

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8 Martin Brecht gives a brief survey of the disputations at Wittenberg in which Luther participated from 1535 until his death. Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 126–134. See below for more on Luther’s involvement in disputation throughout his career.

9 “Scitis, iussu illustrissimi principis electoris esse mandatum, ut una quaeque professio diligenter tractet suam professionem legendo, conferendo, meditando, disputando. Sic theologi, sic iuristae, sic medici faciunt, ut eruant et proponant discipulis suis, quae maxime habeant usum in vita, et discentes exerceant se, ne nudi prorsus ad rerum gubernacula veniant. Quamquam hoc mandatum illustrissimi principis electoris sit humanum, alioqui tamen, cum nos theologi simus praeter hoc debiteos omnes, nostrum officium debemus prae alis summa fide facere et laborare in vinea domini, ut Paulus iubet etiam curare, ut verbum Dei abundet in nobis, aequirum est, ut huic constitutioni illustrissimi principis electoris ex animo et libenter pareamus. Sunt etiam causae, quae nos theologos adhortari debent ad eiusmodi disputationes. Nam cum simus facti spectaculum orbis terrarum et accusamur haeresis et autores novae doctrinae, oportet nos magis ardere studio verbi Dei, ut nos ipsi possimus certi esse de doctrina nostra et fide, et ut parati simus ad respondendum, et non solum contrarii esse rationi nostrae, sed etiam diabolo et portis inferorum et contradictientes arguere et convincere. Et Petrus iubet, nos paratos esse ad responsionem reddendam omnibus petentibus nobis de spe, quae in nobis est, et hoc cum modestia et timore. Quod facere nemo potest nisi in hac arena versatus, qui talibus monstris ab ineunte aetate adfuerint. Quare et ego, si satisfacserent vires mei corporis, de omnibus articulis doctrinarum nostrae praecipuis ordine singulis septimaniis disputarem et vos redderem alcriores ad confrantendum adversariis et armarem adversus haereses futuras, quorum multae erunt nobis mortuis. Sed tantum, quantum potero, faciam.” WA 39/2:6A.5–7A.8.

universities. Luther's opponents constructed arguments intended to refute his theses. Luther responded to the arguments, aiming to find a fault in the arguments of his opponents.\textsuperscript{11} By argument and counter-argument those in the room tested arguments about the person of Christ. Luther led this debate about the theological question of the incarnation within the framework of a disputation, a medieval exercise in logic.\textsuperscript{12}

A little more than a year later, Luther returned to the person of Christ in another disputation. On February 28, 1540, Luther led the \textit{Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ}. On this occasion Luther identified the opponent as the Protestant theologian Caspar Schwenckfeld. Schwenckfeld had published a treatise on the person of Christ in 1539. Luther made Schwenckfeld's argument that Christ is not a creature the focus of the disputation. As in 1539, Luther composed theses on the person of Christ. He then served as the respondent, refuting the counter-arguments raised by the other participants. Once again, the theologians of Wittenberg debated the doctrine of Christ's person within an exercise in medieval logic. By arranging these two disputations on the person of Christ, Luther indicated that the person of Christ merited attention at the University of Wittenberg.

These disputations were not the first time that Luther had written or spoken on Christology. Twenty years earlier Luther had related Christology to the doctrine of


\textsuperscript{12} White describes a disputation as "a sort of formalised logical argument." White, \textit{Luther}, 21.
justification. In his famous treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian* Luther described justification as a marriage between the Christian and the person of Christ. Faith unites the Christian to the person of Christ who is God and a human being in one person. Through faith the properties of Christ’s person become those of the Christian, just as a married couple share all property in common. The Christian receives Christ’s properties of “grace, life, and salvation” through this exchange.\(^{13}\) Luther used Christology in this text to articulate his doctrine of how Christ justifies a person. The person of Christ must possess grace, life, and salvation if those gifts are to be shared with the Christian through faith. Christ’s person is, in this way, central to Luther’s doctrine of justification.

While Luther closely relates justification and Christology, Luther scholars have stressed the importance of justification in Luther’s thought while downplaying the importance of Christology.\(^{14}\) The theologians of the Luther Renaissance, a particular movement in Luther scholarship in Germany at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century, identified the doctrine of justification as Luther’s Reformation breakthrough. They understood justification as an experience and turned Luther studies to a consideration of religion as an experience. Since then other scholars have considered Luther’s doctrine of justification in

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\(^{13}\) WA 7:54.31–55.36.

\(^{14}\) See for instance Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther’s Doctrine of Christ*, Yale Publications in Religion 14 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 191–243. Siggins holds that Luther has little or no concern in philosophical theology. He argues that attending to the technical details of Christ’s person is not necessary to understand Luther’s Christology. Luther’s concerns are preaching and faith rather than speculative thought on the doctrine of Christ. A more recent example is Athina Lexutt, who focuses on justification in Luther even when addressing Christology. The two natures of Christ in her work appear briefly, noted as what makes justification possible and as the model for the *simul iustus et peccator*. Lexutt attends to the place of philosophy in the Christological disputations rather than the person of Christ. Athina Lexutt, “Christologie als Soteriologie: Ein Blick in die späten Disputationen Martin Luthers,” in *Relationen—Studien zum Übergang vom Spätmittelalter zur Reformation: Festschrift zu Ehren von Prof. Dr. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen*, ed. Athina Lexutt and Wolfgang Matz, Arbeiten zur Historischen und Systematischen Theologie 1 (Münster, Hamburg, and London: Lit Verlag, 2000), 210–212.
relation to topics such as law and gospel and preaching. Many scholars have researched the exact time and nature of Luther’s Reformation breakthrough by searching for the first appearance of a new doctrine of justification. Justification and the early Luther have been thoroughly researched. Yet surprisingly little attention has been given to Luther’s doctrine of Christ.

The theme of this dissertation is Luther’s Christology as articulated in the 1539 and 1540 Christological disputations. Historical questions are at stake when analyzing the disputations, such as why Luther turned explicitly to Christology in these years. Also at stake is the historical correlation of Luther to patristic and scholastic Christologies. There are doctrinal issues at stake in the disputations, especially how Luther conceives of the person of Christ and how that person relates to the natures of Christ. There are also methodological issues at stake, namely how Luther uses particular philosophical, biblical, and theological resources in his Christology. The methodology Luther explicitly lays out in the disputations has been the focus of research into these disputations, particularly the relation between theology and philosophy. Luther scholars have reached a general consensus about Luther’s methodology and the place of philosophy in Luther’s theology.


with implications for Luther research. I begin by outlining the general consensus on Luther’s methodology.

1.2 Methodological Issues: The Relation between Philosophy and Theology

Luther advocates leaving philosophy in its own region while doing theology. The final theses of the 1539 *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)* are:

40. We would therefore do better if, having left dialectics or philosophy in its own region, we would learn to speak a new language in the region of faith beyond every sphere. 41. Otherwise it would be as if we poured new wine into old wineskins and destroyed both, as the Sorbonne has done. 42. The disposition of faith ought to be practiced in the articles of faith, not the understanding of philosophy.17

Many Luther scholars interpret Luther’s recommendation to be a divorce between philosophy and theology. Luther advocates leaving “philosophy in its own region” when doing theology precisely because the two disciplines are antagonistic to each other. While this interpretation is a broad consensus among many Luther scholars, setting philosophy and theology into opposition is a conceptual move with its own history. I aim to show how that history began in Luther studies around the turn of the twentieth century in Germany because I wish to challenge this legacy. I intend to argue that Luther does make use of philosophy in Christology.

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17 "40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relictis discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram. 41. Alioqui futurum est, ut vinum novum in utres veteres mittamus, et utrumque perdamus, ut Sorbona fecit. 42. Affectus fidei exercendus est in articulis fidei, non intellectus philosophiae. Tum vere scietur, quid sit: Verbum caro factum est.” WA 39/2:5.13–36.
The predominant approach to the study of Luther began at the turn of the twentieth century in Germany. The new approach to Luther that began then is known as the Luther Renaissance. The scholars of the Luther Renaissance sought intellectual tools for the remaking of society. They found one such tool in Albrecht Ritschl’s idea that Luther’s religious impulse was the key to transform society and the world. Through a recovery of that religious impulse theologians of the twentieth century could realize the full potential of the Reformation through a society shaped by religion. Critical to this investigation is that Ritschl categorized Luther’s insight as a religious impulse. Luther’s insight was that a person’s relation to God would lead to a transformed human subject who would freely work to serve the neighbor. If that original insight into a relation with God could be recovered from the corrupting influence of church politics, people’s experience of God could power a transformation of German society.18 Karl Holl, another theologian of the Luther Renaissance, wrote that Luther understood religion to be an original experience. Luther’s concept of religion came from an experience of a dangerous and unpredictable God who freely forgives sins. Holl framed Luther’s approach to religion as the experience of justification. In this experience the human self is annihilated, requiring a heroic figure to stand and endure such annihilation. Luther was the hero who stood and recovered the experience of justification as the heart of religion. Holl used this image of the heroic Luther to call for resignation and self-sacrifice in Germany following the disaster of World War I.19 Ritschl and Holl used the category of experience to shape a view of Luther’s religion that

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could use spiritual power to work changes in society. The obstacles to this project that they identified were problems related to institutionalization and rationalization.

The scholars of the Luther Renaissance saw Luther as the antidote to the problem of rationalization in religion. They worked with neo-Kantian categories in their project to reshape society by religious impulses. In neo-Kantian thought “rationalization” referred to the mind’s activity to impose order on the disorderly elements of the world. The concept arose from the neo-Kantians associated with the University of Marburg in the 1860s and 1870s. They developed a new concept of how the human mind made sense of physical sensations. Confronted with a world of irrational sensations, the mind imposes a rational order on this world to organize that world into meaningful concepts. Max Weber argued that in religion this process of rationalization corrupted the original spiritual experience. A new kind of religion was sought that could resist the corrosive nature of rationalization. In particular, theologians sought to recover the original Jesus from the corrupting influence of Greek metaphysics. Rudolf Otto understood Luther’s religion to be the non-rational experience of a holy and terrifying God. This holy God is apprehended by feelings rather than thoughts. The scholars of the Luther Renaissance construed systematic theology as a process of rationalization that distorted the original spiritual impulses and experiences of religion. Metaphysics and systematic theology were rational obstacles to be overcome, and Luther had showed how to overcome them. Luther’s return to an original spiritual impulse was framed as the answer to the corrosive process of religious rationalization.

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20 Helmer, How Luther Became the Reformer, 40–44.
21 Helmer, How Luther Became the Reformer, 44–54.
Or, to put it in different terms, the scholars of the Luther Renaissance opposed faith and reason. They framed theology in Luther’s new approach as an explication of faith. They understood faith as the antithesis of reason, an idea that corresponded to their definition of religion as an experience based on feelings rather than thought. Philosophy became the enemy of theology. Luther made great religious achievements because he opposed faith to reason and theology to philosophy.22 Within his broader theology, Luther’s Christology privileged the experience of Jesus over systematic approaches oriented toward the two natures of Christ.23 Luther in this interpretation approached Christ through the categories of experience and emotion rather than speculative Greek thought handed down through medieval scholastic theologians. The theologians of the Luther Renaissance laid down these principles as starting points for Luther research, particularly into Christology.

However a recent development has seen a decisive shift away from the picture of Luther identified by the Luther Renaissance. This shift has decisive implications for reinterpreting Luther’s view of philosophy and theology. This development built on the pioneering work of Heiko Oberman, who situated Luther in his medieval context. Oberman noted that Luther’s education at Erfurt gave him a familiarity with the thought of William Ockham.24 Oberman showed that most of Luther’s ideas had their basis in late medieval thought.25 Since Oberman also showed that late medieval thought was heavily infused with philosophy, Luther’s ideas were formed in an environment that used philosophy in

22 Helmer, How Luther Became the Reformer, 109.
23 Helmer, How Luther Became the Reformer, 17–46.
25 Heiko Oberman, Luther; especially 50–81.
Other scholars followed in Oberman’s footsteps, some with a greater interest in philosophy and theology. Scholars such as Christine Helmer, Graham White, Theodore Dieter, Risto Saarinen, and David Luy offer a new way to approach Luther through the more historical lens of late medieval philosophy and theology. The emerging consensus from the work of these scholars is that Luther appropriated the ideas of late medieval philosophical theologians like Robert Holcot, Pierre D’Ailly, and Giles of Rome in his theology. These scholars have opened up a new historical perspective from which to view Luther by situating him in his late medieval context.

Luther learned theology in the Ockhamist tradition through his studies at the University of Erfurt. At Erfurt Luther studied under two Ockhamists, Arnoldus von Usingen and Jodocus Trutvetter. He read Peter of Spain, Peter Lombard, Gabriel Biel, and Pierre d’Ailly. These medieval theologians incorporated philosophical tools and concepts into theology. They carefully defined terms and analyzed propositions in theology using tools developed in their philosophical work. The approach of Ockham and Biel is a

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30 This approach was followed by scholastic theologians throughout the medieval period. For instance, see Richard Cross, “Philosophy and the Trinity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 342–362. Cross shows how the scholastics used
philosophical theology. They appreciated philosophy as a tool useful for bringing clarity to the organization of systematic doctrines. Luther’s training in this kind of philosophical theology equipped him with the conceptual resources required to use philosophical tools in theological work. Luther’s stance toward the philosophical theology of late medieval nominalism is critical to understanding his Christology. By interpreting Luther as a medieval theologian, neo-Kantian presuppositions about religion can be set aside so that a fair assessment of Luther’s use of philosophical tools in theology is possible.

1.3 Methodological Approach to Christology

Luther advises that the proper methodology is essential for Christology. He warns in the Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ that a lack of attention to methodology leads to pointless arguments: “25. Foolishly Schwenckfeld quibbles with his batrachomyomachia that Christ according to the humanity is called a creature. 26. The man—lacking letters, teaching, and even common sense—does not know how to distinguish equivocal terms.” Luther thinks that education and letters help to avoid pointless Christological debates, or that proper methodology will bring clarity to Christology. A few methodological points that Luther identifies give shape to the kind of metaphysical tools to account for the Trinity. For examples dealing with Christology, see Peter Lombard, The Sentences, Book 3, On the Incarnation of the Word, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), dist. 1–23; pp. 1–103; and Gabriel Biel, Coll. III, dist. 1–23; pp. 1–427.

31 On Ockham’s philosophy, theology, and the relation between the two, see Marilyn McCord Adams, William Ockham (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).
32 Literally, “a battle of frogs and mice.” The word refers to a Greek parody of the Iliad, and refers to a silly altercation.
things one should learn before addressing the person of Christ. A theologian can avoid Christological problems by avoiding the use of etymological studies or analogies when articulating Christology.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, a theologian needs to attend to how Christology relates to syllogisms. Luther observes that in some syllogisms about the person of Christ “the form is optimal but not at all suited to the material.”\textsuperscript{35} Critical to the methodology suited for Christology is the question of philosophy and theology. Luther thinks that in philosophy it is “impossible and absurd” that the word was made flesh, while this is “true” in theology.\textsuperscript{36} Luther has some kind of distinction between philosophy and theology in mind here that enables the passage under debate to be true in theology and false in philosophy. A theologian doing Christology needs to know this distinction as part of the proper methodology. The wrong methodology, or a lack of attention to methodology, leads to Christological errors.

The consensus interpretation of Luther’s methodology is the claim that Luther eliminates philosophy from theology. A famous article by Reinhard Schwarz, published in 1966, has influenced the particular tradition in studies of Luther’s Christology that see enmity between philosophy and theology. Schwarz interprets Luther’s approach as a radical break from nominalist Christology and its use of philosophical categories. Luther, in Schwarz’s view, sees Christology as a linguistic assignment for the theologian rather than a speculative problem. Luther criticizes the philosophical theories of the nominalists used to

\textsuperscript{34} “17. Quare cavendum est in hac re ab etymologia, analogia, consequentia et exemplis.” WA 39/2:94.11–12.
\textsuperscript{35} “26. In his et similibus syllogismus est forma optima, sed nihil ad materiam.” WA 39/2:5.7–8.
\textsuperscript{36} “1. Etsi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Omen verum vero consonat, tamen idem non est verum in diversis professionibus. 2. In theologia verum est, verbum esse carnem factum, in philosophia simpliciter impossibile et absurdum.” WA 39/2:3.1–4.
give an account of the person of Christ and the communication of attributes. Rather than speculate on “person,” “nature,” and the like, Luther is concerned with the right way of speaking that expresses the faith. The tools of philosophy cannot function to defend or articulate the true union of Christ’s natures nor the reality of Christ’s human nature.37 Schwarz works from the neo-Kantian presupposition that faith and reason—or theology and philosophy—are antithetical. Explicating the faith is an exercise in the non-rational experience of religion. In light of the presupposed antithesis of theology and philosophy, Luther must reject philosophy and reason in order to make room for theology and faith in Christology.

In a particularly important turn for the reception of Luther’s Christology, Schwarz assigns the task of uniting the natures of Christ to language. Luther locates the communication of attributes as the center and heart of Christology. This communication—the predication of the two natures of one another, or of attributes of one nature to the other nature—functions to unite the natures of Christ in Luther’s thought. Schwarz interprets the nominalists as inheriting and grudgingly incorporating the communication of attributes into their Christology. But this is merely a surface incorporation. Due to their philosophical commitments, the nominalists are unable to adequately integrate the communication of attributes into Christology.38 Luther, conversely, makes the communication of attributes the central feature of Christology. The words expressing the communication of attributes draw both natures into equal personal existence in Christ. The language of the

communication is scriptural language, so that proper Christology follows the language of Scripture rather than the speculative language of nominalist Christology.39

Despite claims that Luther eliminates philosophy from theology, at this point it is clear that the categories of the Luther Renaissance shape Schwarz’s argument. Since neo-Kantians set faith and reason in opposition, they understand a turn to Scripture by definition as a turn away from speculative metaphysics. Instead of metaphysics, Luther’s Christology is portrayed as the articulation of a particular religious experience. Luther’s contribution to Christology is to oppose the rationalization of systematic theology that corrupts the religious experience of Christ by rejecting speculative metaphysics. Once he dismisses those metaphysics, Luther can develop the communication of attributes as the center of a non-philosophical Christology. Yet this conclusion is determined by the neo-Kantian categories Schwarz uses to interpret Luther. The definitions given to “faith” and “religion” in neo-Kantian thought require them to be opposed to reason and philosophy. While Schwarz works with the presupposition that philosophy and theology are antithetical and mutually exclusive, what he actually does is deploy a particular philosophical view of reason and faith and inscribe that philosophical framework into Luther’s Christology.

The use of neo-Kantian categories leads Schwarz to contradict Luther’s claims in the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14). A central point of Schwarz’s interpretation is that Luther rejects the nominalists’ model of suppositional

carrying for the hypostatic union.\textsuperscript{40} The nominalists compared the relation between the divine person of Christ and the human nature to the relation between a substance and an accident: as a substance gives existence to an accident that inheres in that substance, so the divine person gives existence to the human nature it has assumed in the incarnation. While Luther identifies this model as inadequate in the theses of the disputation, he uses the model in the course of the disputation.\textsuperscript{41} And when Luther identifies this model as inadequate, he intends to limit the explanatory power of the model rather than reject it out of hand.\textsuperscript{42} Yet Schwarz, using neo-Kantian categories of faith and reason, concludes that Luther’s criticism is a rejection of substance metaphysics in Christology. He dismisses the textual evidence by assuming textual corruption, suggesting that instead of “I think” the text should read “they think” because “what follows is certainly not Luther’s view.”\textsuperscript{43} Schwarz’s conclusion, determined in part by neo-Kantian presuppositions, leads to his theory of textual corruption. This is emblematic of modern categories dictating a particular interpretation of Luther. Schwarz’s article set the direction for the predominant trajectory of interpretations of Luther’s Christology.

Scholars following Schwarz’s lead interpret Luther’s Christology as a rejection of nominalist metaphysics and logic. Joar Haga, in his study of Christology in Luther and early

\textsuperscript{40} Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 297–302.
\textsuperscript{42} David Luy persuasively argues that Luther’s criticism of suppositional carrying is not a rejection of the model. I return to this point below. David Luy, “Martin Luther and Late Medieval Christology: Continuity or Discontinuity” in \textit{The Medieval Luther}, ed. Christine Helmer, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation/Reformation Studies in the Late Middle Ages, Humanism, and the Reformation (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming 2019).
\textsuperscript{43} Schwarz, \textit{Gott ist Mensch}, 300n44.
Lutherans, is typical of this approach. Haga contends that Luther moves away from metaphysics, particularly anthropological substance. Haga categorizes the communication of attributes as an event, a flow between the natures, rather than a static thing with a particular metaphysics, and argues that Luther understands this communicative event as the identity of Christ. However, instead of achieving a theology free from metaphysics, Haga actually substitutes a modern metaphysics of event for a medieval metaphysics of substance. Alongside metaphysics, Haga interprets Luther’s Christology as a rejection of the suppositional logic used by the scholastics. This way of interpreting Luther’s Christology fits within a broader conceptualization of Luther’s theology as a turn away from logic. In these accounts Luther does theology, and particularly Christology, without employing philosophical conceptions of logic. Instead, as a biblical theologian he works without philosophical tools, displacing logic with faith and the Bible. That conclusion inscribes modern philosophical ideas about the character of faith and logic into Luther’s work.

44 Joar Haga, Was There a Lutheran Metaphysics?: The Interpretation of communicatio idiomatum in Early Modern Lutheranism (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 25–27, 88–89, 272. Similarly, Marc Lienhard argues that a new metaphysics underlies Luther’s account of the communication. Since Luther’s account does not fit within scholastic metaphysics, Luther must devise new metaphysical models to recover patristic thought on the communication of attributes. Marc Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer’s Christology, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 341.
45 Haga, Metaphysics, 32–33.
47 Christology is part of a larger interpretation of Luther rejecting philosophy, particularly Aristotle. Daphne Hampson argues that Luther rejects Aristotle in the theological task, and displaces a philosophy of substance with a Christ-mysticism drawn from the Apostle Paul that construes the self in extrinsic terms. This theological anthropology leads to a new epistemology along the lines of existentialism. This epistemology
Scholars in the predominant interpretation of Luther’s theology also argue that Luther rejects a nominalist understanding of semantics. Instead of understanding words as signifiers of things, Luther develops a new understanding of language in which words create things in his Christology. In Oswald Bayer’s account of Luther’s Christology, God and man are united in the word, so that “word” receives a new meaning in Luther’s theology. The words of preaching and the sacrament are not signs pointing to God, but are the thing itself: the words are the person of Christ.\footnote{Stefan Streiff, in his analysis of the 1539 disputation, also understands Luther’s new language to mean that in Christ the word and the thing are the same. Instead of using grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic—or put more broadly, philosophical semantics—Luther devises a new language of faith and revelation.\footnote{Oswald Bayer, “Das Wort ward Fleisch: Luthers Chistologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation,” in \textit{Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation}, ed. Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 138 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 30–34.}}


\footnote{Stefan Streiff, \textit{»Novis linguis loque«: Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1, 14 »verbum caro factum est« aus dem Jahr 1539} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 185–195. For a similar but more nuanced view of Luther on logic and language, see Gerhard Ebeling, \textit{Luther: An Introduction to his Thought}, trans. R. A. Wilson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964), 76–92. Ebeling notes that Aquinas holds philosophy and theology in continuity, while Ockham looks for those places where the disciplines part company. Luther, while following Ockham in noting tensions and criticizing philosophy, nevertheless goes beyond Ockham to dismiss Aristotle from theology. In particular Luther insists that the reading of Scripture must be done apart from Aristotelian categories. Theology then bears responsibility for its own language. However, Ebeling notes that Luther has positive things to say about reason within its own sphere. In terms of theology and Christology, Ebeling gives a modern interpretation of Luther’s thought. The performative turn also appears in Jan Lindhardt’s interpretation, who argues that Luther’s use of rhetoric gave rise to a concept of performative speech according to which words are intended to elicit a certain response in the hearer. Words do not signify a reality outside of themselves. In Lindhardt’s account the incarnation works within language, so that the Word becomes sound. Jan Lindhardt, \textit{Martin Luther: Knowledge and Mediation in the Renaissance}, Texts and Studies in Religion 29 (Lewiston, NY, and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 88–99, 195–205. For...}
Streiff concludes that the disputation is evidence that Luther eliminates all philosophical concepts as unfit for Christology. Bayer and Streiff use theories of performative language as categories to interpret Luther’s turn to new language in Christology and theology. They turn to these modern theories of language to analyze the semantics Luther uses in Christology. Ironically, they introduce modern philosophies of language into Luther’s theology: rather than being a theological language devoid of philosophy, Luther’s theology is built on a modern philosophy of performative language.

There is a consistency and value to these interpretations of Luther. For instance, Oswald Bayer characterizes Luther’s theology as focused on performative language. This interpretation captures the importance that Luther assigns to preaching in his theological program. Bayer argues correctly that proclamation is central to Luther’s theological projects. However, when Luther’s turn to performative language is extended from preaching to all doctrines and theological topics, problems arise. A predetermined view takes precedence over the evidence in Luther’s writing, and that view governs how the evidence is understood. The resulting view of Luther is not a theology devoid of philosophy, but a theology framed by a particular modern philosophy. The result is an inconsistency, as

another view of Luther’s new language with a focus on metaphor, see Jens Wolff, *Metapher und Kreuz: Studien zu Luthers Christusbild*, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 410–433.

50 Streiff concludes that Luther argues against Melanchthon and Cruciger. He interprets Luther’s position to be that philosophy has no role to play in theology. Melanchthon holds that Aristotle’s philosophy, particularly his thought on grammar, is useful for theology. While Luther and Melanchthon agree that philosophy and theology are each their own distinct art and ought to be distinguished, the point of contention is whether philosophy is an aid to theology. Melanchthon thinks that it is; Luther thinks that it is not. Streiff, *Novis linguis loqui*, 35–40. See below for my interpretation of Luther’s stance towards philosophy as evident in the disputation.

51 For his extensive treatment of Luther’s theology, see Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*. 
modern philosophical concepts are used to frame a theology of Luther that is said to be free from philosophy.

Luther, however, makes a different point about philosophy. He writes in the 1540 *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*:

1. The catholic faith is this, that we confess one Lord Christ as true God and human person. 2. From this truth of the double substance and the unity of the person follows what is called the communication of attributes. 3. As a result those things which are human are rightly said of God and, vice versa, those things which are divine are said of the human person.52

Luther turns to the philosophical categories of "substance" and "person" to explicate what it means to confess one Christ as God and human. From that metaphysical construal of a single person with two-fold substance follows a particular way of speaking, the communication of attributes. Luther gives the impression not that philosophy is an enemy to be defeated, but a source of distinctions and categories that can be helpful in theology. He discusses natures and person without anxiety and relates philosophical questions about language to Christology.

This observation is the frame of this dissertation. In this dissertation I will show how the late Luther addresses the methodological issues of making Christological claims with a distinctive affinity to philosophy. Specifically, philosophical affinity has to do with the metaphysical claims about natures and essences and their relations in the person of Christ. It has to do with semantics, by which I mean the way that words take on

52 “1. Fides catholica haec est, ut unum dominum Christum confiteamur verum Deum et hominem. 2. Ex hac veritate geminae substantiae et unitate personae sequitur illa, quae dicitur, communicatio idiomatum. 3. Ut ea, quae sunt hominis, recte de Deo et e contra, quae Dei sunt, de homine dicantur.” WA 39/2:93.2–7. Luther draws on the Athanasian Creed for his formulation of “the catholic faith” as confessing the “one Lord Christ.”
significations and point to specific things in propositions. It has to do with logic, by which I mean an analysis of whether a proposition corresponds to the way things actually are. On all three counts—metaphysics, semantics, logic—we will see that Luther is amenable and regards these as methodologically necessary in order to make his claims about who Christ is, how Christ has both a divine and a human nature, and how the person and natures of Christ can be related.

1.4 The Disputations: Christology under Duress from Schwenckfeld and the Sorbonne

This work focuses on two particular disputations. Both the 1539 Disputation on the Sentence: “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14) and the 1540 Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ are prominent in the reception of Luther in the twentieth century. For instance, Schwarz used the Disputation on the Sentence: “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14) to draw attention to his proposed divorce between philosophy and theology in Luther’s Christology.53 Stefan Streiff used the same disputation to argue for a new language in Luther’s theology that underlay his Christology.54 The recent book on Luther’s Christology Creator est Creatura relies on the disputations, particularly the chapters by Gottfried Seebaß and Paul Hinlicky that analyze the Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ.55 Many Luther researchers attend to the disputations to portray a

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53 Schwarz, Gott ist Mensch.
54 Streiff, Novis linguis loqui.
modern Luther, a Luther who turns away from dogmatic questions of Christology to recover religious experience and to focus on proclamation. However, the disputations are indicative of a later Luther who is interested in basic dogmatic questions. Besides the Christological disputations, other disputations turn to the question of the Trinity and to questions of the correct understanding of the law. Luther himself indicates a desire to debate all the articles of faith. Luther’s turn to basic doctrinal questions suggests that there is more to know about Luther than his doctrine of justification, his interest in preaching, and his thought on performative language. His interest in doctrine adds another dimension to the late Luther. Moreover, in regard to the late Luther, his doctrinal interest shows that there is more to his work than unleashing polemics against his theological opponents. His interest in Christology shows that he is serious about working through fundamental doctrines. In his late works Luther identifies Christology as a chief article of the Christian faith. For instance, in his 1538 work on The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith Luther identifies three essential components to holding a right Christology: that Christ is God, that Christ is a human being, and that Christ died and rose for us. One who holds these points correctly remains in the Christian faith, while one who misses any one of these points loses all of them. Luther argues that the

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56 Hinlicky’s article is an exception to this. He attends to Luther’s doctrinal concern to avoid Docetism in the 1540 disputation. Hinlicky, “Luther’s Anti-Docetism.”
57 David Luy provides a list of Luther’s disputations in Luy, “Martin Luther’s Disputations.” Similarly, Axel Schmidt categorizes the disputations in Schmidt, Christologie, 3–4.
59 The standard work on polemics in the late Luther is Mark Edwards, Luther’s Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).
right Christology will bring with it all other doctrines. While Luther indicates that a proper Christology is essential, articulating how the natures of Christ can be God and a human being raises problems. Luther addresses these problems in the disputations with greater attention to methodology than found in his other late writings.

The choice of these two texts dovetails with other texts from the late Luther that address and use Christology for other theological purposes. The person of Christ is at the center of Luther’s theology and underlies his doctrine of justification. In 1537, just two years before the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14), Luther makes the doctrine of Christology central to the Smalcald Articles. He also makes Christology central in On the Councils and the Church, published shortly after the 1539 disputation. Both of these works are written as preparations for a church council, and in each one Luther puts Christology forward as a central article of his theology. In the Smalcald Articles Luther uses Christology as a doctrinal test. Luther asserts that the “first and chief article” is Christ’s work of redemption, a work dependent on Christ’s person. He then uses this chief article to judge questions such as the Mass, purgatory, monasticism, and the like. These judgments draw doctrinal distinctions between Lutheran and Catholic theology. In On the Councils and the Church, Luther identifies the person and natures of

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60 WA 50:266.32–269.35.
61 Johannes Zachhuber, Luther’s Christological Legacy: Christocentrism and the Chalcedonian Tradition, The Père Marquette Lectures in Theology 48 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2017); Dennis Ngien, Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Christ in Luther’s Sermons on John (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).
63 WA 50:509–653. Luther also turns to Christology in 1544 in his Enarratio on Isaiah 52–53. WA 40/3:683–746.
64 Luther, “Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel.”
Christ as central components of the doctrine determined by the ecumenical councils of the church.65 Christology is of central concern in these years in a variety of genres. In this disputation I focus on the two disputations as they offer the best source for the place of philosophy in Luther’s Christology. Luther references philosophy explicitly in the disputations in ways not found in his other late Christological works.

The explicit place of philosophy in the disputations emerges from the medieval practice of disputations. The precisely defined structure of a disputation is key to understanding the place of philosophy in the Christological disputations. The disputation was an exercise in logic and dialectics with roots predating the medieval university.66 From the time of Anselm in the eleventh century, theologians made use of dialogue, reason, and dialectics to explicate Christian doctrines.67 The shape of the dialogue was formalized and institutionalized in medieval universities as disputations stood alongside lectures as the central modes of pedagogy.68 Their incorporation into the university curriculum demonstrated an ongoing commitment to dialectical reasoning in the pursuit of truth.69 Theologians, as Thomas Aquinas identified the purpose of disputations, used them to

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65 WA 50:509–653.
67 Novikoff, Medieval Culture, 225.
68 Volker Leppin, “Zuspitzung und Wahrheitsanspruch—Disputationen in den Anfängen der Wittenberger reformatorischen Bewegung,” in Reformation und Rationalität, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis and Ernst-Joachim Waschke, Refo 500 Academic Studies 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2015), 49. For a brief description of the various kinds of disputations common to the medieval university, see Novikoff, Medieval Culture, 141–147.
69 Novikoff, Medieval Culture, 135–136; 169–170.
eliminate error and lead students to theological truth.\textsuperscript{70} The place of logic and dialectics was determined by the structure and practice of a disputation.

A typical form of disputation, representative of the Christological disputations, began with a list of prepared theses. The participants debated the theses according to prescribed rules and roles. The role of the \textit{respondens} was to defend the theses against counterarguments. The role of the \textit{opponens} was to construct arguments against the theses. The disputation proceeded as an \textit{opponens} raised an argument crafted to show contradictions or logical problems in one of the theses. Once the counterargument was made, the \textit{respondens} was obligated to reply, either by granting or negating the counter argument. The role of the \textit{respondens} was not to defend the original theses, but to find flaws in the counterargument.\textsuperscript{71} The \textit{respondens} did this by finding a problem such as false premises or a formal defect in the argument.\textsuperscript{72} This process was an exercise in logic and dialectics, a prescribed form of constructing and evaluating logical arguments. Therefore it was presupposed that all the participants were grounded in knowledge of logic, dialectics, and language. They needed to know language so that they knew exactly what was being argued, dialectics to know how to construct arguments, and logic to evaluate arguments.\textsuperscript{73} Aristotle’s logic as received by medieval philosophers and theologians governed the logical

\textsuperscript{70} Novikoff, \textit{Medieval Culture}, 170.
\textsuperscript{71} Ignacio Angelelli, “The Techniques of Disputation in the History of Logic,” \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} 67, no. 20 (October 22, 1970): 803–804. It should be noted that Ignacio Angelelli’s work is based on later texts. However, the “modern” method that he details from a 1722 text reflects the kinds of arguments and counterarguments in Luther’s Christological disputations. This correspondence suggests that the practice Angelelli describes was already in place at the time of the Christological disputations, and likely much earlier than that.
\textsuperscript{72} White, \textit{Luther}, 21.
\textsuperscript{73} Angelelli, “Techniques of Disputation,” 807.
rules of a disputation. To participate in a disputation, and even more to organize and prepare theses for a disputation, was an exercise in reason and logic. This point will prove key to assessing the place of logic and philosophy in Luther’s theology.

Luther participated in disputations throughout his academic career. He expressed a fondness for disputations, probably due to his skill at disputations. He used them as a vehicle to develop and express theological ideas. Like Aquinas, Luther saw disputations as a way of pursuing truth, particularly by sharpening the self-understanding of theology at the University of Wittenberg at the beginning of the Reformation. He used disputations to attack theological opponents and to refute misunderstandings of his theology. He also used them pedagogically, particularly to attend to systematic questions. Disputations helped shape the course of the Reformation, beginning with the famous “Ninety-Five Theses.”

Closer to the time of the Christological disputations, Luther used disputations to address

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74 Novikoff provides a summation of the reception of Aristotle’s logic and its implications for disputations. Novikoff, Medieval Culture, 106–132.
75 Luther participated in disputations throughout his life, with the exception of a period where the University of Wittenberg did not have disputations due to questions about its privilege to issue doctoral degrees. See Jonathan Mumme, “The University of Wittenberg,” in Martin Luther in Context, ed. David M. Whitford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 42–44. A brief and helpful summary is provided in Reinhard Schwarz, “Disputationen” in Luther Handbuch, ed. Albrecht Beutel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 328–339. Luy, “Luther’s Disputations.” See especially WATR 4:635.18–21 (No. 5047).
76 Luy, “Luther’s Disputations.”
77 Luy, “Luther’s Disputations.”
the issues of the antinomian controversy in Wittenberg.81 Luther’s organization of the Christological disputations analyzed in this work was part of the culture of the University of Wittenberg. Luther and the other scholars at Wittenberg participated in the medieval practice of using disputations for pedagogy and to find the truth.82 In the Christological disputations Luther sought to seek out the truth about the person of Christ within a medieval exercise in logic.

1.4.1 Luther and the Sorbonne: The Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)

Luther both wrote and presided over the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14) in 1539. In the disputation Luther distinguishes philosophy and theology, arguing that the same thing is not true in philosophy and theology.83 One reason that philosophy was an issue for the late Luther was the question of the place of philosophy at the University of Wittenberg. Melanchthon’s reintroduction of the study of Aristotle at Wittenberg led to the Cordatus controversy in the late 1530’s. In the controversy Caspar Cruciger (aligned with Melanchthon) opposed Konrad Cordatus. Cordatus objected—among other things—to Melanchthon’s application of philosophy in theology.84 Luther’s

81 See Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 160–164.
82 White notes that Luther scholarship has not paid adequate attention to the medieval rules and practice of disputations, and gives a good overview of the points relevant to interpreting Luther’s disputations, particularly the logic involved in them. White, Luther, 20–26. Luy’s recent work on “Martin Luther’s Disputations” in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia is helpful for filling this lacuna in the scholarship.
83 “2. In theologia verum est, verbum esse carnem factum, in philosophia simpliciter impossible et absurdum. ... 39. Quanto minus potest idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia, quaram distinctio in infinitum maior est, quam artium et operum.” WA 39/2:3.2–3; 5.33–34.
84 Streiff, Novis linguis loqui, 35–40.
disputation occurred in the midst of this controversy, so it is clear that Luther thought the correct relation between theology and philosophy was an important question for the scholars at Wittenberg to consider.\footnote{Stefan Streiff argues that one of Luther's purposes for the disputation was to define the approach to theology and philosophy at the University of Wittenberg. Streiff notes that Cordatus controversy and interprets Luther's use of first person plural in the disputation to mean that Luther works to define the position of the University. In Streiff's interpretation, Luther opposes Melanchthon's work to make philosophical tools useful for theology. Streiff, *Novis linguis loqui*, 33–38. I follow Streiff in seeing the disputation contributing to the discussion of philosophical method at Wittenberg, but in my view Luther takes a different position on the question.}

Luther identifies the Sorbonne as his opponent to address the proper role of philosophy in Christology. The Sorbonne is an odd choice, as there is no evident interchange between Luther and the Sorbonne in the years leading up to 1539. Moreover, Luther writes that the disputation is intended to counter the Sorbonne’s claim that the same thing is true in theology and philosophy.\footnote{“Sed nunc disputabimus contra Sorbonicam Parrhisiensem. Nam Parrhsienses theologi determinaverunt, esse idem verum in theologia, quod in philosophia, et e contra. Et impium dogma non potuerunt probare, sicut nec nos probamus, ut ostendimus in his propositionibus. Neque enim hoc tantum, sed implicaverunt se et multos bonos viros innumeris disputationibus, ut ego et vos istos ipsos errores terreamus. Disputabimus, ut videamus, quid eis respondendum sit, et ne videamur ignari earum artium, quibus illi se tam magnificè iactant.” WA 39/2:7A.8–16. “4. Sorbona, mater errorum, pessime definitiv, idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia.” WA 39/2:3.7–8.} However, the Sorbonne’s published decisions against Luther do not contain this claim. The Sorbonne published four documents aimed against Luther and Lutheran doctrine before 1539. Two of these are judgments against Luther in 1521 and 1523. Two later ones are judgments against heretics in general and Philipp Melanchthon.\footnote{Carolii du Plessis d' Argentré, *Collectio Iudiciorum de novis erroribus: qui ab initio duodecimi seculi post incarnationem Verbi, usque ad annum 1632 in Ecclesia proscripti sunt & notati* (Lutetiae Parisiorum: Coffin, 1728), 1:357–412.} Nowhere in these documents does the Sorbonne argue that the same thing is true in theology and philosophy. The Sorbonne occasionally touches on philosophy in relation to Luther, but in such a way that makes clear that different things
are true in theology and philosophy. Modern scholars have not been able to find a publication of the Sorbonne that says what Luther attributes to them. Nevertheless Luther introduces the Sorbonne as the target to establish a difference between philosophy and theology necessary for Christology. Luther, most likely, conflates the position of the Sorbonne with an Oxford condemnation of 1277. While Luther’s citation is not accurate, his concern is that Catholic academic theologians do not adequately parse theology and philosophy. While questions remain over Luther’s ascription of the idea that the same thing is true in theology and philosophy to the Sorbonne, what is clear is that Luther wants to address the proper place of philosophy when articulating the doctrine of Christ’s person.

Without the proper methodology—including an adequate distinction between philosophy and theology—Luther argues that a theologian will fall into Christological heresy. Luther observes: “That syllogism: ‘Whatever has been made flesh has been made a creature. The Son of God has been made flesh. Therefore the Son of God has been made a creature.’ [That syllogism] is valid in philosophy.” The danger Luther identifies is using

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88 The primary philosophical issue the Sorbonne addresses is Luther’s dismissal of Aristotelian ethics. The Sorbonne condemns Luther for arguing that Aristotle’s ethics are at odds with Christian doctrine, and for condemning scholastic theologians who equate Aristotle’s ethics with biblical morality. The Sorbonne replies that some points of Aristotle’s philosophy agree with Christian theology and faith, so that Aristotle has some value in helping to understand Scripture and theology. d’ Argentré, Collectio, 1:373–374.
89 Graham White finds the closest formula to the one that Luther cites in an Oxford condemnation of 1277, and argues that Luther conflates that judgment with writings of Parisian theologians in the sixteenth century. White, Luther, 367–376.
philosophical methods that establish the syllogism as valid to conclude that the Son of God
is a creature. In this case, the claim that Christ is created like any other person means that
Christ is not God but only a created human person. That position is Arianism, the
Christological heresy that denies the divinity of Christ. In order to avoid this and other
Christological errors, Luther insists that one attend carefully to how philosophy functions
in Christology.

Luther thinks that philosophy is important for theological students. He states that a
disputation is an important exercise for students preparing to "labor in the Lord's
vineyard." Moreover, “Paul commands us to take care that the word of God abound among
us.”92 Since the disputation was governed by the rules of medieval philosophy, the
disputation used philosophical methods to address theological questions. Two results
follow from attending to philosophy in theological work. The first is that “we might be able
to be certain about our doctrine and faith.” The second is that “we might be prepared to
respond,” as “Peter commands that we be prepared to reply to all who ask about the hope
within us, and to do this with humility and fear.”93 Luther uses the disputation to fulfill
scriptural injunctions. Rather than oppose scripture to logic and academic philosophy,
Luther uses the logical exercise of a disputation to follow scriptural commands. This

92 “Quamquam hoc mandatum illustriissimi principis electoris sit humanum, alioqui tamen, cum nos theologi
simus praeter hoc debitores omnes, nostrum officium debemus prae aliis summa fide facere et laborare in
vinea domini, ut Paulus iubet etiam curare, ut verbum Dei abundet in nobis, aequum est, ut huic constitutioni
illustriissimi principis electoris ex animo et liberenter pareamus. Sunt etiam causae, quae nos theologos
93 “…oportet nos magis ardere studio verbi Dei, ut nos ipsi possimus certi esse de doctrina nostra et fide, et ut
parati simus ad respondendum, et non solum contrarii esse rationi nostrae, sed etiam diabolo et portis
inferorum et contradicentes arguere et convincere. Et Petrus iubet, nos paratos esse ad responsionem
reddendam omnibus potentiibus nobis de spe, quae in nobis est, et hoc cum modestia et timore.” WA
purpose makes the disputation a critical piece of evidence for how Luther frames a defense of theology and what role he assigns to philosophy in developing the relation between Christ’s person and natures.

1.4.2 Luther and Caspar Schwenckfeld: The Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ

Luther defines a new theological language in the 1540 Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ. Luther uses the disputation to respond to the Christological attacks of Caspar Schwenckfeld. However, Luther’s work in the disputation goes far beyond a response to Schwenckfeld, positing a new theological language as essential for Christology. Luther uses that new theological language to answer Schwenckfeld’s rejection of the claim that Christ is a creature. Schwenckfeld argues that this claim amounts to a denial of the divinity of Christ. He rejects the Chalcedonian solution of the two natures of Christ as proximate bearers of the attributes of Christ because he thinks this solution results in a divided Christ who is half man and half God. Luther’s answer includes careful attention to the semantics appropriate for Christology. He turns to linguistic analysis, offering a new

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95 “Nemlich/in was stande/ehr/glori/krafft/ußn herrlicheyt/heüt der mensch Jesus Christus/sein leib fleysch ü blüt se/n Ob er nun in allem Gott gleich sei oder nicht/ Ob er nach der gantzen person der ware/natürliche sun Gottes/unser Herr und Gott/oder seiner menscheyt halben under Gott/minder dann Gott/und (wie nu ettlich halten) ein dienstbare Creatur sei.” Erm., A3r.

definition of “creature” and other words when predicated of Christ. Luther’s linguistic turn in the 1540 disputation means that the disputation is a key source of evidence for Luther’s conception of a new theological language, as well as how that language functions in Christology.

Luther deploys the new theological language in the disputation to engage with questions of philosophical theology. In particular, Luther addresses how the natures of Christ relate to the person. That engagement is a problem because of Schwenckfeld’s rejection of Chalcedonian Christology. Schwenckfeld argues that Christ’s humanity has become God. He refers to this as “Gottwerdung,” a term signifying that Christ’s humanity has been fully divinized. As God came into flesh, so also flesh has been taken into God and has been established in the power, glory, and reign of God. On account of this Gottwerdung Christians ought to know Christ’s humanity as full divinity.97 Schwenckfeld judges Gottwerdung essential for Christ’s work. Without a divinized human nature, Christ would be incapable of saving people and of receiving worship and glory.98 Schwenckfeld argues


98 These arguments focus on Christ as the model and image of a person’s salvation and future glory. Schwenckfeld cites 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 as proof, a passage where Christ is described as a heavenly man and held up as the image that Christians bear. The passage contrasts the heavenly man with an earthly man. “Deßhalbenn denn Paulus nicht ein mal allein von zweyerley menschen hat geschrieben/Jn sunderheyt aber. j. Corinth. xv. da er spricht. Der erste mensch ist von der erden uñ irrdisch/Der ander mensch/ist der Herre vom himel rc. Wie wir getragen haben das bild des irrdischen/also werden wir auch tragen das bile des himlischen.” Erm., B2v.
that questions regarding Christ’s metaphysical status are essential knowledge for every Christian, not just the theologically trained. Luther does not criticize Schwenckfeld for idle metaphysical speculation, nor does Luther make the entire conversation a question of experience, preaching, or faith. Instead, Luther engages with the doctrinal questions about Christ’s person raised by Schwenckfeld. Luther locates the new theological language in this debate about the doctrine of Christ’s person and natures. I ask what kind of philosophical tools Luther takes up to refute Schwenckfeld’s Christological conclusions along with other Christological problems he identifies that result from holding that the same thing is true in philosophy and theology.

The metaphysical problem is inherent in the Chalcedonian categories of “person” and “nature.” Schwenckfeld’s challenge to Christology hinges on the status of Christ’s human nature in relation to the divine nature and the person. Schwenckfeld argues that one cannot hold that Christ has a created nature without falling into Arianism. Luther’s problem is to uphold the two natures of Christ in a way that retains the essential attributes of each nature without reaching the conclusions of Arianism. The doctrinal problem requires attention to metaphysical problems having to do with what “person” and “nature” are and how they relate. The problem of Christ’s person also has a semantic aspect. For instance, to say that Christ is a human person raises questions about what “human person” means. The language of Christology needs to reflect that the person of Christ subsisting in

99 “So weret der böß geyst so vil er kan oder mag/damit es nitt herförer an den tag ku̱me/Jn dem so er die menschen gern wolte bereden/das es eyn unnütz ding/ja fürwitz/spitzfindigkeyt/und on not sei zuwissen/Jn was wesen/waserley substantz ün natur Christus sei. Es sei nicht von nötten so hoch von Christo zuspeculieren/Das soliche puncten alleyn für die gelerten/üñ nicht für die Leyen/noch für den gemeynen mañ/wölle gehören.” Erm., A3r.
two natures is unique while also signifying that Christ, as a human person, shares the same humanity as all other people. How to account for the language of Christ as a created human person without falling into the Arian denial of the divinity of Christ calls for careful attention to the definition and signification of words. Another aspect of the problem is the logical problem. If Christ possesses an eternal divine nature, it seems logically impossible for Christ to be created or born. Yet reaching that logical conclusion falls into the error of Docetism, the idea that Christ only appears to be a human person. Conversely, if Christ possesses a created human nature, it seems logically impossible that Christ is eternal God. The doctrinal problem calls for an account of when logic is and is not valid in Christology. Luther’s turn to Christology includes a turn to proper methodology, attending to the place of metaphysics, semantics, and logic in theology.

1.5 Conclusion

The basic method of analyzing the place of philosophy in Luther’s theology places this dissertation in conversation with a group of contemporary scholars who are loosely associated around the name “medieval Luther.” They approach Luther as a medieval Catholic, creating space for a sympathetic place for philosophy in Luther’s theology. Approaching Luther as a medieval Catholic is particularly productive for Christology. Late medieval nominalists, including William Ockham and Gabriel Biel, addressed the same Christological problems as Luther. They were concerned to avoid Arianism, Docetism, and other challenges to Chalcedonian Christology. They addressed these problems by engaging in philosophical theology: they crafted philosophical tools and concepts suited to articulate
and defend Christological doctrines. Luther knew the solutions offered by late medieval
nominalists to Christological problems, and particularly their use of philosophical tools to
construct a metaphysics, semantics, and logic suitable to the Christological task. What did
Luther think of the solutions offered by the nominalists to Christological problems? How
did he assess their use of philosophy to resolve Christological difficulties? Approaching
Luther by means of the nominalists and their categories opens up space to address these
questions.

The medieval Luther is important for recognizing the key role that philosophical
theology plays in Luther’s thought. Recent work on Luther demonstrates the place of
philosophical theology in Luther. Oberman’s work, continued by Berndt Hamm, shows how
the medieval Luther opens up generative interpretations of Luther’s doctrine of
justification.100 Graham White and Christine Helmer situate the role of logic and the Trinity
in Luther’s theology.101 David Luy locates a traditional view of the impassibility of the
divine nature as a central component of Luther’s Christology and soteriology.102 Candace
Kohli explores the role of the Spirit in Luther’s anthropology and his view of human agency
in moral good while in conversation with medieval theologians.103 As these scholars
analyze the medieval Luther, they show the importance that Luther assigns to

100 Berndt Hamm, The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by
Berndt Hamm, ed. Robert J. Bast, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 110 (Leiden and Boston: Brill,
2004).
101 White, Luther; Helmer, Trinity.
102 Luy, Dominus mortis.
103 Candace L. Kohli, “The Gift of the Indwelling Spirit: Anthropological Resources in Luther’s Pneumatology,”
in Lutheran Theology and the Shaping of Society: The Danish Monarchy as Example, ed. Bo Kristian Holm and
Nina J. Koefoed, Refo500 Academic Studies (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2018), 129–150; also
Candace Kohli, “Help for the Moral Good: Martin Luther’s Understanding of Human Agency and the Law in the
philosophical theology. Luther's well-known doctrine of justification by faith does not reject or replace traditional doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, but depends upon them. The medieval Luther allows scholars to see this dependence and to locate the role that philosophy plays in Luther's theology. This approach is aided by recent work into the theologians of the scholastic period, and particularly into the late medieval nominalists Luther knew well.104

What I aim to answer in this dissertation is how Luther used particular philosophical concepts of late medieval nominalists in the Christological disputations from 1539 and 1540. How does Luther understand philosophy? What kind of logic, semantics, and metaphysics does he use in Christology, and what kinds of philosophical tools does Luther find useful for theology? In this dissertation I look to answer these questions by interpreting Luther through the categories of late medieval nominalism. I analyze how theologians like William Ockham and Gabriel Biel understood philosophy and its relation to theology. Rather than presume a complete rupture between Luther and the philosophical theology of the medieval nominalists, I look for continuity and change between the nominalists and Luther. This transformative approach accounts for Luther's new Reformation breakthroughs while acknowledging Luther's retention of traditional questions, tools, and methods in his thought.105

105 Volker Leppin puts forward a model of "transformation" to capture both continuity and change between the medievals and Luther. By "transformation," Leppin means that something remains, but in a different state or form. Leppin cautions that searches for continuity ought not to erase Luther's reformational discovery, while searches for change ought not to eliminate all traditional elements from Luther's thought and world. Luther's transformations of medieval thought, Leppin suggests, must be approached carefully, for different areas of Luther's thought reveal different transformations. Volker Leppin, "Luther's Transformation of
Two medieval theologians feature prominently in this work. William Ockham is central because of Luther’s education as an Ockhamist. Ockham’s *Summa Logicae* is a useful summary of the basic philosophical categories employed in late medieval nominalism. The other medieval theologian is Gabriel Biel, whose work Luther knew well. Not only did Luther study Biel as a student, but he retained an intimate knowledge of Biel’s *Canonis Misse Expositio* and commentary on the *Sentences* throughout his life.\textsuperscript{106} Biel’s approach to Christological difficulties in these works was thus well-known to Luther, who could use, reject, or adapt Biel’s thought as he saw fit. Setting Luther’s Christological solutions alongside those of Ockham and Biel provides an excellent viewpoint for tracing Luther’s transformation of medieval Christology.

1.6 Chapter Summaries

In chapter two I address what Luther means by “philosophy” and “theology.” I explore the points of difference that Luther uses to distinguish them, and compare Luther’s approach to the understanding of philosophy and theology as different areas of inquiry (regions) in the medieval university. Luther’s thought on philosophy and theology in the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)* leads into

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considerations of logic and epistemology. These fields provide methods for identifying truth and analyzing how one knows things. By examining how Ockham and Biel turn from philosophy to theology, I provide a point of reference for what Luther means by “philosophy” and “theology.” This question is foundational for the dissertation as it lays down a definition of philosophy that stands behind the philosophical tools considered in chapters three and four. By attending to the definitions of philosophy and theology and the standards for truth and knowledge in each, I analyze a foundational point of the basic methodology Luther indicates as necessary for Christology. I consider these methodological topics to show how Luther resolves the theological problem of Arianism in the disputations.

In chapter three I turn to semantics, the properties of words and how they function. Luther appeals to a new language in theology, especially to avoid Christological heresies by attending to semantics. Once again, Arianism is the central theological problem. In this chapter I consider the specific aspect of the Arian problem related to the idea that Christ is a creature. Luther turns to the semantic properties of “creature” to address this problem. To place Luther’s new language in its medieval context, I sketch out Ockham’s theory of signification and how it functions in Ockham’s Christology. By identifying some of Ockham’s semantic convictions relevant to Luther’s *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, I compare Luther’s new theological language to the semantic interventions of Ockham. As a concrete example of this I include an analysis of the word “*homo*” (“human person”) in the Christology of Ockham, Biel, and Luther. Since all three theologians offer definitions of “human person” crafted specifically for Christology, this
analysis provides a picture into the kinds of semantic moves Luther makes to develop a new language relative to nominalist semantics.

I turn to the communication of attributes in chapter four with a particular focus on metaphysics in Christology. I use the question of the adoration of Christ that Luther addresses in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* as a lens to analyze the place of metaphysics in Luther’s Christology. Since the question of Christ’s adoration was discussed by many theologians, especially John Damascene, Peter Lombard, and Gabriel Biel, this question gives important perspective for identifying Luther’s use of metaphysics. The medievals, as I show, follow John Damascene’s turn to metaphysics to resolve the question. I compare their use of metaphysics to Luther’s in the disputations. Beyond the question of the adoration of Christ, I sketch out how Gabriel Biel uses metaphysics to develop rules for the communication of attributes. I then compare Luther’s use of the communication of attributes to Biel’s rules. That analysis shows the role of philosophical tools—logic, semantics, and metaphysics—in Luther’s Christology.
2.1 Defending the Divinity of Christ

“In theology it is true that the Word has been made flesh; in philosophy it is simply impossible and absurd.”¹ With this assertion Luther addresses the theological problem of the incarnation in the 1539 Disputation on the Sentence: “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14). The reference to John 1:14 (“the Word was made flesh”) is scriptural evidence for the incarnation. The problem of the incarnation is holding that Christ is the eternal God who was made a human person (flesh). Theologians since the Council of Chalcedon seek to maintain both the human and divine natures of Christ without separation, division, confusion, or change. They aim to conceive of Christ as similar to other human persons as possible without diminishing the divine nature. The problem theologians face is asserting that Christ is a real human being without separating Christ’s natures, diminishing the divine nature, or in some other way contradicting the doctrine defined at the Council of Chalcedon.² Luther in the Christological disputations addresses the theological problem of asserting that Christ is a human being without diminishing the divinity of Christ or dividing

² The result is that, despite claims that Christ was made just like other people, theologians throughout the scholastic period put forth doctrines that differentiate Christ as a unique individual. Marcia Colish, for instance, argues that Lombard does not allow Christ to have a full human psychology, and allows Christ to take on only those human defects which were profitable for Christ’s work. Marcia L. Colish, Peter Lombard (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1:438–443; 470. Lombard, On the Incarnation of the Word, Book 3, dist. 15, ch. 1.1–13; pp. 57–61.
the natures. Luther sees the doctrinal problem complicated by philosophical methods and presuppositions that lead to the conclusion that “the Word was made flesh” is impossible and absurd in philosophy. In order to get Christology right, a theologian must set out with a methodology that can avoid the pitfalls of philosophy.

The central aspect of the incarnation that Luther addresses in 1539 is the question of the divinity of Christ. The divinity of Christ is a problem because of Christ’s created human nature. Since Christ is a human being and human beings are creatures, it follows that Christ also is a creature. However, that assertion is problematic when held alongside the divinity of Christ: if Christ is God, how can one assert that Christ is created without giving up Christ’s eternal, uncreated divinity? Arians had long made that very argument, reasoning that Christ is not God. The Arian argument moves from Christ’s similarity to other created people to a denial of Christ’s divinity. Luther addresses various Arian arguments in the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)*. A simple form of the argument that he addresses is: “Christ is a creature. Therefore Christ is not God.” The full syllogism would read something like: “No creature is God. Christ is a creature. Therefore Christ is not God.” Arians conclude that as a human being Christ is not the same substance as the Father nor God by nature. It seems absurd to assert that a human being who came into existence and was born is at the same time the eternal God.

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Arians resolve the absurdity by giving up the divine nature of Christ. Luther works in the disputation to uphold the divine nature of Christ while also holding to the human nature.

Luther distinguishes between philosophy and theology to address the theological problem of Christ’s divinity. Luther grants that the Arian argument is true in philosophy. In philosophy Luther thinks that a creature cannot be God.5 Philosophy in the Middle Ages built on Aristotelian theories of humanity and the characteristics of a human person. Following Aristotle, scholars held that human beings are finite beings. Since they also held that the finite and the infinite were incompatible, they found it impossible and absurd that a human being should be infinite and eternal God.6 Luther observes that no philosopher in antiquity or in the Middle Ages could grant the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity since they judged it false that any human being could be infinite.7 Luther’s problem is to give an answer to the arguments of philosophers that the incarnation is impossible and absurd. He turns to a distinction between philosophy and theology in order to maintain

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6 “R. Omnes philosophi, neque Aristoteles, hanc rem ita disputant de creatione, nec Plato, qui dicit quidem, Deum esse conditorem coeli, sed infinitam potentiam ei non tribuit. Inde est, quod Plinius dicit, Deum non posse omnia facere, videlicet, quod factum est, fieri non possit infactum, et alia, quae inde colligit. Inde quoque ali praestantiores philosophi concedunt, Deum esse infinita potentiae, hoc est, quod mundus est infinitus, nec amplius. Minor itaque est neganda simpliciter. Nam etsi Dei est infinita potentia, tamen Deus non potest secundum philosophiam dici, videlicet, quod ipse creator et creatura, Deus et homo secundum philosophiam dici non potest. Esto, quod philosophia concedat, esse Deum, esse omnipotentem, tamen eum posse inerri hominem, ex philosophia nullo modo concendi potest, quia ipse est infinitus. Si enim est infinita potentiae, ergo non potest homo fieri finitus, quia homo est aliquid finiti.” WA 39/2:8A.13–9A.4.

the Chalcedonian doctrine of the person of Christ in two natures in theology. Luther’s
strategy is to establish that the same thing is not true in philosophy and theology so that he
can assert that the incarnation is true in theology. Leaving philosophical conclusions alone,
Luther turns to a distinct region of theology in which it is true that the Word was made
flesh.

Luther’s distinction between philosophy and theology includes numerous aspects
according to which philosophy and theology differ. As I will argue below, Luther conceives
of philosophy and theology as regions of inquiry aligned with the faculties of a medieval
university. These regions have different methods, presuppositions, and criteria for truth.
Different questions require the researcher to use different tools in her investigation of
things. By conceiving of philosophy and theology as regions, Luther is able to define the
kinds of tools appropriate for each area of inquiry. This chapter, after examining Luther’s
conceptions of philosophy and theology, turns to several aspects of the regions that Luther
uses to address Arian arguments.

One aspect is the question of logic in theology. Luther sees syllogistic logic as a
problem for Christology. Medieval syllogistic logic held that when the premises of a valid
syllogism are true, the conclusion of that syllogism is also necessarily true. In Christology,
Arians use formal logic to work from premises that Christian theologians grant are true
(such as “Christ is a created human person”) to necessary conclusions that Christ is not

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8 An opponent in the disputation raises this argument, and Luther does not contradict it in theology. He does,
however, invoke a distinction between philosophy and theology in reply: “Consequentiam probo ex principiis
dialectics: Si praemissae sunt verae, sequitur bona conclusio etc. R. Nos negamus, principia dialectica esse
Later an opponent makes the same point: “Ubi praemissae sunt verae, ibi etiam conclusio est vera.” WA
Since theologians hold that it is true that Christ is a human being, and it is true that human beings are finite, created beings, a valid syllogism concludes that “Christ is a [finite] created being. Therefore, Christ is not God.”

Luther must find a way to argue against this syllogism. Furthermore, the medievals held that whatever is predicated of the subject of the major or minor premise can also be predicated of the subject of the conclusion of a syllogism. From this doctrine of predicability, it follows that if God is a human person, then God is “a rational, sensitive animal, having body and soul, namely a created substance.”

By that conclusion, the incarnation is impossible and absurd, since it necessarily leads to false conclusions about God. The Arians made this argument as well: if the second person of the Trinity has been made flesh, and flesh is a created substance, then Arians conclude by the law of predicability that the second person of the Trinity is a created substance.

Luther attends to the place of logic and the syllogism in theology to resolve these Christological problems.

A further aspect of the difference between philosophy and theology is the question of epistemology. Late medieval scholars theorized different ways of determining the truth of a given proposition. Arians work from evident knowledge of creatures to a denial of

\[\text{divine. Since theologians hold that it is true that Christ is a human being, and it is true that human beings are finite, created beings, a valid syllogism concludes that “Christ is a [finite] created being. Therefore, Christ is not God.” Luther must find a way to argue against this syllogism. Furthermore, the medievals held that whatever is predicated of the subject of the major or minor premise can also be predicated of the subject of the conclusion of a syllogism. From this doctrine of predicability, it follows that if God is a human person, then God is “a rational, sensitive animal, having body and soul, namely a created substance.” By that conclusion, the incarnation is impossible and absurd, since it necessarily leads to false conclusions about God. The Arians made this argument as well: if the second person of the Trinity has been made flesh, and flesh is a created substance, then Arians conclude by the law of predicability that the second person of the Trinity is a created substance. Luther attends to the place of logic and the syllogism in theology to resolve these Christological problems.}

\[\text{A further aspect of the difference between philosophy and theology is the question of epistemology. Late medieval scholars theorized different ways of determining the truth of a given proposition. Arians work from evident knowledge of creatures to a denial of}\]
Christ’s divinity. Experience shows that all created things come into existence after not existing. Christ, as a created human person, must also have come into existence after not existing. This kind of knowledge, as shown below, was considered “science” in an Aristotelian sense. Since science derived from evident and undeniable first principles, it was considered necessary and true knowledge. Luther intervenes with an alternative epistemology to demonstrate that Christ is both divine and a creature, showing how theologians know this to be true.

Luther’s arguments about theological method in Christology depend on his distinction between theology and philosophy. In this chapter I analyze the 1539 *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)* to ask how Luther construes philosophy and theology in the disputation. Furthermore, I inquire how Luther uses that construal of philosophy and theology to solve the theological problem of Arianism. I ask in this chapter particularly about the kind of logic and epistemology Luther theorizes and uses in philosophy and in theology. I analyze Christological arguments made by William Ockham and Gabriel Biel to lay out the nominalist approach to philosophy and theology in Christology. Their work provides analytical tools to investigate how Luther conceives of philosophy and theology, and what kind of logic and epistemology Luther correlates with each region. As I set out, I hypothesize that Luther’s distinction follows late medieval construals of philosophy and theology as regions of inquiry, allowing Luther to define certain philosophical tools that are useful for defending the divinity of Christ. If this is the

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12 Throughout this work, when “experience” is used as a category of scholastic philosophy, it refers to the data obtained from the senses as they perceive the natural world. This sense of experience differs from the concept in neo-Kantian thought as non-rational religious affect.
case, then Luther’s distinction between theology and philosophy functions not to exclude all philosophy from theology, but to establish boundaries marking off philosophical concepts and methods that are useful tools in theology. However, that argument cannot be made until interpretations of the modern Luther have been addressed. A good deal of scholarly attention has been given to Luther’s thought on philosophy, logic, and epistemology. I sketch out the contours of the major interpretations of Luther’s stance toward philosophy next to clear the way for an investigation from a medieval viewpoint.

2.2 Interpreting Luther’s Turn to Theology

Scholars who work with a modern Luther interpret the distinction between philosophy and theology as a complete separation. This kind of interpretation leaves no space for philosophical tools to function in theology. Reinhard Schwarz, Joar Haga, and Axel Schmidt interpret Luther’s Christology as a theological exercise devoid of philosophy.13 A representative example of this way of interpreting Luther’s Christology is Reijo Työrinja’s work on Luther’s Christological disputations. Työrinja equates philosophy with logic, and particularly syllogistic or terministic logic. Työrinja then interprets Luther’s criticisms of philosophy as a complete rejection of suppositional logic. Työrinja treats philosophy, reason, and logic as a whole that Luther rejects in its entirety in his theological work.14

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14 On the treatment of reason as a whole, see White, Luther, 55–60. Beyond the historical question of Luther, not all Lutheran theologians are content with this construal of philosophy and theology in contemporary theology, as Colin Gunton and Robert Jenson work to go beyond a dualism of sensible and intelligible worlds. Colin Gunton and Robert W. Jenson, “The Logos Ensarkos and Reason,” in Reason and the Reasons of Faith, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter, Theology for the Twenty-First Century (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2005), 78–85.
Luther displaces logic and reason with faith. As important as faith is in this account, Työrinja does not work out exactly what faith means for Luther.\textsuperscript{15} Työrinja works with neo-Kantian presuppositions that divorce reason from the realm of the supersensible.\textsuperscript{16} According to those presuppositions, Luther's claim that theology is about the word of God and faith while philosophy is about reason and dialectic means that theology and philosophy have nothing to do with one another. Työrinja concludes that Luther does not just distinguish philosophy from theology; he completely divorces the two.

Scholars of the modern Luther emphasize that Luther has no place for logic in Christology. Haga, for instance, interprets Luther's Christology as a rejection of the suppositional logic used by the scholastics.\textsuperscript{17} This line of interpreting Luther's Christology fits within a broader reading of Luther's theology as a turn away from logic. Denis Janz points to Luthers "Disputation against Scholastic Theology" as evidence for a firm break between Luther and the \textit{via moderna}.\textsuperscript{18} Luther, in this interpretation, appeals to scripture rather than logic, and uses scripture to eliminate flawed logical rules inherited from


\textsuperscript{17} Haga, \textit{Metaphysics}, 32–33.

\textsuperscript{18} Denis Janz, \textit{Luther on Aquinas}, 83.
medieval theologians. In these accounts Luther does theology, and particularly Christology, without employing philosophical conceptions of logic. If this is Luther’s approach to logic, then his Christological work should involve no elements of philosophical or suppositional logic. Instead, one would expect a series of biblical citations with frequent calls to believe things that contradict reason and logic.

However, Luther’s work in the Christological disputations does not use that kind of scriptural model. Instead, following the rules of medieval disputations outlined in chapter one, Luther analyzes syllogisms in the disputations. For instance, an opponent raises the syllogistic argument that “Every human being is a creature. Christ is a human being. Therefore Christ is a creature.” Luther responds:

I deny the minor premise, since “human person” is equivocal, making the syllogism one with four terms. It is taken one way in the major premise and another way in the minor premise. In the major premise it signifies a natural person; in the minor premise it signifies a divine human person and incarnate God.  

Note that Luther’s answer does not quote Scripture. Nor does Luther object to the construction of a syllogism in theology. Instead, Luther makes a logical argument based on a problem in the syllogism. Luther’s participation in the logical exercise of a disputation, at the very least, calls for careful attention to the place that Luther assigns to reason in theology and Christology. Moreover, Luther did not know the modern idea that theology

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19 Robert Rosin sees the “Disputation against Scholastic Theology” as a rethinking of theology, a rejection of the tools of dialectic and syllogistic logic. Luther, frustrated with Lombard and the scholastics, seeks an alternative to the “rancid rules of the logicians.” Luther is “fundamentally a biblical theologian,” setting him apart from the scholastics. Rosin, “Humanism,” 91–100; quotations 96, 98. See also Müller, “Luther’s Transformation,” 106–107.

and philosophy are antithetical disciplines. Instead, he knew medieval conceptions of philosophy and theology. Using these medieval conceptions as analytical concepts for interpreting Luther avoids reading unwarranted modern presuppositions back into Luther.

Scholars of the medieval Luther provide a more nuanced reading of philosophy and theology in Luther. Notably, Christine Helmer and Graham White locate Luther in his medieval context, charting Luther’s conceptions of philosophy, theology, reason, and faith in relation to late scholastic concepts of the same. Both Helmer and White see an ongoing role for philosophical tools in Luther’s theology. They argue that the distinction between theology and philosophy is not an absolute divide in Luther’s thought, nor are the disciplines locked in combat with one another. Rather, Luther carefully identifies what philosophical tools are useful in theology. His distinction allows him to make use of philosophical tools while avoiding the doctrinal problems that arise when there is no distinction between philosophy and theology. In this chapter I build on the work of Helmer and White, approaching Luther’s distinction between theology and philosophy within his medieval context. I show how Luther works with the distinction to address Christological problems.

This chapter prepares the way for the following chapters by overcoming a simplistic reading of Luther’s rhetorical flourish against philosophy, reason, and understanding. I ask in this chapter whether Luther’s understanding of philosophy and theology allows some philosophical tools to be used in theological work. In this chapter I explore logical and epistemological tools. In chapter three I turn to semantic tools and Luther’s new theological

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21 Helmer, *Trinity*, 43–133; White, *Luther*. 
language. In chapter four I consider not only metaphysical tools, but also what other tools Luther uses in the communication of attributes. Luther’s understanding of philosophy and theology is foundational for these questions.

2.3 Regions of Philosophy and Theology

2.3.1 The Arian Argument against the Divinity of Christ

Arianism holds that Christ is not divine. One facet of the Arian problem is the difficulty in asserting that the same person is God and a human person. This facet calls for an account of how the proposition “God is a human person” can be true. Luther grants that, judged by the standards of philosophy, the claim is false. Any claim to be God entails characteristics of power, glory, majesty, and the like that appear to be incompatible with a finite human person. Luther must answer how it is possible to hold that “God is a human person” is true. Luther, in the 1539 Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh (John 1:14), distinguishes between what is true in philosophy and what is true in theology to defend this claim:

We would therefore do better if, having left dialectics or philosophy in its own region, we would learn to speak a new language in the region of faith beyond every sphere. ... The disposition of faith ought to be practiced in the articles of faith, not the understanding of philosophy.

Luther advocates leaving philosophy in its own region while doing theological work. As I will show below, Luther did not invent the strategy of distinguishing between the regions

23 “40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relicits discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram. ... 42. Affectus fidei exercendus est in articulis fidei, non intellectus philosophiae. Tum vere scietur, quid sit: Verbum caro factum est.” WA 39/2:5.35–40.
of philosophy and theology to address Christological difficulties. Gabriel Biel also
distinguishes between theology and philosophy while considering the proposition that
“God is a human person.” This surface similarity calls for careful analysis of how Biel and
late medieval nominalists distinguished between philosophy and theology. That analysis
includes attention to the key concepts Luther and Biel use to map the boundary between
the regions. In the passage just cited, Luther calls for attending to the regions of philosophy
and theology by leaving dialectics in the region of philosophy and exercising faith rather
than understanding in theology. The key terms—“faith,” “dialectics,” “understanding,”
“philosophy,” and “theology”—are not original to Luther. They were current in late
medieval thought, particularly debates on the kind of knowledge one gains from theology.24
Luther takes up the vocabulary of the late medieval nominalists as he construes the regions
of philosophy and theology. But do the words mean the same thing for the medievals and
Luther, or does Luther reinscribe the old words with new significance? To answer that
question I turn to how Ockham and Biel distinguish philosophy and theology.

2.3.2 Late Medieval Nominalists on Philosophy and Theology

A distinction between philosophy and theology was central to late medieval efforts
of the via moderna to defend the faith. Late medieval theologians debated concerns and
questions about equating philosophy and theology similar to the concerns that Luther
raised in the disputation. The debate was between adherents of the via antiqua and

24 White observes that Luther deals directly with scholastic thought using the vocabulary of the scholastics, a
vocabulary often clouded by modern interpretations of the scholastics. White, Luther, 82–83.
adherents of the *via moderna*. Theologians in both schools agreed on the importance of establishing the truth of the faith. However, they disagreed on whether Aristotle could provide a philosophical defense of Christian truth. Those following the *via antiqua* used philosophy in theology to a greater extent, particularly to defend Christian doctrine by philosophy. Theologians in the *via moderna* distinguished philosophy and theology to defend Christian doctrine. The *moderni* used the distinction to reduce the role that Aristotle played in defending the faith.\(^{25}\) They objected to the use of pagan philosophers to illuminate and defend doctrines of Christian theology.

“Philosophy” and “theology” in this debate were distinct regions of human inquiry. “Philosophy” meant what could be known of the world by natural power and reason. It was a distinct region, an area of inquiry that had its own institutions in the liberal arts faculty of medieval universities. The *moderni* aligned philosophy with first principles, sensory experience, and logic as the means of investigating the natural world. Conversely, they aligned theology with Scripture and tradition and conceived of theology as knowledge that goes beyond sensory experience of the created world. Theology as a region also had its institution in the theological faculties of medieval universities. Each region had its own set of discrete questions and methodologies. By distinguishing between the two regions, the *moderni* were able to limit the role of natural reason in theological work. The famous divide in scholastic thought between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* on the question of

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By the early sixteenth century, a significant number of theologians (those in the via moderna) called for a restriction of the use of philosophy to defend Christian doctrine.

William Ockham and Gabriel Biel were members of the via moderna in this debate. Biel limited the role of Aristotle and other pagan philosophers in the Christological sections of his commentary on Lombard’s Sentences, as I show below. Following the approach of the moderni, Ockham and Biel viewed the incarnation as a truth known only in theology, in fact, a truth that cannot be known in philosophy. Since Luther knew the works of Ockham and Biel, it is necessary to analyze how Ockham and Biel conceived of philosophy and theology. That analysis provides a framework in which to locate Luther’s thought on philosophy and theology. In particular, four questions are key to Luther’s Christology. First, what subject matter do Ockham and Biel assign to philosophy and to theology? Second, what means do they use to undertake an investigation in each region? Third, when distinguishing philosophy and theology, how much distance do they place between the regions? And fourth, do they allow different conclusions in theology than in philosophy? With those

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27 For a survey of developing thought on philosophy during the scholastic period, see G. R. Evans, Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Evans traces an increasing move through the scholastic period to turn to revelation to establish doctrines like the incarnation that were deemed inaccessible to unaided reason. However, the seeds of this development were in place early in the scholastic period. For instance, Aquinas distinguishes between a kind of metaphysical theology that considers God by study of the sensible world and a sacred theology which considers God by means of revelation. Aquinas uses this distinction to preserve a place for mysteries of the faith while allowing reason in theology. John P. Doyle, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Theological Truth,” in Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown, ed. Kent Emery, Jr., Russell L. Friedman, and Andreas Speer, Studien und Texte zur Geistgeschichte des Mittelalters 105 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 571–589.
questions answered, Luther’s assertion that the same thing is not true in philosophy and theology can be mapped against its late medieval background.

Ockham and Biel define supernatural things as the proper subject of theology. Biel defines theological truth in a broad sense as “every truth or proposition formed or formable about God or even about creatures as they have reduction or order per se to God, such as things along the lines of divine governance, creation, preservation, justification, redemption, etc.” Theology can be about all simple (incomplexus) things, if and when those things are considered in relation to God. Since every simple thing can have something of a theological nature predicated of it (the predication may be that the thing is a being, creator, creature, creatable, annihilable, etc.), Biel concludes that one may include all simple things in theological work. Likewise, Ockham considers supernatural things as the subject matter studied in a theological question. Philosophy, on the other hand, is an

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28 “Ista descriptio veritatis theologicae est stricta. Notificatur quandoque largius, ut omnis propositio seu veritas formata vel formabilis de Deo vel etiam de creaturis ut habent reductionem vel per se ordinem ad Deum, puta secundum rationem gubernationis, creationis, conservationis, justificationis, redemptionis etc., dicatur veritas theologica.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 1, art. 1. not. 3; p. 12, D.13–17. Ockham works with the same understanding, signaling a turn to theology when a thing is considered in relation to God. See SL I.50, I.57, I.59; pp. 159.1–162.84, 185.62–69, 189.33–46.

29 But theology is not of all complex things or conclusions as scientifically known, for not all demonstrable conclusions are demonstrated in theology. For instance, metaphysical or logical conclusions are not demonstrated in theology. “Sed si quaeritur: De quibus est theologia? Solutio: Theologia sumitur quandoque, ut patuit quae est praecehdenti et qu. 1 Prologi circa terminum ‘veritas theologica’, pro fide infusa; alio modo pro omni habitu simpliciter theologico fidei acquisitae, ut supra patuit quaestionem praecedentem. Primo modo est de omnibus rebus significatis per terminus propositionum theologicae. Sic enim respicit solam fidem infusam quae una dicitur in patribus et nobis, ut doceri solet in tertio. Secundo dicitur quod est de omnibus rebus significatis per terminos propositionum theologicae. Et quia non est aliquid terminus, de quo non possit praedicari passio theologica (omne enim ens est creator vel creatura, item perpetuabile, creatibile, annihilabile, factibile sive causa secunda extrinseca etc.), ergo potest dici quod est de omnibus incomplexis, non tamen de omnibus complexis sive conclusionibus tamquam scilibilibus propinquis, quia non omnes conclusiones demonstrabilis demonstrantur in theologica; non enim metaphysicales nec logicales.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 9, art. 2, con. 3; p. 61, I.1–14.
investigation into natural, created things. Biel’s definition of theology allows flexibility for considering the same thing in either philosophy or theology. An investigation is theological when it includes God in relation to the thing studied. It is philosophical when the question is only about created things without reference to God. A philosophical investigation is restricted to the natural world as its subject matter.

Ockham and Biel identify natural reason as the means of inquiry in philosophy. For Ockham, a philosophical investigation proceeds by the application of unaided natural reason to a study of the natural world. Such a study includes the natural powers of sensory perception, experience, and deduction from evident principles. In this context, “reason” is shorthand for an investigation using natural powers of sense and intellect applied to the natural world. A philosopher is accordingly limited to the knowledge that can be gained by studying the natural world with natural powers. Like Ockham, Biel also points to natural reason as the means of study in philosophy:

If the Peripatetic heathen, that is Aristotle and his followers, did not know this, it is no wonder that they erred in these things as in many other things in which they attended only to natural power which experience teaches, while remaining ignorant of divine omnipotence, which is above nature. In this the faithful ought not imitate the heathens, since the orthodox and most certain faith reveals many logical, natural, and metaphysical truths which pagan philosophers never attained.

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32 “Quam si non cognoverunt Peripatetici infideles, Aristoteles scilicet cum suis sequacibus, quid mirum, si in his sicut in multis alis erraverunt, in quibus naturalem potentiam, quam experientia docuit, tantum attenderunt, divinam omnipotentiam, quae super naturam est, ignorantes. Nec in hoc sunt imitandi a fidelibus, quoniam fides orthodoxa et certissima multas veritates logicales, naturales et metaphysicales revelavit, ad quas gentiles philosophi minime pervenerunt.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 171, M.36–42.
Philosophers in Biel's account know things by natural power drawn from experience of the
natural world. They are ignorant of divine omnipotence and do not have access to truths
revealed by faith.

Theologians, however, have more tools available for their study. Biel points to a
consideration of points known from revelation in the passage just cited. Moreover,
theologians are able to account for divine omnipotence in their work. Similarly, Ockham
holds that theologians have access to truths revealed in Scripture and in the church.33 By
looking to divinely revealed truths, Biel and Ockham expand the means of investigation in
theological questions. These means provide more knowledge than is accessible from
philosophical studies. Divine revelation leads theologians to an expanded knowledge of
logic, nature, and metaphysics.34 The expansion of these philosophical categories points to
the close relation between philosophy and theology in the thought of Ockham and Biel.

While Ockham distinguishes between philosophy and theology, he does not separate
the regions entirely. He maintains a place for philosophy in theological work. “Reason”—
here meaning a use of the intellect, including deduction from evident principles as well as
logic—is a useful tool in Ockham's theology.35 Likewise, Biel does not divorce philosophy
from theology as he distinguishes these regions of inquiry. Instead, Biel's distinction allows
reason and logic to function within bounds in theology. Biel thinks that the logic developed

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34 “Quoniam fides orthodoxa et certissima multas veritates logicales, naturales et metaphysicales revelavit, ad
quas gentiles philosophi minime pervenerunt.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 171, M.40–42.
35 Ockham conceives of an aggregation of knowledge in the different regions. This way of thinking about
theology as an aggregation of knowledge allows for some things that are originally known from physics or
metaphysics to be known also in theology, while retaining their original source in a different region. Pelletier,
Ockham, 267–269.
in philosophy is useful for analyzing propositions in light of revealed truth and that dialectics may work in theology from known truths to unknown truths. For both Ockham and Biel the regions of theology and philosophy are close enough to have areas of overlap yet distant enough to maintain restrictions on the kind of knowledge available in each.

While Ockham and Biel do not separate philosophy from theology completely, they posit enough of a distinction to allow different conclusions in each region. For instance, Ockham qualifies the role of reason as unaided natural investigation in the theological region. When truths known from the church or revealed theology run counter to the conclusions of natural reason, Ockham accepts the truths of theology over the conclusions of reason. Ockham does not object to the use of reason in theology, but he does relativize its conclusions. When Ockham judges that a philosophical investigation fails to grant theological truths, or reaches conclusions that run counter to theological claims, Ockham turns to the truth of the theologians to counter the conclusions of natural reason. Specifically, Ockham appeals to divine power and revealed truths in order to preserve theological truths against philosophical conclusions that would deny them.

Ockham distinguishes between philosophy and theology at key points in his Christology to get around problematic philosophical conclusions. He uses the distinction between the regions to argue that things that are not true in philosophy are true in theology. Ockham’s thought on the hypostatic union shows how he uses the distinction to

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36 Oberman, *Harvest*, 42.
38 Ockham’s use of logic is clear even as he argues for limits to the place of reason in theology, an argument Ockham makes by analyzing minor premises and how they might be proved in a way that Aristotle would accept. Adams, *Ockham*, 1:270–276.
solve Christological problems. Ockham’s ontology poses challenges to Christology, particularly his view of relative things. Ockham thinks that unaided natural reason concludes that relations are not things existing outside of the mind independent of the absolute things that are related. More precisely, neither experience nor theoretical arguments lead to the conclusion that real relations really distinct from absolute things exist outside of the mind.\(^39\) Using reason and experience, a philosopher would rightly conclude that there is no such thing as an independently existing real relation. However, Ockham thinks that the incarnation includes the production of a real relation of union between Christ’s natures, an entity distinct from either one of the natures.\(^40\) Ockham comments that Aristotle would deny the theological conclusions about the existence of a real relation in the hypostatic union. The real relation of the hypostatic union is not the only Christological point that is problematic for philosophers. Many claims about the incarnation, Ockham observes, are absurd in Aristotle’s philosophy because they cannot be proved by reason. Despite the difficulties that Ockham imagines Aristotle having with the existence of real relations, Ockham holds that in the incarnation there is a real relation between Christ’s natures. On this point Ockham agrees with theological truth over a philosophical conclusion.\(^41\) Ockham turns to the authority of church and Scripture to

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\(^40\) Adams works out the logic here. Ockham appeals to an argument that contradictories cannot be successively true of the same thing unless because of locomotion, the passage of time, or the production or destruction of something. Ockham rules out locomotion and the passage of time as explanations for why Christ’s human nature is first not united to the divine nature and then is united. Similarly he denies that any absolute thing could be produced that would unite the natures. He is left with the conclusion that the change is accounted for by the production of some real relation of union between Christ’s natures, a relation that is really distinct from absolute things. Adams, *Ockham*, 1:269.

establish the existence of real relative things when experience and theoretical arguments suggest that there are no real relative things. He makes similar arguments about the relationships between the persons of the Trinity and how substance and accidents relate in transubstantiation. In these cases Ockham distinguishes between truths that Aristotle knows (that is, truths known to philosophy) and “the truth of the theologians.” That distinction allows Ockham to resolve Christological problems, and to assert that theological truths expand on what is known to philosophy.

Biel also uses the distinction between philosophy and theology in Christology to allow different conclusions in the two regions. Biel analyzes the proposition, “Deus est homo,” in both philosophy and theology. Since Luther analyzes the same proposition in the Christological disputations, Biel’s analysis is an ideal point of reference for tracing Luther’s continuity with the late nominalists on philosophy and theology. Biel notes that according to Aristotle “Deus” and “homo” are disparate terms, meaning that they cannot be verified of the same thing. Aristotle’s conviction that it is impossible for God to be a human being makes the predication of “Deus” and “homo” of the same thing impossible. Accordingly, the predication of “Deus est homo” is disparate—the subject and predicate cannot both be true of the same thing. Proceeding beyond philosophical analysis into theology, even according to “catholics” the predication may be considered disparate, if one understands “disparate” to mean that the terms naturally or by natural power cannot be verified of the same thing. However, if “disparate” means that the terms cannot by any power be verified of the same

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42 Adams, Ockham, 1:267–270.
thing, then the terms are not disparate. In other words, in the region of theology divine omnipotence makes the predication possible. Biel’s analysis illustrates his concept of philosophy as an investigation of natural things using natural powers: Aristotle and philosophers are limited to what may be known by natural powers. With this limitation, they conclude that it is impossible for one thing to be God and a human being and therefore impossible for God to be a human being. Some catholic theologians grant the point insofar as things possible by nature are considered. Theologians, however, having access to the truths of the incarnation, know the supernatural power that makes it possible for God to be a human being. By this power both “God” and “human being” can be predicated of the same thing. When theologians consider the proposition in light of supernatural power, the problem of disparate predication is resolved. Like Ockham, Biel uses the regions of philosophy and theology to argue that a proposition is false in the region of philosophy while true in the region of theology.


45 Oberman takes up the regions of philosophy and theology in Biel. He shows the distinction between the world known by experience and reason in philosophy and the need for revelation in theology. Oberman frames the distinction between the regions in Biel as a result of the distinction between God’s absolute and ordained powers, so that this distinction delineates the regions. Oberman, Harvest, 38–42, 52–56. It is not immediately clear that Biel’s distinction between the regions of philosophy and theology depend on a prior distinction between absolute and ordained powers, nor how the distinction of powers is required to delineate the regions. I argue instead that the regions are delineated by the subject matter studied and the manner of study in each.
This brief survey of philosophy and theology in Ockham and Biel yields four key points for a consideration of Luther’s conception of these regions. First, Ockham and Biel distinguish philosophy and theology by pointing to different things investigated in each region. Philosophy is limited to an investigation of the natural world, while theology goes beyond the natural world to consider supernatural truths and natural things in relation to the supernatural. Philosophy then is a limited region, restricted by natural means of investigation and natural things investigated. Second, Ockham and Biel distinguish philosophy and theology by the means of investigation. Philosophy is limited to an investigation using a person’s natural power, or “reason” construed as natural sense and intellect. Third, Ockham and Biel construe the distinct regions as related closely enough to permit areas of overlapping knowledge between philosophy and theology. And close enough to permit a qualified use of philosophical tools in theology. Fourth, both Ockham and Biel conclude that, at least in some cases, philosophy and theology reach different conclusions. Or, to put the point in Luther’s terms, Ockham and Biel conclude that in some cases the same thing is not true in philosophy and theology. Taken together, these points provide an outline of how late medieval nominalists conceptualize distinct regions of philosophy and theology. That outline can now be applied to Luther’s disputations to ask if Luther works with similar concepts and regions.
2.3.3 Luther on Philosophy and Theology

2.3.3.1 Philosophy as Investigation of Natural World by Natural Power

The distinction between philosophy and theology is key to Luther’s Christological strategy. While he asserts that Christological claims such as “the Word became flesh” are true in theology but not philosophy, Luther does not offer explicit definitions of what he means by “theology” or by “philosophy.” However, the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)* offers clues about how Luther conceives of theology and philosophy. These clues are best recognized by approaching Luther under the points surveyed in Ockham and Biel: the subject matter of theology and philosophy, the means of investigation in each, the distinction between them, and the space for different conclusions in each. I suggest at the outset that Luther thinks of philosophy and theology as regions of inquiry, different academic disciplines within which a scholar pursues knowledge.

Luther identifies the natural world as the proper subject matter of philosophy in the 1539 *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)*. Luther thinks that ethical instruction is knowledge available to natural reason. Accordingly, philosophy has access to what Luther calls a “legal wisdom,” which Luther aligns with commands of the Decalogue. The commands of God, particularly those of the second table of the law speaking to how people ought to relate to one another, are included in the subject matter of
philosophy. On this point Luther uses “philosophy” to describe what ethical content people may know by a consideration of the natural world. That construal of the subject matter of philosophy aligns with Ockham’s and Biel’s concept of the subject matter of philosophy.

Luther also parallels Ockham and Biel in construing natural power and reason as the means of philosophical inquiry. The use of reason in philosophy is evident in Luther’s approach to “legal wisdom.” In both philosophy and theology Luther thinks that one arrives at the same knowledge of the same ethical norms. The difference is the manner in which one knows them, whether the knowledge comes by reason or by revelation. When one discovers ethical norms through the use of reason, Luther identifies this activity and knowledge as philosophy. While the same ethical norms are also made known by revelation, Luther excludes knowledge gained by revelation from philosophy. Luther’s correlation between natural power and the region of philosophy parallels the thought of Ockham and Biel on the means by which a philosophical investigation proceeds.

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Luther’s thought on ethical norms illustrates the force of his distinction between philosophy and theology. Luther thinks that these truths are accessible both by reason and by revelation, so that they are known in both philosophy and theology. On this point, Luther sees a correspondence between philosophy and theology. That correspondence reveals that for Luther philosophy and theology are not completely divorced. They are, however, distinguished from one another. Luther frames the distinction as one of diversity: where philosophy and theology differ, Luther asserts that the difference is not a matter of contradiction, but a case of diversity. The diversity between the disciplines shows that for Luther philosophy and theology consider different subject matter using different means of inquiry. One may reach the same conclusions about some questions in both philosophy and theology. However, when one reaches different conclusions in the regions, this is a case of diversity. It falls short of the strict standards of a true contradiction (conflicting assertions about the same thing at the same time) because scholars investigate different subjects using different means in the two regions.

2.3.3.2 Theology Surpassing Natural Powers

While granting that one has access to the same ethical norms through philosophy as through theology, Luther identifies other theological doctrines that are inaccessible to philosophy. In contrast to legal wisdom, Luther argues that there is “another theological

wisdom about the Son, etc.” that is above and beyond reason and philosophy.\textsuperscript{50} Some doctrines are set apart from legal wisdom because unaided human powers cannot know them.\textsuperscript{51} Luther thinks that it is wrong to argue from the correspondence in ethical instruction to the conclusion that there is also correspondence between philosophy and theology regarding the incarnation, justification, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the like.\textsuperscript{52} Luther uses his distinction between legal wisdom and other theological wisdom to argue that “it is far different to believe in the Son of God, to have and to hope for eternal life, than it is to be chaste, to marry.”\textsuperscript{53} While one could gain a legal wisdom about the ethics of marriage from a study of the natural world, the same method of study could not lead to belief in Christ. Philosophers cannot grant that the higher doctrines of theological wisdom are true.\textsuperscript{54} In Luther’s account these higher doctrines cannot be known by an investigation using natural power. They are known instead by divine power. The region of theology is set apart from philosophy by its method of inquiry, one that includes what is known by revelation. Moreover, Luther’s appeal to a higher theological wisdom shows that the

\textsuperscript{50} “Concedo, sapientiam Dei legalem non esse contra, sed non includi in illam sapientiam Evangelii. Theologia, incarnatio, iustificatio sunt supra et extra rationem et philosophiam.” WA 39/2:13B.27–14B.27.

\textsuperscript{51} “Quod vero haec summa, propter quae vel sola data est scriptura, theologica, videlicet de iustificatione, de remissione peccatorum, de liberatione a morte aeterna tribuerunt philosophiae et viribus humanis, hoc non possimus nec debemus ferre.” WA 39/2:14A.3–6.


subject matter has also changed in theology. Theologians consider God and things in relation to God, going beyond a study of the natural world.

Luther follows the strategy of Ockham and Biel by using a construal of philosophy as a limited discipline to argue for theological doctrines that go beyond what can be known from philosophy. Like Ockham and Biel, Luther sees philosophy as a region that is limited to what is accessible to natural human reason through its inquiry into the natural world. Where theological doctrines surpass this limitation, Ockham, Biel, and Luther argue that philosophy must be left behind in favor of theology. As shown above, Ockham abandons a philosophical view of real relations when doing Christology in favor of the “truth of the theologians.” Biel abandons a philosophical view of disparate predication in “Deus est homo” in light of what is possible in theology by supernatural power. In the same way, Luther argues that when a thing is greater than philosophy, philosophy ought to be left behind.55 A doctrine greater than philosophy surpasses both of the limitations of philosophy sketched out here. These doctrines go beyond the limitations of natural human powers, and they concern things that go beyond the natural, created world to include God, Christ, and God’s works like justification. As a result, when Luther in Christology argues that philosophical conclusions are to be left behind, he is arguing that the boundaries he established for philosophy prevent a philosopher from inquiring into a supernatural thing using Scripture or revelation. An investigation of this sort is a theological exercise. When he distinguishes philosophy and theology, Luther is following a strategy evident in Ockham

and Biel. Moreover, like Ockham and Biel, Luther does not completely divorce theology and philosophy by distinguishing between the regions. Instead, by limiting philosophical conclusions, Luther establishes boundaries that allow for overlap between the two regions.

2.3.3.3 Luther’s Departure from Ockham and Biel

While Luther follows Ockham and Biel in distinguishing philosophy and theology as distinct regions, his construal of the regions rejects their practice of reading theological truths into philosophy. The precise point of departure can be mapped by considering Luther’s handling of “human being” in light of Christ. Like Biel, Luther thinks that a simple thing may be considered either in philosophy or theology. Biel understands a theological consideration of human beings to include an investigation of how people relate to God while taking supernatural power into account. Neither the relation of people to God nor supernatural power are considered in philosophy.56 In the same way, Luther holds that one may consider a human being either philosophically or theologically.57 When a human being is considered philosophically, the inquiry is based on philosophical lines; that is, the philosopher inductively learns what she can about a human being through principles naturally known in and of themselves and from observation of human beings, and then follows the rules of syllogisms to gain more knowledge from what is known inductively. When a human being is considered theologically, the human being is considered in relation

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56 For an analysis of philosophical and theological anthropology in Biel, see Oberman, *Harvest*, 57–60.
to God and in light of truths revealed through theology. So far, Luther is following Biel’s thought on the regions of philosophy and theology.

Luther breaks new ground by letting philosophical conclusions stand without amendments from theology. Biel, as shown above, looked to theology to fill out philosophy, so that natural and metaphysical truths learned in theology are read back into philosophy. Luther’s strategy is to let philosophical conclusions remain valid within the region of philosophy and to posit new conclusions in theology. That move is evident in Luther’s handling of the concept of “human being.” Luther posits two distinct words: “human being” is one word in philosophy and another in theology. He does not, as Biel suggests, read the theological truths discovered about a human being back into the philosophical understanding of human beings. This departure is foundational for several of Luther’s strategies for Christology, especially his new theological language considered in the next chapter.

Luther uses a late medieval model of the regions of philosophy and theology to solve Christological problems. By distinguishing between the regions, Luther grants that Arian arguments are true within the region of philosophy. When the natural world is considered by natural power, the syllogism is true: “No creature is God. Christ is a creature. Therefore Christ is not God.” However, Luther rejects the conclusion of this and other Arian arguments in theology. The turn to the region of theology opens up new means of

58 I analyze these definitions further below; here I raise the point to map Luther’s departure from Ockham and Biel by not reading theological truths back into philosophy.
investigation by considering divine power and revelation in the inquiry into Christ’s person. Within the context of a disputation, Luther as the respondens uses the distinction to grant arguments without falling into Christological error. As noted in chapter 1, in a disputation a respondens was obligated to either deny or concede the counterarguments raised. By turning to theology, Luther grants the validity of arguments in philosophy while asserting that different conclusions result from a theological investigation. Ockham and Biel made the same turn while retaining the use of philosophical tools in theological inquiry. I now take up the question of one such tool, logic, and its place in Luther’s theology, asking if Luther permits the use of this philosophical tool in theological inquiries.

2.4 Logic in Theology

2.4.1 The Same Thing Is Not True in Philosophy and Theology

Luther uses the distinction between philosophy and theology to argue that some things are true in one region but false in the other. He asserts flatly that the same thing is not true in philosophy and theology. The Arian argument that “Christ is created. Therefore Christ is not God,” is “true in philosophy” according to Luther. However, Luther denies that the conclusion is true in theology. This argument raises questions about how

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60 See above, 35–37, for details on the rules and practice of a medieval disputation.
Luther understands truth and how truth is determined in philosophy and in theology. The analysis of truth falls under the category of logic. By logic, I am interested primarily in the way that one determines whether a statement is true or false. I also mean the determination of what deductions are valid and legitimate when analyzing arguments. In this section I ask how Luther determines truth in theology, or what kind of logic Luther employs in the region of theology.

On the surface, Luther seems to reject all logic from theology. He writes:

24. Much less is this syllogism [to be held]: All flesh is a creature. The Word is flesh. Therefore the Word is a creature. 25. Nor is this syllogism: All flesh is a creature. The Word is not a creature. Therefore the Word is not flesh. 26. In these and similar syllogisms the form is valid, but nothing for the material. 27. Therefore we must go to a different dialectic and philosophy in the articles of faith, which is called the word of God and faith.64

Each of these syllogisms uses a logical deduction to argue for Arianism. Luther rejects the particular syllogisms because they are unsuited for the material. His appeal to the “word of God and faith” as an alternative dialectics in theology gives the impression that Luther eliminates all logic from theology. However, the context of the disputation complicates that interpretation of Luther’s argument. The disputation itself is an exercise in the logic of analyzing arguments. Luther's participation in this logical exercise means that Luther analyzes Christological arguments by using logic. We must therefore look beyond Luther's surface rhetoric to see what kind of logic he uses in the disputation.

2.4.2 Truth and Falsehood

Luther, in the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14)*, argues that specific syllogistic arguments are invalid in theology. Graham White has noted that while Luther makes use of logic in the Christological disputations, he rejects certain deductive arguments in theology. Rather than rejecting logic completely in theology, Luther uses logic to accept some arguments and reject others. In particular, Luther objects to syllogisms that reach a deductive conclusion by using a major premise drawn from philosophy and a minor premise drawn from theology. Luther addresses the Arian argument by rejecting this form of syllogism. The major premise of the Arian argument, “No creature is God,” is philosophical in that it comes from observation of the natural world. The minor premise, “Christ is a creature,” is theological because it comes from traditional interpretations of Scripture. Luther grants that the conclusion, “Therefore Christ is not God,” is true in philosophy. However, he rejects that argument as valid in theology. A philosopher would conduct an investigation of natural things using natural powers of sense and reason. Yet in theology the investigation would include different data about the person of Christ known by revelation. Theology would therefore judge the conclusion false. But how does Luther determine that this is false? Before that question can be answered, it is necessary to determine what Luther means by “true” and “false” in the disputation. Here

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65 White, *Luther*, 136–144, 156.
again the nominalists provide an intellectual framework to use in an investigation of Luther.

The late medievals conceptualized truth as a property of propositions. The late medieval nominalists understood “true” and “false” as terms that can be predicated only of propositions. In general, the scholastics held that a proposition is true when it corresponds to an actual state of affairs. In order to analyze the relation between a proposition and the actual state of affairs, the scholastics began by reducing a declarative sentence in any form to a proposition with “is” as the copula. The late medieval nominalists illustrated this reduction with the example sentence “homo currit,” “a human being runs.” In order to determine its truth, they reduced this statement to “homo est currens,” “a human being is a running thing.” This reduced proposition, understood to be equivalent to the original sentence, was then analyzed as true or false. The question of truth in this account is the question of whether a reduced propositional sentence corresponds to an actual state of affairs.

Luther, having studied Ockham and with followers of Ockham, would have been familiar with Ockham’s particular view of late medieval theories of truth. Ockham thinks of truth as a connotative term predicated of a proposition. He follows Aristotle in thinking of “truth” as a predicate that can be ascribed only to propositions. Ockham relates “truth” so closely to propositions that he thinks of “true” and “false” not as real things distinct from

68 Philotheus Boehner, *Collected Articles on Ockham*, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert, Franciscan Institute Publications Philosophy Series No. 12 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1992), 201, 232. White observes that also for D’Ailly every truth is a true proposition, so that the category of truth is one that corresponds to propositions. White, *Luther*, 177–178.
70 Boehner, *Ockham*, 232.
propositions, but as connotative terms that signify the proposition directly and connote that the proposition signifies things as they are (true) or does not signify things as they are (false). In other words, “truth” does not exist independent of propositions, and Ockham never defines “truth.” Instead, Ockham understands truth as a condition of a proposition and analyzes the conditions under which a proposition is true. Any conversation about truth, by this understanding, is a conversation about propositions.

Furthermore, Ockham thinks that truth applies primarily to a declarative proposition predicating one thing of another. Ockham gives a nuanced reading of Aristotle’s theory of truth. Aristotle defines the truth of a statement by the existence of the thing signified. However, Ockham notes that Aristotle himself explains this by offering the example that when one denies the statement “Socrates is white,” he is denying only that whiteness belongs to Socrates. He is not denying the existence of Socrates or whiteness. Ockham uses Aristotle’s example to argue that the primary kind of proposition that truth applies to is of the form “X is Y” rather than a simple statement of existence such as “X is.” This kind of proposition is declarative, so that imperative sentences, questions, and the like are not candidates for the logician to analyze as true or false. This view of truth then covers a narrow range of propositions. For one working within Ockham’s theory, an

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71 Adams, Ockham, 1:394.
72 The classic statement comes from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1011b25: “A falsity is a statement of that which is that it is not, or of that which is not that it is; and a truth is a statement of that which is that it is, or of that which is not that it is not.” Quoted in Richard A. Lee, Jr., *Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 100.
74 Boehner, Ockham, 200–211.
identification of “true” or “false” is an indication that he is analyzing a declarative proposition.

Luther’s use of “true” and “false” in the disputation agrees with Ockham’s view that these are categories applied to propositions. He identifies various statements when he works out his claim that one thing may be true in philosophy but false in theology.⁷⁵ For instance, Luther says that it is “true” in theology that “the Word became flesh,” but that this same sentence is “impossible and absurd” in philosophy.⁷⁶ What Luther identifies as true in this instance is a particular proposition. He identifies the premises and conclusions of syllogisms (propositional statements) as “true” or “false.” Conversely, he does not analyze syllogisms as “true” or “false,” but as “valid” in form.⁷⁷ What clearly sets Luther within the view of truth as a characteristic of propositions is his description of “God and human being” as two propositions. He defines the question in terms of propositions about God, propositions that Luther himself devises. He argues that the proposition “God is a human being” is true in theology but false in philosophy.⁷⁸ In this instance Luther addresses a

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⁷⁵ As White notes, a disputation is a practice of judging statements as true or false. Luther works within this practice, following the rules of a disputation to reject certain statements. He frequently does this by pointing to a faulty premise in a syllogism. White, Lutheran, 164.


question by constructing a specific proposition with “est” as the copula. Furthermore, the propositions that Luther discusses in the disputation as true or false fit the pattern of “X is Y.” When discussing Arius, Luther identifies as “true in philosophy” the proposition that “Christ is not God.” Luther analyzes truth in terms of one thing being rightly predicated of another thing. He is interested in whether these particular statements correspond to the actual state of affairs. When Luther declares that “Christ is not God” is true in philosophy, he understands “truth” to be a quality of a particular proposition.

In medieval thought, the truth of propositions was determined by logic. The medievals frequently distinguished between “logic” and “dialectics,” following Cicero and Boethius, who construed dialectic as the art of finding arguments and logic as the art of judging arguments. It is therefore important to carefully distinguish “philosophy,” “dialectics,” and “logic” in Luther’s vocabulary. According to this distinction, Luther’s appeal to “a different dialectics” in theology does not mean a rejection of logic understood as the analysis of argument. Given that distinction, Luther could consistently reject


80 Adams, Ockham, 1:459. This medieval distinction was altered already in the sixteenth century, so that “logic” was understood to address broader questions. Marenbon, “Latin Philosophy,” 226. That shift presents a particular challenge to readers of Luther: in order to identify the precise target of Luther’s attacks against dialectics, one must recognize a now-lost distinction between forming arguments and judging arguments.

81 Some modern interpreters of Luther erase this medieval distinction. This erasure happens, for instance, in Työrinja, “Proprietas Verbi.” It is also evident in Kantian construals of faith and reason that group together the practice of making arguments and judging arguments into one category of “reason” or “logic.” See, for instance, Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter, “Introduction,” in Reason and the Reasons of Faith, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter, Theology for the Twenty-First Century (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2005), 1–23.

82 “27. Eundum ergo est ad aliam dialecticam et philosophiam in articulis fidei, quae vocatur verbum Dei et fides.” WA 39/2:5.9–10. For instance, Luther says: “21. Ut quae sit non quidem contra, sed extra, intra, supra, infra, circa, ultra omnem veritatem dialecticam.” WA 39/2:34–35. His discussion then includes an analysis of syllogisms, with the conclusion that in the articles of faith “aliam dialecticam et philosophiam” is required in the articles of faith. While Luther judges propositions (logic), he rejects some syllogisms that could be formed
dialectics from the region of theology while still using and employing a particular theory of logic.

2.4.3 A Sketch of Suppositional Logic

Luther, having studied in the tradition of Ockham, learned the logical theory of William Ockham. Ockham's theory deserves careful attention in the question of logic in Luther's theology. Since Luther knew this theory, and knew how it functioned in the theology of Ockham, Biel, and others, I ask here if Luther continues to use Ockham's theory of logic in his Christology. That question requires attention to Ockham's logic, which I sketch out here. With that framework shown, I then compare Luther's logic in the disputation to Ockham's approach to logic.

Ockham's theory of logic is based on the medieval theory of supposition. Supposition is the medieval analysis of what thing a term takes the place of in a proposition. Ockham explains supposition as "being put in the place of something else." While terms signify before they are put in a proposition, supposition is a property that a term takes on only in a proposition. Within a proposition, a term supposits in relation to

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83 A discussion of Ockham's theory is provided in the logic textbook by Berthold Arnoldi von Usingen that Luther studied at Erfurt. White, Luther, 192–195.
85 Adams, Ockham, 1:327–328. Ockham distinguishes between personal, material, and simple supposition.
the other term in the proposition, so that a predicate supposits for the subject of a
proposition. While supposition is similar to a very precise analysis of signification of a
term in a proposition, supposition remains distinct from signification due to the relational
nature of the terms suppositing for one another in a proposition. It is more precise to think
of supposition as the relationship between a term and the thing it supposits for in a
particular proposition than to think of the precise thing that a term calls to mind
(signification). This distinction is important because it allows space for a term to supposit
for a thing that it does not precisely signify.

Supposition functions in Ockham’s thought to determine the correspondence
between a proposition and a given state of affairs. Ockham’s theory of truth, briefly put, is
that when the terms of a proposition supposit for the same thing, the proposition is true. Important for Luther is the space that opens up when truth is analyzed in terms of
supposition instead of signification. By analyzing supposition, one allows space for a term
to signify certain qualities of that thing and not other qualities. Because a term stands in a
proposition for a certain thing, that term may designate an object without automatically
telling everything about that object. That space will be important for an analysis of
Luther’s thought on logic, and particularly for analyzing Christological propositions.

Recall that Luther’s rejection of Arian arguments depends on rejecting the major
premise in theology. The major premises in these arguments (and others of the same kind)

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88 White points out that supposition functioning in a realist view of semantics parts ways with idealistic
are universal propositions. The premises “all flesh is a creature” and “no creature is God” are universal, signifying all creatures rather than one specific creature.\(^89\) Universal propositions, whether negative or positive, require particular kinds of analysis in Ockham's suppositional theory of logic. Ockham defines particular kinds of supposition in order to analyze these kinds of propositions. I sketch out these categories here in order to show how the major premises of the syllogisms in Luther's disputation would be analyzed in suppositional logic.

The details of Ockham's theory of supposition have been treated by others. Since most of these details are not relevant for considering Luther's Christology, I leave them aside. For instance, while Ockham distinguishes between simple, material, and personal supposition, only personal supposition is relevant for an analysis of suppositional logic in Luther's Christological disputations.\(^90\) For Ockham, personal supposition is when a term supposits not for the term itself nor for a concept, but for the thing it signifies. Since Ockham holds that words signify individual things primarily rather than universals or concepts, personal supposition is when a term supposits for the object or objects it signifies.\(^91\) Personal supposition is further divided depending on the type of proposition a term occurs in, and these divisions are important for analyzing Luther's Christological disputations.


\(^90\) For analyses of these kinds of supposition, see Adams, Ockham, 1:327–351, and Boehner, Ockham, 236–241.

\(^91\) Adams, Ockham, 1:342–351; Boehner, Ockham, 236–238.
Ockham divides personal supposition into various categories, beginning with discrete and common. Discrete personal supposition is when a term supposits for an individual, such as Socrates. Common personal supposition is the supposition of general terms, in which case the term supposits for more than one discrete individual. In order to judge propositions with a general term as true or false, Ockham descends from a general proposition to a string of individual propositions. The string includes one proposition for each of the things the general term supposits. Accordingly, a term that has common personal supposition leads to an analysis of the proposition that begins by reducing the proposition to a series of individual propositions.

Ockham further divides common personal supposition into various categories. These categories are common determinate supposition, merely confused supposition, and confused and distributive supposition. The various categories of common personal supposition account for different kinds of propositions (such as particular or universal propositions) and provide rules for descending from these different kinds of propositions to different strings of individual propositions. Once the descent to individual propositions has been made, then the logician can determine the truth of a proposition by asking if the terms supposit for the same thing. These are important for Luther's arguments, because they will determine the kind of reduction applied to the major premises of Arian arguments.

Common determinate supposition is the kind of supposition in a general proposition. General propositions use a general term (rather than a strictly individual term), but do not place that general term under the scope of a universal sign or a negation.
Such general propositions have terms with common determinate supposition. One instance of a general proposition is a particular proposition, such as the proposition “a certain human being is an animal,” in which “human being” has common determinate supposition. It is determinate because it supposits for at least one individual person. Accordingly, common determinate supposition means that a term will descend from general to singulars by means of a disjunctive proposition without changing the other extreme. In the example “a certain human being is an animal,” “human being” is thus reduced by means of a series including “or,” while the other extreme (in this case the predicate) is unchanged. Reducing this proposition to individual propositions leads to the descent: “a certain human being is an animal, therefore this human being is an animal or that human being is an animal or that human being...”

That is, in the example given, the general term “human being” allows one to descend to the disjunctive “this human being...or that human being” while the other extreme (“is an animal”) stays the same. Once the descent has been made, the logician can ask if the terms supposit for the same thing in the individual propositions generated. If a single proposition of those generated is true, then the general proposition is true.

Ockham identifies different kinds of supposition in universal propositions. A universal proposition includes a universal sign such as “every” or “no.” The universal signs change the kind of supposition in the proposition. Predicate terms in affirmative universal propositions have merely confused supposition. Common determinate supposition fails in a universal proposition, since one can no longer descend from the general term to

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individuals via a disjunctive proposition without changing the other extreme. Instead Ockham defines the supposition of the predicate in a proposition with a universal affirmative sign as merely confused supposition. That is, in the proposition “Every human being is an animal” the predicate term “animal” has merely confused supposition. The proposition does not allow the inference that “therefore either every human being is this animal or every human being is that animal,” as it would if it had common determinate supposition. However, the proposition does allow the inference “every human being is either this animal or that animal or....” The proposition could, in theory, be reduced to an individual proposition for every human being. With this reduction in place, the logician can then ask if the terms supposit for the same thing. Once again, the truth of the individual propositions generated determine the truth of the universal proposition. It is true if every one of the individual propositions is true.

The subject term in a universal proposition has confused and distributive supposition. Likewise, the predicate term in a universal negative proposition has confused and distributive supposition. According to confused and distributive supposition, a logician can descend from a general term to singular terms in a series of propositions joined by a conjunction (rather than a disjunction). The subject “human being” has this kind of supposition in “every human being is an animal,” so that it can lead to the inference: “this human being is an animal and that human being is an animal and...” In a universal negative

93 If it did, the universal affirmative proposition “Every person is an animal” would descend via the subject term “person” to “Every person is an animal, therefore either this person is an animal or that person is an animal or...” As a result, a single person who is an animal would make the proposition true, and the force of the universal “every” would be meaningless.
proposition, both subject and predicate have confused and distributive supposition. Accordingly, one can descend from “No human being is an animal” to “No human being is this animal and no human being is that animal and…” extending to each individual human being. These descents allow the logician to analyze the truth of a universal proposition by analyzing the supposition of the terms in the individual propositions.

While these distinctions are technical, they are important in Ockham’s logic. The distinctions in kinds of personal supposition clarify the truth conditions for the various kinds of propositions in Ockham’s thought. For Ockham, the truth of a proposition is determined by an analysis of the supposition of the terms of the proposition. A proposition is true when its terms supposit for the same thing. This analysis is straightforward in singular propositions, those that have a single, defined subject. In singular propositions this analysis means asking if the singular thing the subject supposit for is the same thing that the predicate supposit for. For instance, the proposition

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95 Adams maps out the further distinction between mobile and immobile confused and distributive supposition. Immobile confused and distributive supposition is a relevant category for the subject term in an exceptive proposition, a category that does not apply directly to Luther’s Christological disputation. Mobile confused and distributive supposition is what I sketch here, applying to universal propositions, whether affirmative or negative. Adams also critiques Ockham, whose definitions do not quite work since the descents include a change in the term that Ockham’s theory does not permit. She does grant the example I have given above as a legitimate descent under Ockham’s theory. Adams, Ockham, 1:356–359. For more details on Ockham’s divisions of personal supposition and a critique of his thought on personal supposition, see Adams, Ockham, 1:352–377.

96 Medieval logic used different strategies to judge the truth of a proposition or the conditions under which a proposition is true. While similarities may be found in these strategies, different medievals have different approaches to the details of determining whether a proposition corresponds to a given state of affairs. For instance, see Gyula Klima, “Two Summulae, Two Ways of Doing Logic: Peter of Spain’s ‘Realism’ and John Buridan’s ‘Nominalism,’” in Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500–1500, ed. John Marenbon and Margaret Cameron, Investigating Medieval Philosophy 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 109–126. Klima traces continuities across Peter of Spain and John Buridan while noting that they go about the work of logic differently.

97 For an extensive discussion of Ockham’s theory of the logic of propositions, see Adams, Ockham, 1:383–435.
“Socrates is a human being” is true if “Socrates” and “human being” stand in for the same thing—in this case, if Socrates is also the human being for which the predicate supposits.98

General propositions are true if the series of singular propositions to which they are reduced are true. One kind of general proposition is an indefinite proposition, a proposition with an indefinite subject. As a general proposition, it is analyzed by reducing it to a string of individual propositions. An indefinite proposition is true if at least one instance of a thing in which the subject and predicate supposit for the same thing is true. If, for instance, there is one human being who is an animal, then the proposition “a certain human being is an animal” is true. This one human being would appear in the descent to the disjunctive series of “either this human being is an animal or that human being is an animal or...”99

The subject and predicate of that single proposition would be the same thing, and the indefinite proposition is judged to be true. However, the standard of truth for a universal affirmative proposition is higher. This kind of proposition is true only when the predicate supposits for everything that the subject supposits for. Following the rule for confused and distributive supposition, the proposition “every human being is an animal” is true if the series of reduced propositions is true in every case: “this human being is an animal and that human being is an animal and...” Every one of the individual propositions must be true for the universal proposition to be true. A single instance of a human being who is not an animal will render the proposition false.100 Ockham includes universal negative propositions in the same category, so that the proposition is true only if the predicate does

100 Adams, Ockham, 1:392–393.
not supposit for anything that the subject supposits for. A single instance of the subject and predicate suppositing for the same thing renders the universal negative proposition false.

2.4.4 Suppositional Logic and Luther’s Disputation

With Ockham’s theory of supposition sketched out, I now turn to specific syllogisms Luther analyzes in the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14). As noted above, the premises of these syllogisms are often universal affirmations or negations: “No creature is God” or “Every human being is a creature.” I now ask what results when Ockham’s suppositional logic is used to analyze these propositions, and more broadly other Christological syllogisms. To determine the place of suppositional logic in Luther’s theology, I use the major premise “no creature is God” as an example.102

In Ockham’s account, the subjects of these universal propositions have confused and distributive supposition. They are true if every instance of their reduced individual propositions is true; a single instance of an individual proposition in the series that is not true will render the entire proposition false. Luther’s distinction between the regions of philosophy and theology, including the diverse things considered under each region,

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101 Adams, Ockham, 1:392–393. Here Adams helpfully provides a rule for negative universal propositions that Ockham fails to supply.
102 Denis Janz argues that Luther turns to an enlightened reason to serve faith, a reason that does not try to reach above itself to truths known only by revelation. Denis R. Janz, “Whore or Handmaid?: Luther and Aquinas on the Function of Reason in Theology,” in The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition, ed. Jennifer Hockenberry Dragseth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 47–52. In this section I suggest that suppositional logic works in this way for Luther when informed with principles drawn from theology. For more on Luther and Aquinas, see Denis R. Janz, Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983).
changes the things included in the string of individual propositions descending from the universal propositions in the different regions. The different group of individuals considered in theology would give the potential for the truth of the proposition to change when analyzed in theology rather than philosophy. And, since the difference is in the subject matter investigated, Luther could assert that the proposition is true in philosophy and false in theology without introducing a theory of double truth or making a contradiction.

When one analyzes “no creature is God” across the regions of philosophy and theology using suppositional logic, the analysis yields opposite results in each region. The premise “no creature is God” would descend by Ockham’s rules for confused and distributive supposition from the proposition “no creature is God” to “therefore this creature is not God and that creature is not God and…” Once that descents is in place, the proposition can be analyzed as true or false by asking if there is any instance in which “creature” and “God” supposit for the same thing. If no instance is found, the proposition is true; if even one instance is found where “God” and “creature” supposit for the same thing, the universal proposition is false. Luther analyzes the proposition twice: once in philosophy and once in theology. In philosophy, the subject matter to be considered is the natural world, in this case a consideration of all created things known from nature by the use of natural powers. Given that distinction, the subject term “no creature” descends to a string of individual propositions that must include every ordinary creature—but does not include the person of Christ. Luther judges this proposition to be true in philosophy. This fits within the bounds of suppositional logic, since one could extend the descent of the
subject term to every ordinary creature and in no case would the subject and predicate of an individual proposition supposit for the same thing. However, once the proposition is analyzed in the region of theology, a critical addition is made to the creatures for whom the terms supposit. In addition to ordinary creatures, “every creature” includes the person of Christ, a divine person. In the descent to a string of propositions, Christ’s divine person yields the individual proposition: “this creature (that is, the person of Christ with a created human nature) is not God.” Since both subject and predicate supposit for the same divine person of Christ, this individual negative proposition is false. That single false proposition makes the universal negative proposition false.

I conclude that Luther achieves his goal of rejecting Arian syllogisms by analyzing the arguments using suppositional logic. Since the major premises in these syllogisms are false in theology, the syllogisms are rendered invalid. This strategy depends upon Luther’s distinction between the subject matter studied in theology and philosophy. Once the distinction between philosophy and theology is granted, along with the individual human beings considered in each region, suppositional logic judges the proposition “no creature is God” true in philosophy and false in theology.103 The analysis of other major premises drawn from philosophy will reach the same conclusions in Christological syllogisms, such as “every human being is a creature.” The divine person of Christ considered in the region of theology makes the major premises false when those premises are reduced to a series of

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103 Bruce Marshall thinks that Luther finds the suppositional logic meaningless. In Marshall’s interpretation, Luther criticizes the logic because it insists that both sides of a proposition be identical. For instance, the claim “Deus est homo” is only true if it can be proven that “Deus est Deus.” Marshall, “Faith and Reason,” 37–40. Yet Marshall does not sufficiently attend to the objects that the terms supposit for. Nor does he note that Luther’s definition of “homo,” which I consider in chapter three, fits the scheme of suppositional logic.
individual propositions. Luther uses suppositional logic to judge the major premises of problematic Christological syllogisms as false. He can reject the syllogisms as invalid without dismissing logic from theology.

Suppositional logic allows Luther to use reason in the service of faith. By using suppositional logic Luther does not need to abandon the principle of non-contradiction while restricting the role of philosophy in Christology.\textsuperscript{104} Instead, Luther appeals to the regions of philosophy and theology to determine exactly which things will be considered when propositions are analyzed. Suppositional logic, by placing the emphasis on the things for which the terms stand rather than the signification of the terms, allows Luther to judge a proposition true when held up against one set of things and false when held up against another set of things. Luther carefully construes the regions of theology and philosophy to permit the philosophical tool of suppositional logic to function in the analysis of theological propositions informed by revelation and known by faith.

Suppositional logic illustrates the importance of reading Luther in his medieval context. The theory of supposition fell out of use quickly after the Middle Ages, so that modern scholars do not typically encounter the theory apart from research into scholastic thought.\textsuperscript{105} Despite this historical shift, recognizing the theory of suppositional logic is critical for assessing the place of reason and logic in Luther, since this theory of judging the truth of propositions was current in Luther’s day and studied by Luther.\textsuperscript{106} If Luther holds

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\textsuperscript{105} Marenbon, “Latin Theology,” 227.
\textsuperscript{106} White, \textit{Luther}, 192–195.
to logic in theology—and particularly suppositional logic—where does this leave faith? And how does one know what things are to be included in the region of theology and philosophy? These questions take us beyond logical analysis to the related field of epistemology. I turn next to epistemology to map the particular relation of faith and reason in Luther.

2.5 Epistemology: Faith, Understanding, and Science

2.5.1 Faith as Epistemological Category in Luther

Epistemology is a further aspect of the Arian problem. How one knows the premises of Arian problems is an epistemological question. While Luther grants that the premise “No created human being is God” is true in philosophy, he declares the premise false in theology. The minor premise, that “Christ is a created human being,” is a theological premise.107 Above I have analyzed the logical aspect of how Luther deals with this syllogism. That includes the move of including the person of Christ within a theological investigation of all created human beings. But how does a theologian know that Christ is a created human being? That is, by what means does one know that Christ is a created human being, and further that this same Christ is also God? Likewise, what kind of knowledge does a philosopher have when judging that “no created human being is God”? These are epistemological questions. By epistemology I mean different ways of knowing things and the basis of each kind of knowledge.

Luther locates the source of theological knowledge in divine revelation. His appeal to the “word of God and faith” in theology points to the word as the source of knowledge and “faith” as a way of knowing things. Alongside faith, Luther describes other ways of knowing things in the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh (John 1:14):*

These things [the incarnation and the union of finite and infinite] can be thought by a human being, but in no way believed, as I can think many things that are beyond my capacity. Anyone can think about the word and about all the articles of faith, about eternal life and many other things. But a human being cannot conclude that they are true by himself, such as not [concluding that it is true] that the infinite one could become finite as a human being. For if they could understand, then they would believe.

Luther distinguishes between the mental acts of thinking, understanding, and believing as different ways of knowing things. While anyone can think the articles of faith, not all believe them to be true. The articles of faith Luther mentions here are those subjects he has identified as proper to the region of theology, things that cannot be known from sensory experience of the natural world. A human being may think about the articles of faith using only natural power, but will not conclude that these articles are true without faith. That argument assumes a certain kind of epistemology, or way of knowing things. Luther identifies “understanding” as an epistemological criterion in philosophy. A philosopher will only hold true what he can understand. On that basis of knowing philosophers do not believe the incarnation because they cannot understand it. The resulting puzzle for

110 “R. Si tribuit Deo infinita, tunc non est philosophia. Nam Paulus Rom. 1 dicit, quod Deus eis hoc manifestaverit. Alioquin enim nullus philosophus concedit neque Plato neque Cicero, quod possit incarnari,
modern scholars is that Luther holds that anyone can think the articles of faith, even those lacking faith. Many modern interpreters of Luther struggle to see how anyone could think about or understand doctrines that are meaningless without faith. One example is Stefan Streiff, who sees theology as a context within which the new language has meaning. Dennis Bielfeldt also takes this view, arguing that the old language and the new language of Luther are incommensurable. In Bielfeldt’s view “incommensurability” means that there is no middle ground to provide accurate translation between languages. Theological language receives its meaning only within the context of theology and faith. How then does one account for Luther’s claim that anyone can think about the articles of faith? While the idea that anyone can think the articles of faith poses a challenge to modern conceptions of faith and reason, late medieval thought on faith and reason offers a potential solution to the puzzle. By turning to nominalist conceptions of the different kinds of mental acts involved in knowing, I aim to shed light on Luther’s epistemology.


111 White, *Luther*, 148–149. White observes that the idea that anyone can think the articles of faith does fit within the semantic realism he observes in Luther.
113 Dennis Bielfeldt, “Luther and the Strange Language of Theology: How “New” Is the *Nova Lingua*?” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David M. Whitford (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2002), 221–244. Bielfeldt critiques White’s view that Luther works with a realist semantics. Instead, Bielfeldt interprets Luther’s new language as an exercise in intensionalist semantics employing metaphor, so that terms do not literally or precisely signify what they mean. I take a much different view of Luther’s new language in chapter three.
2.5.2 Faith as an Act of Judgment

Ockham develops a scheme of different mental acts that correspond to different ways of knowing things. He distinguishes first between acts of apprehension and acts of judgment. Both kinds of acts are involved in knowing a proposition. One must apprehend the terms of a proposition to know it. But a further act of judgment by which one assents to the proposition is also required to know the proposition. In Ockham's account, assent is usually an act of the intellect rather than the will. However, some judgments have an act of the will as a partial efficient cause of giving assent. Because apprehension and judgment are two separate mental acts, it is possible for one to entertain a proposition she has apprehended without knowing it or believing it.114

“Faith” in Ockham's epistemology is a particular act of judgment assenting to a proposition. Ockham distinguishes between different kinds of assent by which one may judge that a proposition is true and come to knowledge of that proposition. One kind of judgment gains knowledge from evident assent, which is given when one has evident cognition of the terms of a proposition. Evident knowledge of one proposition may lead to evident knowledge of other propositions. This is the case because Ockham thinks that the kind of assent given to the premises of a syllogism carries through the syllogism. One assents to the conclusion of a syllogism by the same act of judgment that she gives to the premises. When one evidently assents to the premises, and the inference drawn in the syllogism is necessary and very evident, then assent to the conclusion will also be evident. Where evident knowledge of a proposition is lacking, Ockham theorizes other ways of

knowing the proposition. Faith is one such way of knowing inevident propositions, including those that serve as premises in a syllogism. If one believes the premises of a syllogism by faith and apprehends the conclusion of the syllogism, then one believes the conclusion.\textsuperscript{115} Belief (faith) in this account is inevident knowledge, a form of assent given to a proposition that is not established by evident cognition. Nevertheless, like evident assent, faith is an act of judgment that assents to a proposition.

Luther’s account of thinking and believing the articles of faith reflects Ockham’s account of apprehension and judgment. Recall that Luther argues that anyone can think the articles of faith while not everyone will hold them to be true.\textsuperscript{116} The idea that anyone can think the articles of faith without judging them to be true works within Ockham’s categories of apprehending and judging. Thinking the articles of faith means apprehending them, or recognizing what is being claimed. But before these apprehended claims are known, an act of judgment is required. Faith in this context is the act of judgment that assents to theological doctrines.\textsuperscript{117} In the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh (John 1:14) Luther uses faith as a kind of epistemological category, and that category functions in the same way as Ockham’s construal of faith as a kind of judgment.


\textsuperscript{117} Clearly Luther often uses “faith” in a different sense oriented towards justification and salvation. While it goes beyond the scope of this study to work out what saving faith is in Luther, it is important to recognize that in the disputation “faith” is oriented not to salvific trust in Christ, but rather functions as a description of a particular act of judgment.
What kind of a judgment is faith? Luther offers some hints in the passage above, suggesting that “understanding” functions as a cause for assent to a proposition in philosophy, while “faith” functions as a different cause for assent to theological doctrines. He does not, however, expand further on how these acts of assent differ. Since we have already noted one correspondence between Ockham and Luther, the scholastic discourse on faith may further illuminate Luther’s thought. The scholastics worked out the criteria leading to various acts of assent, including “understanding” and “faith.” These definitions emerged especially in scholastic debates about science and theology.

2.5.3 Faith and Science

The scholastic debate on theology and science offers another perspective on the syllogisms that Luther rejects in Christology. Luther, as shown above, rejects syllogisms that take a major premise from philosophy and a minor premise from theology. He specifically objects to confining God within syllogistic logic:

18. That common syllogism: “All of the divine essence is the Father. The Son is the divine essence. Therefore the Father is the Son,” is valid. 19. Yet the premises are true and the conclusion is false, and in no way do they agree here. 20. The defect is not in the form of the syllogism, but is due to the excellence and majesty of the material, which cannot be contained within the narrow confines of reason or syllogisms.

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The divine majesty, Luther argues, cannot be contained within a syllogism. However, as shown above, Luther uses the disputations to critique syllogisms about God. He does not reject every argument on the formal grounds that it is a syllogism, which suggests that he sees some as valid and others not. Luther needs conceptual resources to accept some syllogisms about God while rejecting others. One such conceptual resource is a theory of knowledge. In medieval thought, a particular kind of knowledge results from syllogisms. Identifying this kind of knowledge is one conceptual resource for identifying which syllogisms about God are valid and which are not. By Luther’s day, medieval theologians had given a great deal of attention to these kinds of epistemological questions.

The scholastic discourse on epistemology in theology works with Aristotle’s theory of science. Aristotle theorized different kinds of knowledge, one of which is “science.” For Aristotle, “science” is knowledge derived from a syllogism in which the premises are true, primitive, immediate, and more known than and prior to the conclusion. Science is not particular knowledge or knowledge of a contingent thing, but universal and necessary knowledge derived from a syllogistic demonstration. The medieval conversation about Aristotle’s definition of science and its relation to theology focused on knowledge of the premises. Recall that for Ockham the kind of knowledge of the premises of a syllogism carries through to the conclusion of the syllogism. By analyzing how premises are known, the scholastics also analyzed how the conclusion of a syllogism was known. All the scholastics agreed that in some way that the primitive and immediate knowledge required for scientific knowledge comes from an inductive process by which the mind extracts a
universal from many singulars.\textsuperscript{120} As a result, one must have evident knowledge of terms
that in the premises of a syllogism in order to attain scientific knowledge of the conclusion
of the syllogism.

The evident knowledge required for science complicates medieval theories about
theology as a science. This complication arises from the scholastic consensus that eternal
blessedness is seeing God. While the scholastics agree that the blessed (souls in heaven)
have immediate knowledge of God because they see him, their conception that eternal
blessedness consists in seeing God means that the pilgrim (\textit{viator}, the Christian in this
world and life) does not see God. Without sensory access to God, pilgrims cannot attain the
kind of evident knowledge from which they might gain primitive, immediate knowledge of
premises leading to scientific knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{121} Despite not seeing God, various
scholastics aimed to construe theology as a kind of science, and accordingly needed to
show that pilgrims had immediate, evident knowledge of God without seeing God.\textsuperscript{122} Most
of the debate goes beyond the scope of this work, but it is necessary to place Ockham’s and
Biel’s arguments into context by noting Aquinas’s position to which they respond.

Aquinas works with a theory of a subalternated science to make room for scientific
knowledge in theology. He thinks of sacred theology as a kind of subalternated science.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120} Lee, \textit{Science}, 7–11.
\textsuperscript{122} For an account surveying this debate through the scholastic period, see Lee, \textit{Science}.
\textsuperscript{123} Not all the medievals read Aquinas this way. The fourteenth century Dominican Thomas Sutton, a staunch
defender of Thomas Aquinas, argues that Aquinas sees theology as a science, but not a science subalternated
to God and the knowledge of the blessed. Klaus Rodler, “Thomas Sutton on Theology as a Science,” in
\emph{Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown}, ed. Kent Emery, Jr., Russell L.
Friedman, and Andreas Speer, Studien und Texte zur Geistgeschichte des Mittelalters 105 (Leiden and
Boston: Brill, 2011), 591–622. It should be noted that Aquinas distinguished various kinds of science in
theology, one kind that corresponded to a metaphysical theology, and another that corresponded to sacred
According to Aquinas’s theory of a subalternated science, one science can obtain its first principles from the conclusions of another science. In that case the first science would be a subalternated science, since its principles would be evident not from induction, but from the scientific conclusions generated from another science. For Aquinas (and many other scholastics), music was such a subalternated science, using the conclusions of geometry and mathematics as its first principles. Since these conclusions started with evident premises, they were also evidently known; music derived the evident knowledge of premises from the scientific conclusions of geometry and mathematics. In the same way, Aquinas thinks, theology among pilgrims obtains its first principles from a higher science: the knowledge of God that God and the blessed have and mediate to the pilgrims. The evident character of the blessed’s knowledge of God is preserved as that knowledge is given to pilgrims and functions as the first principles of theology among pilgrims. Theology in Aquinas’s account is a science whose principles are known not by the light of the natural intellect, but by principles known by the light of a higher science.\textsuperscript{124} The key move here is that pilgrims have access to the scientific conclusions of the blessed. Aquinas thinks that this mediated evident knowledge is sufficient to establish theology as science.

Ockham objects to Aquinas’s theory of theology as a subalternated science. Ockham thinks that there is no preservation of evident knowledge in the move from the conclusions of one discipline to the principles of another science. Accordingly, Ockham severely
restricts the amount of science in theology. Ockham defines most theological knowledge as “belief” rather than “science.” That shift in vocabulary points to a larger shift in the construal of the type of knowledge Ockham understands theology to be. Ockham thinks that theological knowledge is (for the most part) inevident and therefore not science.\textsuperscript{125} Instead, a different kind of assent to an apprehended proposition is required for theological knowledge. Faith assents to inevident propositions that make up theological knowledge. Unlike evident knowledge that only involves the intellect, the activity of the will is a part of the assent of faith.\textsuperscript{126} Theological knowledge in this sense can be had only by believers, those who by faith assent to the claims of theology.

Ockham does, however, grant that there is some scientific knowledge in theology. This knowledge does not come from the scientific knowledge of God and the blessed passed down to pilgrims, as in Aquinas’s theory. Instead, Ockham holds that a theologian knows some theological truths gained from evident knowledge of terms. The evident character of this knowledge means that these truths are science.\textsuperscript{127} Ockham looks particularly to the middle term of a theological syllogism as the criteria for science. Where the middle term is known evidently, the syllogism can produce scientific knowledge. Moreover, in order for the syllogism to be valid and produce knowledge, the middle term must be a category standing above the subject—the subject must be an instance of a broader category that functions as a middle term. In this case the properties of the middle term can be predicated

\textsuperscript{125} Lee, \textit{Science}, 94.
\textsuperscript{126} Pelletier, \textit{Ockham}, 213–218.
\textsuperscript{127} Pelletier, \textit{Ockham}, 218–221.
of the subject which stands underneath the middle term. According to these criteria, theological science is knowledge about God derived from propositions using a middle term evidently known to pilgrims and placed above God. For instance, Ockham thinks that a pilgrim can produce a syllogism with “being” as a middle term, so that one can conclude by demonstration that God is good. (Since God is being, and being is good, therefore God is good.) Syllogisms of this type, Ockham holds, can demonstrate many attributes of God.

Ockham’s analysis of science in theology is important context for Luther’s Christological disputations. His definition of the kind of syllogism leading to scientific knowledge about God is key for making sense of Luther’s rejection of some syllogisms. Before showing that correlation, it is helpful to consider the certainty of theological knowledge among the nominalists. When Ockham determined that most theological knowledge is not science, he potentially weakened the certainty of theological knowledge. Yet Ockham is less interested in the kind of necessary, rigorous, and certain knowledge that followers of Aristotle’s theory of science were after, and more interested in knowledge that was free from doubt and error. While faith cannot attain the level of rigorous necessity demanded by late medieval interpretations of scientific certainty, most knowledge fell short of these criteria in Ockham’s account. The question for Ockham and other late medieval scholastics was not faith as certain knowledge, but whether faith was knowledge of God.

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130 Pelletier, Ockham, 236–238. Pelletier is skeptical about just how “many” things can be demonstrated about God.
131 See Adams, Ockham, 1:551–629 and Pelletier, Ockham, 261–263. Ockham insisted that most theology remains inevident knowledge. He was skeptical of the possibility of certain knowledge due to his conviction that God could deceive a person’s cognition of things. Without an infallible indicator that this deception was not occurring, the question of certainty remained open.
free from doubt and error. Luther is interested in showing the certainty of faith (that it is free from doubt and error) in his Christological disputations. Gabriel Biel provides an answer to the question of the certainty of theological knowledge, particularly in relation to the terms that Luther uses: “understanding” and “faith.”

Gabriel Biel defines “science” and “understanding” as evident kinds of knowledge. Biel correlates the term “understanding” (*intellectus*) to knowledge of the principles and the term “science” to the knowledge of the conclusion of a syllogism. When these kinds of knowledge become habitual (impressed upon the mind through repetitive acts of knowing), Biel can identify “understanding” (*intellectus*) as the habit of the principle and “science” as the habit of the conclusion.  

“Science,” properly speaking, is evident knowledge (*notitia*) of a necessary truth, of such a nature that it is caused (*nata causari*) through evident premises applied to the thing known through syllogistic discourse. More briefly, it corresponds to a scientifically-knowable (*scibilis*) proposition. A scientifically-knowable proposition is necessary, so that Biel distinguishes science from contingent truths such as knowing that a thing exists or that a thing is here or there. One may know

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132 Beyond these terms, Biel identifies wisdom (*sapientia*) as the habit that is one in respect to both the principles and the conclusion. Wisdom is equivalent to understanding (*intellectus*) and science. In this way he posits wisdom as the habit of the entire demonstration. Or, in another sense, wisdom is taken as the habit of a demonstration of the most noble objects. “[Dubium 4] Quartum dubium est, »qualis sit ille habitus, qui ponitur unus respectu principiorum et conclusionis«. Solutio: Est sapientia. Et sapientia aequivalenter est intellectus et scientia. Unde ponit sapientiam esse habitum totius demonstrationis, sicut intellectus est habitus principii et scientia habitus conclusionis. Verum sapientia accipitur aliquando generaliter pro habitu totius demonstrationis ex primis principiis. Et ita etiam inventur in artibus mechaniciis secundum quod dicius sapientem latomum, sapientem statuficem, ut habetur VI Ethicorum cap. 8. Aliter accipitur sapientia pro habitu demonstrationis quae est nobilissimorum obiectorum.” *Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 8, art. 3, dub. 4; p. 55, H.1–10.*

133 “Circa articulum secundum notat quid sit scientia proprie dicta. Est autem scientia »notitia evidens veri necessario, nata causari per praemissas applicatas ad ipsum per discursum syllogisticum«. Brevius posset definiri correspondenter ad propositionem scibilem. Pro quorum intellectu plura adducit, praemissa declaratione singularum clausuarum scientiae proprie dictae.” *Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 2, art. 2; p. 33, C.1–6.*
(cognoscere) such things through sensory experience, but this differs from science, which
refers to knowledge of necessary things.134 In Biel’s epistemology, “understanding” and
“science” are different types of evident knowledge, corresponding to the premises and
conclusion of a demonstration.

Biel uses these distinctions to sort out what theological truths may be known
evidently and scientifically. Like the other scholastics, Biel deems it impossible for a pilgrim
to have permanent evident knowledge of God; if a pilgrim did, she would no longer be a
pilgrim but blessed.135 Since science depends upon evident knowledge, Biel severely
restricts scientific knowledge of God for the pilgrim. The only scientific knowledge in
theology comes from propositions about God that are necessary, dubitable, and
mediated.136 This body of knowledge is small because Biel determines that pilgrims do not
have permanent evident knowledge of God. Lacking evident knowledge, their access to
scientific knowledge of God is effectively cut off. Most of what pilgrims know about God is a
different kind of knowledge: faith. Note that here in Biel, as in Luther, “understanding” is

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134 “Notitia intuitiva est »notitia incomplexa termini vel terminorum, rei vel rerum, virtute cuius potest
evendt cognoscir aliqua veritas contingens, maxime de praesenti«, ut quod res est vel non est, quod est hic
vell ibi; ut est visio exterior Socratis. Per hanc enim cognosco evidenter Socratem esse.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 1,
art. 2, not. 2; p. 15–16, F.13–16.
135 “Et sic addendum erit descriptioni viatoris ly ’permanenter’, ut sic dicatur: Viator est »qui non habet
notitiam intuitivam deitatis« permanenter »sibi possibilem de potentia Dei ordinata. Per primum excluditur
intellectus» beati Deum clare videntis; per secundum excluduntur damnati, quibus notitia intuitiva Dei non
est possibilis stante lege, secus de potentia absoluta.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 1, art. 1, not. 1; p. 9, A.27–31.
136 Biel discusses the question of scientific knowledge of God at length in the second question of the prologue
of his commentary on the Sentences. His conclusion suggests, without making explicit, that pilgrims have little
to no access to scientific knowledge of God. “[Conclusio] Ex istis potest colligi haec conclusio responsalis ad
quaestionem: Omnis propositio necessaria, in qua aliquid affirmatur vel negatur de Deo, dubitabilis, cuius
praedicatum alii ali termino prius convenit quam subjecto talis propositionis vel prius ab eo removetur,
haec et sola talis est demonstrabilis; et ita eius notitia evidens est scientia proprie dicta. Hoc est: Omnis
propositio de Deo necessaria, dubitabilis, mediata est demonstrabilis.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 2, art. 3, con.; p. 37,
H.15–21.
distinguished from “faith.” For Biel the distinction hinges on whether the knowledge is evident or not.

In Biel's thought faith or believing (credere) functions as an epistemological category identifying a certain kind of knowledge. For Biel, “faith” or “belief” means to know something as imposed by an authority. Biel thinks that faith and science are mutually exclusive, so that something that is believed is not known scientifically. Like Ockham, Biel holds that the kind of knowledge is preserved through a syllogism. Where a syllogism’s premises are believed, the conclusion of the syllogism is believed and not known scientifically.\textsuperscript{137} “Faith” as well as “science” are compatible with syllogisms, and both kinds of knowledge are preserved from the premises through the conclusion of a syllogism. If premises are evidently known (in Biel's vocabulary, “understood”) through intuition, the knowledge derived from syllogisms is science. In this instance the evident knowledge of the premises leads directly to knowledge of the conclusion without an act of the will. But, if the premises are believed, the conclusion of a syllogism will also be believed and the knowledge of the conclusion will be faith rather than science. This faith involves an act of the will to assent to the proposition so that one knows it.

Biel defines faith in such a way that it is a certain knowledge. He comments on the certainty of faith in connection with the knowledge of God’s existence. A pilgrim knows that “God is” by different knowledge than the blessed. For the blessed, this proposition is

evident knowledge, gained from their vision of God. The blessed know the term “God” per se, but the pilgrim knows “God” differently. A pilgrim does not know the term “God” according to a per se definition gained from evident knowledge, so the pilgrim’s concept of “God” will not be as full or clear as the blessed’s concept. Since the pilgrim’s knowledge of God is not evident knowledge, this knowledge is not a kind of science. Instead, the pilgrim’s knowledge that “God is” is faith rather than understanding. Yet Biel holds that the pilgrim’s knowledge is still certain knowledge of God’s existence. The certainty of theological knowledge in Biel’s account comes from his conception of faith. Biel categorizes most theological knowledge as faith and argues that faith is necessary for one to have theological knowledge. One without faith, Biel thinks, can work through theology and gain opinions about theological truths shown to be probable. However, one cannot assent to any believable thing in theology without faith.

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138 Here Biel is following Ockham: “Ex illo sequitur quod Occam per terminos intelligit conceptum objective existentem iri mente secundum unam opinionem, ut patet ex q. 4 dist. 3; vel secundum aliam opinionem per terminum potest intelligi res praecise significata per extrema. Unde patet quod non sunt idem termini in propositione ‘Deus est’, quam format beatus et quam format nos, propter quod illa quam format beatus, est per se nota, sed non illa quam format nos,quia termini in propositione quam nos format, non praecise significant Deum, quia Deum secundum rationem absolutam et propriam cognoscere pro statu illo non possimus.” Coll. I, qu. 1, art. 1, not. 3; p. 11, C.26–33.

139 “Si quae reris: Quem actum vel habitum acquirit studens theologiae? Respondetur quod theologus per studium theologiae »augmentat habitum fidei acquisitae«, si praefuit, aut acquirit, si non praefuit. Ibi namque credenda recitatur. Et hic habitus non est in infidel, quoniam qui habet hunc habitum, credit, et ita iam fidelis est. Praeter haec tam fidelis quam infidelis »acquirit multos scientiales habitus qui etiam in aliis scientiis acquirit possunt, et praeter illos acquirit multos habitus scientiales consequentiariarum» propriarum theologiae. Etiam acquirit opiniones circa veritates probabiliter ostendas, item multos habitus apprehensivos tam terminorum quam propositionum. Et mediatus illis potest habere »omnes actus possibles theologo praefer solum actum credendi«. Quibus mediantibus »potest praedicare, docere, roborare et cetera omnia talia « quae pertinent ad theologum. Nihil autem horum, ad quae requiritur fides, est scientia proprie dicta. Et cum nulli credibilium potest assentiri sine fide secundum omnes, sequitur quod de credibilibus non est scientia proprie dicta.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 7, art. un., not. 2, dub. 1; p. 49, C.1–14. Here Biel has in mind the kind of syllogisms that Luther has identified as problematic and leading to equivocation. Some theological truths can be known scientifically where they work on premises that are evidently known; here Biel seems to have in mind the kinds of propositions he had identified earlier as demonstrated in philosophy, such as the proposition “God is good.”
faith may understand the things of theology in the sense that she recognizes the claims that are being made, she will not assent to those claims but (at best) categorize them as probable opinion. Faith leads beyond opinion to assent through an act of the will, granting certain knowledge to the theologian with faith. This assent in theology—an assent imposed by Scripture—makes faith a kind of knowledge gained by an argument from authority. The authority of Scripture or of the church acts on the will so that one gives assent to theological truths, going beyond opinion to know these things by faith. These external authorities provide certainty to faith.

Two points emerge from Biel’s and Ockham’s construal of science and faith that are helpful for reading Luther’s disputations. The first is that for these late medieval thinkers, faith is no less certain knowledge than science. Biel asserts that faith is a most certain knowledge. Even when Biel grants that faith is not evident knowledge, he argues that this takes nothing away from the certainty of faith. He is clear that, while the pilgrim’s knowledge of God is not evident knowledge, the faith of the pilgrim is just as certain as the knowledge of the blessed due to its divine revelation, and is even more certain than scientific knowledge. Biel’s understanding of the certainty of faith is grounded in its

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143 “Fides ergo est certa, immo certissima, immo omni humana cognitione viae certior. Est enim revelatorum a Deo secundum illud loh. 1: »Deum nemo vidit umquam: unigenitus, qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit«, et 2Petr. 1: »Non voluntate humana aliquando allata est prophetia, sed Spiritu Sancto inspirati locuti sunt sancti Dei homines.« Revelata autem a Deo (qui est prima et infallibilis veritas, cui falsum subesse non potest) certissima sunt, quibus falli est impossibile. Non ergo vincitur certitudo fidei certitudine scientiae humanitas acquisitae, immo eam vincit, pro quanto veritas prima, quae Deus est, cui fides innititur, infallibilior est quamque inquisitione humana. — Si vero ’scientia’ accipitur pro certa visione in patria, adhuc non est certior fide. Nam qui se videndum praebet in patria, ipse veritates fidei revelavit in via, licet patriae visio sit evidentior. Et ita, extendendo nomen certitudinis ad evidentiam, exponenda e sunt auctoritates sanctorum,
source in divine revelation, not an existential leap that makes it certain for the believer.\textsuperscript{144} Because faith in itself is certain, the quest for science can be set aside in theology without importing uncertainty into theology.

Second, the scholastic construal of faith and science does not separate faith from syllogisms or logic. Instead, it distinguishes the type of knowledge of a syllogism’s conclusion based on the type of knowledge one has of the premises. Both Ockham and Biel are comfortable building syllogisms that begin with premises known by faith. Accordingly, the nominalists build theological arguments using dialectics and test them by logic while working out articles of faith.\textsuperscript{145} These points are instructive for considering Luther’s thought on faith and reason, and for sketching out the kind of epistemology signaled by Luther’s distinction between faith and understanding.

\textit{2.5.4 Luther on Kinds of Knowledge}

Luther, like the nominalists, works with an epistemological scheme of different kinds of knowledge in the Christological disputations. Luther correlates believing with the region of theology. He writes, “Philosophy and theology differ. Philosophy deals with things knowable by human reason. Theology deals with things to be believed, that is, things apprehended by faith.”\textsuperscript{146} Luther’s position on theological truths being believable and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{144} O \textit{Oberman, Harvest}, 73. \\
\textsuperscript{145} For a discussion on the relation between faith and reason in Biel, see \textit{Oberman, Harvest}, 68–89. \\
apprehended by faith aligns with the epistemology of Ockham and Biel, particularly his
description of faith in the disputations as a way of gaining knowledge. Faith functions as
the means by which assent is given to theological propositions.

Luther’s argument that faith is needed to accept theological propositions as true
also aligns with Ockham’s and Biel’s thought. Luther argues that no philosopher will grant
that God could become incarnate, just as Ockham and Biel identify the incarnation as a
truth unavailable to natural reason. Luther argues that philosophers do not believe
articles of faith because they do not understand them:

These things [the incarnation and the union of finite and infinite] can be thought by a human being, but in no way believed, as I can think many things that are beyond my capacity. Anyone can think about the word and about all the articles of faith, about eternal life and many other things. But a human being cannot conclude that they are true by himself, such as not [concluding that it is true] that the infinite one could become finite as a human being. For if they could understand, then they would believe.

As Ockham and Biel before him, Luther grants that anyone, especially philosophers, might conceive theological ideas such as the incarnation. In this passage Luther puts forth

rationem. Fides not est regulis seu verbis philosophiae adstricta aut subjecta, sed est inde libera. Et sicut Deus multas sphaeras in coele creavit, ita etiam in his facultatibus distinctae sunt.” WA 39/2:7C.34–38.

See, for instance, Biel: “Secundo sequitur quod veritatum theologiarum aliquae sunt naturaliter notae, aliquae sunt supernaturaliter cognitae et tantum fide credita, ut ‘Deus est trinus et unus’, ‘Deus est incarnatus’ etc.” Coll. I, Prologus, qu. 1, art. 1, not. 3 cor. 2; p. 13, D.30–32.

“understanding” as a philosophical criteria to judge that an argument is true. Biel aligns “understanding” with evident knowledge of the premises of a syllogism. Such a definition fits Luther’s argument perfectly: for a philosopher to accept a thing as true she must have evident knowledge of principles leading to evident knowledge of the conclusion. Theology differs, as in theology some things are held to be true that cannot be gained by evident knowledge of principles attained from natural sense and reason.

For Luther, to “believe” in this context means to accept something as true on the basis of some authority. This is especially apparent in an odd statement that Luther makes about philosophers “believing” something. In the case of philosophers, they “believe” those things that they understand, so that understanding is the criteria for judging a thing to be true in philosophy.149 While this use of “believe” is not typical of Luther’s use of “faith” in the disputations, the example suggests that Luther in this context uses “faith” like the nominalists to signal a kind of knowledge (in this instance, philosophical knowledge based on understanding) and not in his more typical sense of saving faith. More frequently in the disputations, Luther restricts “believe” to the discipline of theology. In theology, certain truths are held as true apart from an evident understanding of truths derived from evident principles. Theologians believe things to be true that God has revealed, particularly in the word, so that from an epistemological perspective theological belief is accepting things as

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true based on an authority. Luther associates the “I believe” of the Creed with what Paul says about Christ. Because Scripture speaks of the two natures of Christ being inseparably united, the knowledge of these natures is faith rather than understanding. Like Ockham and Biel, faith for Luther is no less certain than evident knowledge; as Biel grounded the certainty of faith on divine revelation, Luther also points to revelation as the basis for the certainty of faith.

Furthermore, Luther’s thought on visible and invisible aligns with scholastic categories of evident and inevident assent. Luther describes the difference between philosophy and theology as a distinction between visible and invisible. Luther places things that are seen in the region of philosophy and things that are hoped for (but unseen) in the region of theology. Philosophy has the things that are visible, while theology treats of things that are invisible, the objects of hope rather than sight. Luther’s description fits well with the scholastic conception of pilgrims who cannot see God. In philosophy one investigates things that are seen and therefore can be known by evident knowledge gained from human sense and reason, producing understanding of the principles. Theology treats those things that are invisible, that is, inaccessible by means of evident knowledge, and so

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150 Bruce Marshall argues convincingly that Luther’s concept of faith involves holding to certain beliefs beyond a mere inward trust. Faith for Luther includes knowledge of certain things. Marshall, “Faith and Reason,” 31.


results in believing. Luther’s distinction between visible and invisible corresponds to Ockham’s and Biel’s distinctions between evident and inevident knowledge and the restriction of scientific knowledge available to pilgrims.

Finally, Luther’s combination of faith with logic and syllogisms is evidence that Luther works with nominalist categories of epistemology. Luther’s appeal to faith functions within a disputation, an exercise in logical analysis involving syllogisms. Like Ockham and Biel, Luther includes faith in theological work alongside logic and syllogisms. Luther makes arguments arising from premises known by faith—and in this way reason continues to have a role in theology. Faith and reason work together within a nominalist epistemology in these ways as Luther analyzes Christological arguments.

2.5.5 Luther on the Incomprehensible and Ineffable

A knowledge of Luther’s categories of different kinds of knowledge is critical for understanding his claim that theology believes things that are “incomprehensible.” Luther categorizes Trinitarian doctrines as incomprehensible, asserting that “We believe incomprehensible things to be; if they could be comprehended, there would be no need to believe.” 154 The truth that the Father, Son and Spirit are three persons and one essence can be believed, but will never be understood by human reason. 155 Luther observes that the Creed says “I believe,’ not ‘I understand’” these Trinitarian doctrines. 156 Interpreting

156 “Es heißt credo, non intelligo in Deo.” WA 39/2:21A.10–11.
Luther as following Ockham and Biel in his epistemology allows one to account for these arguments. When Luther makes understanding and faith mutually exclusive in these claims, he is following nominalist precedents about the criteria needed to give assent to a proposition. Furthermore, when Luther identifies these truths as “incomprehensible” he means that they cannot be derived from evident knowledge by reason. For Luther, as for Biel, “comprehending” or “understanding” means having evident knowledge of premises. Luther locates incomprehensible things within the region of theology, where they are known not by evident knowledge of principles but by faith. Luther does not mean to say that reason and comprehension play no role in theology, but only that some theological truths cannot be known from a consideration of the natural world using human reason. In this sense theological truths are incomprehensible, echoing the thought of Ockham and Biel.

Perhaps even more striking is Luther’s insistence that some things in theology are ineffable. Luther aligns the “ineffable” with the “incomprehensible.” When discussing Christ as both creator and creature, Luther advises using only the formulae prescribed by the Holy Spirit to discuss Christ as a creature, “because the thing is ineffable and incomprehensible.” ¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Luther claims that the hypostatic union is ineffable.¹⁵⁸ Luther’s use of “ineffable” fits within scholastic categories of epistemology and language. Things that are incomprehensible cannot be demonstrated from evident knowledge.

Without evident knowledge of the thing from sensory perception, precise words signifying the thing are beyond the capacity of people to formulate. The Holy Spirit, the authority behind them, has given certain formulae of speech that in some way signify a truth that goes beyond philosophical comprehension.

2.5.6 Luther’s Elimination of Science from Theology

Luther departs from Ockham by eliminating scientific knowledge in theology. Ockham, as shown above, allows some scientific knowledge of God. Pilgrims may know things scientifically from syllogisms in which God is placed under a middle term that is evidently known. Luther’s criticism of syllogisms in theology is narrowly targeted at the specific kind of syllogism Ockham identifies as generating science in theology. Luther objects to syllogisms that hold the articles of faith captive under the judgment of human reason.\(^{159}\) Likewise, Luther’s position that theological subject matter is too high to be contained in the narrow confines of a syllogism rejects precisely those syllogisms which place God underneath a middle term known evidently by human reason.\(^ {160}\) For instance, Luther argues that it is right to say “Deus est homo.” However, he does not permit theologians to build syllogisms with a middle term about “homo” drawn from evident knowledge of the world. That is, Luther does not allow God to be placed under the middle

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term “human being” in a syllogism. That move would be problematic, because a syllogism placing God under “human being” could generate the conclusion that God is “a rational animal, sensitive, having a soul, a body—namely, a created substance.”¹⁶¹ In Ockham’s account this conclusion would be scientific knowledge, gained from evident knowledge of what a human being is and placing God under the term “human being” in a syllogism. Luther sees this as an improper mixture of philosophy and theology. When Luther insists that theological truths are not against, but beyond any dialectical truth, he rejects Ockham’s narrow methodology of constructing syllogisms to produce scientific knowledge of God as a valid method of asserting truths about the Trinity.¹⁶² Luther does not, however, restrict all syllogisms or logic from theology, but only those that would subject God to a middle term that is evidently known.

Even in this departure from Ockham, Luther continues the broader trend away from natural knowledge of God and scientific knowledge of theology advanced by Ockham and Biel. Ockham and Biel restricted the amount of scientific knowledge in theology beyond what earlier scholastics (such as Aquinas) had argued. Luther’s position on knowledge in philosophy and theology picks up and continues this scholastic trajectory moving from science to faith. Yet Luther takes it a step further: he denies the types of syllogism that Ockham categorizes as scientific knowledge of God and theology in order to reject problematic Christological syllogisms.

¹⁶² “Ut quae sit non quidem contra, sed extra, intra, supra, infra, citra, ultra omnem veritatem dialecticam.” WA 39/2:4.34–35.
2.6 Conclusion

Luther uses a clear distinction between the regions of philosophy and theology to address Christological problems. Luther thinks that Arian arguments sound plausible only when one does not have the correct methodology for Christology. One such argument is: “No created human being is God. Christ is a created human being. Therefore Christ is not God.” This sounds plausible when considered in light of what may be known from a study of the natural world. However, restricting Christological work to evident knowledge of the world gets theological method wrong. The correct methodology distinguishes between different kinds of investigations. A philosophical investigation involves natural reason applied to the natural world. It is improper to mix the conclusions of such an investigation with theological premises. In theological work, divine realities are considered in light of divine revelation. This work requires particular tools drawn from philosophy, including concepts and methods for analyzing the argument. By distinguishing philosophy and theology Luther does not exclude all philosophical concepts and tools from theology. Instead, he establishes boundaries so that certain philosophical tools can be used in Christology without running into problematic conclusions.

Many of the philosophical tools Luther uses in Christology have to do with the way syllogisms function in theology. Luther uses suppositional logic to disprove Arian syllogisms in theology while affirming them in philosophy. Since one using suppositional logic relies on the things related to a proposition, logical analysis includes a consideration

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of those things rather than just the signification of the terms. By introducing the person of Christ into theological analysis of arguments, Luther can use suppositional logic to reject the premise that “No created human being is God.” Since the analysis of this premise includes a descent to a string of individual propositions, the person of Christ will critically alter that string. A theologian knows that Christ is both a created human being and God. That single proposition makes the universal proposition false. Since the syllogism has a false major premise, it is rendered invalid. This logical move works because the theologian knows who and what Christ is by faith, connecting the logical aspect of the problem to the epistemological aspect.

Epistemology gives another perspective on Luther’s treatment of Arian arguments. Luther grants that it is true in philosophy that “No created human being is God. Christ is a created human being. Therefore Christ is not God.” The first premise, that “No created human being is God” holds true in philosophy by evident knowledge. A philosopher knows from sensory experience or speculation on “created human being” that no created human being is God. In Ockham’s scheme this is a middle term evidently known under which Christ can be placed, which would lead to a scientific conclusion that “Christ is not God.” Luther intervenes in theological method to avoid such a problematic conclusion judged as necessary and evident knowledge. Luther, rejecting this syllogism by suppositional logic and the distinction between philosophy and theology, excludes scientific knowledge from

theology in the process.\textsuperscript{165} While Luther’s strategy deals with the problem of Arius, it also restricts theological knowledge to faith rather than science. In late medieval scholastic epistemology, this restriction does not sacrifice certainty, nor does it displace logic from theology. In the same way, Luther restricts science from theology while maintaining logic and reason and holding to the certainty of theological truth. Moreover, Luther grants some natural knowledge in theology, as shown above in the discussion of ethical wisdom. However, Luther would not categorize this knowledge as science, since it would not be the result of a syllogistic demonstration. Instead, Luther sees this kind of ethical wisdom as evident knowledge gained apart from syllogistic discourse. Other theological topics are accessible only by faith, and therefore beyond the region of philosophy.

Luther’s conceptions of theology and philosophy allow theological work to progress beyond what may be known from philosophical inquiries. That move beyond the limitations of natural powers investigating the natural world does not require the dismissal of all philosophical tools from the theological task. Luther continues to rely on logical and epistemological tools while doing Christology. His limitations on philosophical conclusions in Christology follows the lead of nominalists like Ockham and Biel. For all of these theologians, philosophy has a limited role to play in theology. While certain philosophical tools are useful in Christology, other philosophical methods and conclusions ought to be rejected in theological work. Since faith and reason are not monolithic, mutually exclusive

\textsuperscript{165} Alternatively, one could argue that the minor premise is something known only by faith. Since knowledge of one premise is faith, it could be concluded that the conclusion of the syllogism would be faith rather than science. I am not certain how Ockham would treat the conclusion of the syllogism; at the very least, it succeeds in placing Christ under a middle term that is evidently known, and it is that move that Luther rejects, thereby closing the possibility of scientific knowledge in theology.
wholes, there is room for philosophical tools to be used in theology. Luther’s understanding of the regions of philosophy and theology gives room for philosophical tools to be used in theology without restricting theology to philosophical conclusions. In this chapter I have considered logical and epistemological tools that Luther employs in theology. In the next chapter I examine the type of semantic tools Luther uses to build a new theological language for Christology.
Chapter 3
Semantics: Christ Is a Creature

3.1 A New Theological Language

Luther identifies the need for a new theological language as part of the proper methodology for Christology. He writes:

20. Nevertheless it is certain that every vocable receives a new signification in Christ in the same thing signified. 21. For “creature” when used in the old language and in other things signifies a thing separated from divinity in infinite ways. 22. When used in the new language [“creature”] signifies a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways. 23. So it is necessary that vocables such as “human person,” “humanity,” “suffered,” etc. are all new vocables when said of Christ. 24. Not that it signifies a new or different thing, but it signifies in a new way and differently, unless you wish that it also say something new.¹

Words when predicated of Christ take on a new signification. For instance, “creature” takes on the signification “a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person.” If one is to get Christology correct, all terms predicated of Christ receive a new signification similar to the one Luther assigns to “creature.” Luther identifies a new language as a key methodological approach required in Christology.

At stake in the language used for Christology are arguments that Christ is a created human person and God. The confession of “one Lord Christ...true God and human person”

is at the center of the Christian faith. But what does “human person” mean in this sentence? A typical medieval definition of “human person” as “rational animal” would mean that Christ is a created, rational animal. Luther places the question of Christ as a creature at the center of the 1540 *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*. Luther uses the disputation to counter Schwenckfeld’s argument that Christ is not a creature. Luther’s problem is to assert that Christ is a creature while avoiding the Arian conclusion that if Christ is a creature, then Christ is not God. Beyond the simple claim that Christ is a creature, Luther identifies a number of “improper expressions” about Christ as a creature made by authorities and defends those statements. Though they are incorrect when taken according to a strict literal reading of the words, Luther defends the statements because they were said by theologians who “think rightly and catholically.” Luther turns to semantic theories to address these Christological problems: he attends to the signification and properties of words. Luther posits a new signification of terms like “creature” and “human person” when predicated of Christ to avoid theological difficulties. He develops a new language in order to assert that the divine person of Christ is a human person and a creature.

The predominant interpretation of Luther’s new language understands Luther’s theological language to be effective speech. I analyze key proponents of this interpretation.

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4 “49. Sed omnes illi recte et catholice sapienti, ideo condonanda est illis commodissima locutio. ... 56. Ita cum nihil aliud velint istae formae locutionis: Christus secundum quod homo, vel secundum humanitatem, vel humanitate, vel per humanitatem, vel in humanitate est creatura, quam quod habet creaturam vel assumpsit creaturam humanam, vel, quod simplicissimum est, humanitas Christi est creatura; contemnendi sunt pravilogicales, qui diversis formis grammaticae loquenti diversas affingunt in eadem re sententias.” WA 39/2:96.1–2, 16–22.
of the new language of Christology in the next section. Here I point to one example, Oswald Bayer, to frame my approach to Luther’s new theological language. Bayer interprets Luther’s Christology as a linguistic achievement. He locates the person of Christ within the category of promise, a kind of speech in which words do what they say. In Christology the promise holds together the two natures of Christ as performative words effect the hypostatic union.5 Luther, Bayer argues, uses a robust concept of “promise” to account for the union of Christ’s two natures. The difficulty with this argument is that Luther does not appeal to a concept of promise in his discussion of a new theological language in the 1540 Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ.

For instance, the new signification of “creature” Luther offers in the disputation does not depend on a promise. In the passage cited above, Luther gives a definition of “creature” in the new language: “21. For “creature” when used in the old language and in other things signifies a thing separated from divinity in infinite ways. 22. When used in the new language [“creature”] signifies a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways.”6 Luther’s definition of “creature” in the new language parallels its definition in the old language. Both signify a thing that is in some way related to divinity. No mention of promise is made, nor anything else to indicate that the new language is a turn to performative speech. In fact, since the unity of the created thing to divinity happens

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5 Oswald Bayer, “Das Wort,” 24–32.
in “ineffable ways,” it seems unlikely that Luther thinks the unity is achieved by words. If the union of God and creature cannot be spoken, how can this union be effected by words?

In this chapter I ask what kind of language Luther uses to develop an account of the person of Christ. Setting aside the idea that Luther's new signification in the Christological disputations is a turn to performative speech, I examine the actual moves Luther makes as he defines and uses the new words of a new theological language. I ask in this chapter if Luther uses tools of nominalist semantics in order to fashion a new theological language. In this chapter I analyze Luther's *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* in light of Ockham’s semantic theories. I examine components of Ockham’s theory of language from his *Summa Logicae* that are relevant to Luther’s Christological disputations. Ockham has a highly sophisticated theory of language that he applies to tasks similar to those Luther sets himself in the Christological disputations. Ockham theorizes multiple levels of language (written, spoken, and mental) and uses those levels to interpret authoritative statements. Ockham theorizes further about how words take on different significations at the level of written and spoken language, theories that are relevant to Luther’s idea of new signification in a theological language. Furthermore, Ockham uses his understanding of concrete and abstract word pairs, nominal definitions, and connotative terms to define terms accurately. These concepts, as I will show, appear in Luther’s disputation. By

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7 Other scholars have made the case that Luther’s language in the disputations is nominalist in character. The leading work here is White, *Luther*. Joar Haga, while arguing that Luther rejects nominalist metaphysics, agrees with White that Luther’s linguistic theory is essentially nominalist. Luther, according to Haga, abandons the scholastic idea of the person of Christ as a *suppositum* in favor of casting the person of Christ as the event of the communication of attributes. Yet the language Luther uses to describe this event is very similar to late medieval nominalists’ view of language. Haga, *Metaphysics*, 25–33, 82–89. I build on their work in this chapter, but expand the research to particular aspects of Ockham’s view of language and how these aspects shape the moves that Luther makes to craft a new language.
analyzing the disputation in light of Ockham’s theory, I aim to show how Luther uses semantics to address Christological problems. As I do so, I compare Luther’s Christological arguments involving a new language to the way that Ockham and Biel use semantics to make Christological arguments. My hypothesis is that Luther’s new Christological language is built using the tools of nominalist semantics.

3.2 Scholarship on Luther’s New Language

Before analyzing the semantic aspects of Luther’s method for Christology, it is necessary to critique the prevailing view of Luther’s new theological language. The predominant view interprets Luther’s new language in Christology as one that unites Christ’s natures by the power of words. The scholars surveyed here interpret Luther’s *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:19)*. From the disputation they conclude that Luther’s Christology is based on an understanding of performative speech or effective language—words that accomplish what they say.

Reinhard Schwarz’s influential essay on Luther’s Christology turned scholarly attention to the function of language in Luther’s Christology. Schwarz argues that Luther uses a new, effective language to achieve a unity of Christ’s natures that was closer than any unity available within nominalist philosophical theology. The favorite theory of the personal union for Ockham, Biel, and other late medieval nominalists was a model of suppositional carrying. According to this theory, the divine nature—equivalent to the person of Christ—assumes a human nature and gives existence to the human nature. The model of the relation of the divine to the human nature is the relation of a substance and an
accident. As a subject gives existence to an accident, so the divine person of Christ gives existence to the human nature of Christ. In nominalist thought an entity that exists independently (without relying on any other thing for existence) is called a “supposit.” In Christology, the nominalists consider the second person of the Trinity to be a supposit. This person exists independently. Since the supposit carries the human nature as a substance carries an accident, the theory is one of suppositional carrying: the divine person gives existence to a human nature. In Schwarz’s interpretation, this model of the union of the natures is inadequate because it does not give what he calls “personal existence” to the human nature. Instead, the human nature is limited to communicating concrete denominations—words—to the person of Christ. That is, one may say that “Christ is a human person” because the divine person carries a human nature, and this nature allows the concrete denomination “human person” to be predicated of Christ. However, Schwarz contends that this puts Christ into a different category than Peter (or any other person). While Peter’s human nature has personal existence, the human nature of Christ does not. Christ remains in the category “God” for the nominalists and cannot be included in the category “human.” In order for the union to be real, Schwarz argues, the human nature of Christ must exist as any other human nature does.

Luther, in Schwarz’s account, rejects the nominalists’ model of suppositional carrying because the unity of Christ’s natures theorized in the model was too loose. Luther makes Christology a linguistic task to achieve a closer unity of the two natures of Christ.

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8 Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 293–301.
9 Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 322–324.
Luther’s goal is to give the human nature personal existence, so that the two natures of Christ have equal personal status.\textsuperscript{10} He gives equal personal status to each of Christ’s natures by turning to the semantic theory of synthetic propositions. God and man are spoken together in the single person of Christ in a sentence like “a human person is God.” Luther does not understand this as a declarative sentence that signifies an existing reality. Instead, Luther understands this and other Christological sentences as synthetic sentences in which the subject and predicate speak the same thing and in doing so unite the two terms of the sentence. By turning to language, Luther can hold that Christ is a human person in more than just the secondary sense that Biel and Ockham assign to Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

Because the language of the scholastics was limited to signifying words and worked within the bounds of suppositional logic, Schwarz thinks that they could not completely unite the two natures of Christ.\textsuperscript{12} Luther’s semantic innovation was a turn to effective language in the specific form of a synthetic proposition. Schwarz’s argument that Luther makes Christology a linguistic task set a research trajectory for later scholars of Luther’s Christology.

One example of this trajectory is Stefan Streiff’s analysis of language in the *Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:19)*. Like Schwarz, Streiff interprets Luther’s new language as effective language. Rather than using Schwarz’s concept of synthetic propositions, Streiff approaches Luther’s new language through the category of medial language. In the theory of medial language words do more than say what the author means; they achieve something beyond mere signification of existent

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 301–308.  
\textsuperscript{11} Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 339–342.  
\textsuperscript{12} Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 315, 330–334.}
realities. Streiff thinks that Luther's linguistic theory works along the lines of medial language. Luther shifts semantic theory from a fixed language to a dynamic language that addresses hearers in order to work faith in their hearts. Words do not just signify things; their real intent and work is the creation of faith. The semantic theory standing behind Luther's Christology is an understanding that God uses theological words to call people to believe in Christ.

Streiff identifies a unique twist on medial language in Christology. While medial language operates throughout Luther's theology, the words of Christology add an extra dimension to medial language. In Christology the word is the thing itself; Christ, the *res* of Scripture is the very thing that is spoken so that the hearer may believe in Christ. The new theological language therefore addresses itself (Christ) to the hearer to work confident faith in the hearer. In this interpretation the distinction between Christ’s person and words collapses. Following Schwarz's interpretation, Streiff locates Christ’s person within words that are effective. Luther’s new language goes beyond dead, fixed signification to a living address to people, and Christ's person is that living word addressed to hearers.

Using a closely related category, Oswald Bayer locates the hypostatic union within a theory of promise. Bayer identifies a new understanding of language as the root of the Reformation discovery. Luther's Reformation breakthrough is an understanding of promise as a performative statement that establishes a reality. Luther discovered a promise in

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14 On this point Streiff brings forward another point of Schwarz's thought on the use of language. Schwarz argued that the gospel's character of revealing God to people reflects and includes the use of language to unite the two natures of Christ. Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 344–345.
absolution and the sacraments and that discovery led him to a view of language as performative speech. Among other topics, the new understanding of language led Luther to a new conceptualization of the person and work of Christ.\textsuperscript{16} The promise holds together the two natures of Christ as the performative words of a promise effect the hypostatic union.\textsuperscript{17} By conceptualizing language as performative speech, Luther’s Christology breaks with scholastic approaches as he relies on words to hold together the natures of Christ.

Schwarz, Streiff, and Bayer all interpret Luther as abandoning philosophical theology in the turn to a new language. Once Christ’s two natures are united by words, questions about person, nature, and essence recede to the background. Schwarz argues that Luther turns the personal union of Christ’s natures from a speculative problem to a linguistic assignment.\textsuperscript{18} Bayer thinks that he is not concerned with plausibility or generality, but with the biblical fact of the incarnation.\textsuperscript{19} The communication of attributes, traditionally understood as what attributes may be spoken of Christ’s person and nature, takes on a radically different function. Bayer argues that Luther sees the communication under the category of relation rather than substance. The medium of this relation is the promise.\textsuperscript{20} All Christology then becomes an exercise in preaching. Whether that preaching is analyzed as a form of medial language or as a promise, the metaphysical speculation about Christ’s person and natures is dissolved into effective words that call hearers to faith in Christ. The logical problems of the coherence of the attributes of Christ’s natures are

\textsuperscript{16} Bayer, \textit{Martin Luther’s Theology}, 44–58.
\textsuperscript{17} Bayer, “Das Wort,” 24–32.
\textsuperscript{18} Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch,” 309.
\textsuperscript{19} Bayer, “Das Wort,” 19–21.
\textsuperscript{20} Bayer, “Das Wort,” 31–32.
abandoned as Luther appeals to the power of words to accomplish what seems impossible in the substance metaphysics of the nominalists and other scholastics.

A fatal problem with this line of interpretation goes all the way back to Schwarz. The argument depends on Luther’s alleged rejection of the nominalist model of suppositional carrying. Yet, as noted in chapter one, David Luy has recently demonstrated that Schwarz’s interpretation of Luther’s criticism of the model of suppositional carrying is incorrect. Though Luther does criticize the model of suppositional carrying, the critique occurs in a list of other statements from the Fathers. Luther argues that, while these statements are not technically correct, they ought to be permitted because the Fathers thought correctly.21 And, Luy points out that Luther in the disputation describes the hypostatic union of Christ in the terms of suppositional carrying.22 If Luther does not reject the model of suppositional carrying, then he does not necessarily need language to unite the two natures of Christ. Words may function differently for Luther in the Christological disputations.

There is much to be said for scholars who note Luther’s thought on effective language. They correctly identify a turn to performative speech as one of Luther’s key theological moves, so that there is unquestionable merit in (for instance) Bayer’s approach to Luther’s use of promise in his theology. Luther clearly relies on the word of God to create faith, seeing effective speech in things like the word of absolution. One can point rightly to

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22 Luy, “Luther and Late Medieval Christology.”
Luther’s understanding of a divine presence in and alongside the word of God that makes words performative.\textsuperscript{23} However, while Luther relies on performative language for theological goals like creating faith, this is not his only understanding of language. He limits effective language to those instances where God has bound the word to do what it says. In other circumstances, Luther does not see language as effective or performative.\textsuperscript{24} That distinction suggests that Luther’s understanding of theological language is broader than a turn to performative speech. Some words in theology are effective, while others are only significative. The question for the \textit{Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ} is what theory of language Luther uses while addressing the person of Christ.

Luther’s theory of different kinds of language in different circumstances provides perspective for the questions I ask in this chapter. In the \textit{Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ} Luther does not explicitly argue that God has made Christological words effective. In the example of creature cited above, Luther offers a new definition of “creature” when used in the new language. The term “signifies a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways.”\textsuperscript{25} Luther does not point to a divine command or promise that makes “creature” an effective word. Instead, he offers a


\textsuperscript{24} Luther does this particularly in his debate with Zwingli over the words of institution in the Eucharist. See Aaron Moldenhauer, “Analyzing the \textit{Verba Christi}: Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Gabriel Biel on the Power of Words,” in \textit{The Medieval Luther}, ed. Christine Helmer, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation/Reformation Studies in the Late Middle Ages, Humanism, and the Reformation (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming 2019). In a similar way, Christine Helmer traces different kinds of language in different genres of Luther throughout her study of the Trinity in Martin Luther. Helmer, \textit{Trinity}.

definition that changes what the term signifies. In this chapter I analyze the new
signification of Luther’s language in light of nominalist theories of signification. I look for
evidence that nominalist semantic theories can lead to a deeper understanding of the
moves Luther makes in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*. If this proves
to be correct, than Luther’s new language in this disputation is not the turn to effective
language he makes at other points in his theology.

3.3 Analyzing Christological Claims: Written, Spoken, and Mental Language

3.3.1 Luther on Improper Words of the Fathers

Luther in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* locates heresy in the
sense rather than the words. He introduces a general rule: “It is wicked to accuse
[someone] of error from words spoken improperly when you know that the sense is
faithful and sound.” It is possible, Luther claims, to find errors in the sayings of all the
fathers and teachers. For instance, the “most Christian poet” Sedulius writes that “the
blessed author of the ages put on a body in a servile manner.” The words speak the
heretical idea that the human nature is the clothing of the divine nature, which is an error
because clothing and body do not constitute a single person as God and man constitute a
single person. Nevertheless, despite the heretical words, Sedulius thinks most faithfully as
is evident in his other poems.26 Sedulius is just one of many theologians who speak

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incorrect words but have the correct sense. Luther argues that one should defend these incorrect words. His list of sayings includes the comparison of the hypostatic union to fire and iron, to body and soul, and the model of suppositional carrying. All of these comparisons, Luther observes, are heretical when the words are taken strictly.27

Nevertheless, Luther writes: “49. Since all those people think rightly and catholically, an improper expression ought to be granted to them. 50. Since they wanted to speak an ineffable thing, and every comparison limps while none (as they say) runs on four legs.”28

While these sayings are incorrect, Luther argues that the ones speaking them think correctly, so that their words are to be excused. Heresy is located in the sense and not in the words.29 How does Luther conceive of a sense that is distinct from words that are spoken or written? How does a theologian identify a right understanding that permits one to allow improper, even heretical words? Here Ockham’s thought on the distinction

\[\text{WA 39/2:95.19–37.}\]

27 “40. Eadem ratione haereticum esset vulgatum illud: Tota trinitas operata est incarnationem filii, sicut duae puellae tertiam induunt, ipsa simul sese induente. 41. Ita scholastici aliqui, dum divinitatis et humanitatis habitudinem sentiunt similem esse unioni formae ad materiam, non possent defendi. 42. Alii contra esse habitudinem similem materiae ad formam, multo ineptius, si indicentur rigide, loquuntur. 43. Neque illa consisteret, ubi divinitatem igni et humanitatem ferro similant, etiamsi sit pulcherrima similitudo. 44. Neque illam ferre liceret, quam Athanasius ponit: Sicut anima rationalis et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus. 45. Omnes enim negant, Christum esse compositum, etsi constitutum affirmant. 46. Nulli vero insulsius loquuntur, quam Moderni, quos vocant, qui omnium volunt subtilissime et propriissime loqui videri. 47. Hi dicunt, humanam naturam sustentari seu supposito divino. 48. Hoc et portentose dicitur et cogit pene Deum velut portare vel gestare humanitatem.”

28 “49. Sed omnes illi recte et catholice sapiant, ideo condonanda est illis incommoda locutio. 50. Quia rem ineffabilem volebant effari, deinde omnis similitudo claudicat nec unquam (ut dicunt) currit quatuor pedibus.”

29 “57. Igitur in sensu, non in verbis est haeresis, ut dixit recte S. Hieronymus a suis calumniatoribus exagitatus.”

“57. In sensu, non in verbis est haeresis, ut dixit recte S. Hieronymus a suis calumniatoribus exagitatus.” WA 39/2:96.23–24. Luther’s appeal to sense over words to defend these statements must be taken into account when assessing Luther’s critique of scholastic Christology. While he thinks that the model of a suppositional union does not precisely express the reality of Christ’s two natures, he excuses the statement because it is spoken by those who think correctly. Moreover, since the union of Christ’s natures is ineffable, no analogy or comparison will be exactly the same as the personal union of Christ. These points qualify Luther’s criticism of the suppositional model of the hypostatic union, so that his critique cannot be taken simply as a rejection of scholastic Christology.
between written, spoken, and mental language provides an important perspective for understanding Luther’s analysis of spoken words and correct thought. The perspective is especially important because Ockham uses these levels to interpret improper speech, the same task Luther sets for himself.

3.3.2 Ockham’s Theory of Levels of Language and Improper Speech

Ockham divides terms into three levels: mental, spoken, and written. This distinction is part of longer debates and theories of mental language. Ockham defines a term as a part of a proposition, so that a term is anything that is or could be part of a proposition. This broad definition of “term” admits for terms of different natures, which Ockham explores in the first book of the *Summa Logicae*. Every term in this account is threefold: written, spoken, and conceived. Ockham defines a written term as “part of a proposition that is written on some corporeal thing which is seen or can be seen by the bodily eye.” A spoken term is “part of a proposition spoken by the mouth and suited to be

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30 See Martin Lenz, “Mental Language,” in The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 363–382. Lenz explores one problem of the theory of mental language: where does the structure of this language come from? While debates like this are important, my interest here is how Luther can conceive of mental language in a way that allows him to read authorities charitably, a question for which the source of mental language’s structure (and similar questions) is not critical.

31 This qualification is added to show that terms exist independently of their use in propositions. “Omnes logicae tractatores intendent astruere quod argumenta ex propositionibus et propositiones ex terminis componuntur. Unde terminus aliiud non est quam pars propinqua propositionis. Definiens enim terminum Aristotelis, I Priorum, dicit: ‘Terminum voco in quem resolvitur propositio, ut praedicatum et de quo praedicatur, vel apposito vel diviso esse vel non esse’. Sed quamvis omnis terminus pars sit propositionis, vel esse possit, non omnes termini tamen eiusdem sunt naturae; et ideo ad perfectam notitiam terminorum habendam oportet aliquas divisiones terminorum prae cognoscere.” *SL* I.1; p. 7.3–12.

32 “Est autem sciemendum quod sicut secundum Boethium, in I Perihermenias, triplex est oratio, scilicet scripta, prolata et concepta, tantum habens esse in intellectu, sic triplex est terminus, scilicet scriptus, prolatus et conceptus.” *SL* I.1; p. 7.13–16. See also Adams, Ockham, 1:71–73.

33 “Terminus scriptus est pars propositionis descriptae in aliquo corpore, quae oculo corporali videtur vel videri potest.” *SL* I.1; p. 7.16–17.
heard by the bodily ear.”34 Ockham defines a mental (conceived) term as “an intention or affection of the soul naturally signifying or co-signifying something, suited to be a part of a mental proposition and suited to supposit for the same thing.”35 Within this schema, Ockham subordinates spoken words to concepts or intentions of the soul. Mental language is primary.36 Although written and spoken words are subordinated to mental words, terms at each level—written, spoken, and mental—signify things directly.37 Written or spoken words do not signify a mental concept, but instead directly signify the same thing that the mental term signifies.

34 “Terminus prolatus est pars propositionis ab ore prolatae et natae audiri aure corporali.” SL I.1; p. 7.17–19.
35 Ockham uses this definition to define the “mental words” that Augustine identifies in De Trinitate as terms that belong to no language, but have signs subordinated to them. Ockham writes: “Terminus conceptus est intentio seu passio animae aliquid naturaliter signifcans vel consignificans, nata esse pars propositionis mentalis, et pro eodem nata supponere. Unde isti termini concepti et propositiones ex eis compositae sunt illa verba mentalia quae beatus Augustinus, XV De Trinitate, dicit nullius esse linguae, quia tantium in mente manent et exterius proferri non possunt, quamvis voces tamquam signa subordinata eis pronuntientur exterius.” SL I.1; p. 7.19–25. For Augustine on “mental words,” see De Trinitate XV:10–12; the Latin text may be found in PL 42:1069–1075.

36 “Dico autem voces esse signa subordinata conceptibus seu intentionibus animae, non quia proprie accipiendo hoc vocabulum 'signa' ipsae voces semper significent ipsos conceptus animae primo et proprie, sed quia voces imponuntur ad significandum illa eadem quae per conceptus mentis significantur, ita quod conceptus primo naturaliter significat aliquid et secundario vox significat illud idem, in quod voces instituta ad significandum aliquid significatum per conceptum mentis, si conceptus ille mutaret significatum suum eo ipso ipsa vox, sine nova institutione, suum significatum permutaret. Et pro tanto dicit Philosophus quando dicit voces significare conceptus. Et universaliter omnes auctores, dicendo quod omnes voces significant passiones et sunt notae earum, non aliud intendunt nisi quod voces sunt signa secundario significantia illa quae per passiones animae primario importantur, quamvis alique voces primario important passiones animae seu conceptus, quae tamen secundario important alias animae intentiones, sicut i n f e r i u s ostendetur. Et sicut dictum est de vocibus respectu passionem seu intentionem seu conceptum, eodem modo proportionaliter, quantum ad hoc, tenendum est de his quae sunt in scripto respectu vocum.” SL I.1; p. 7.26–8.45. Adams, Ockham, 1:73.

37 The alternative would be that written and spoken terms signify the mental concept directly and a thing only indirectly through the mental concept. Ockham’s hierarchy of the levels of language does not imply this kind of indirect signification for spoken and written terms. For an extensive study of Ockham’s theory of mental language, see Sonja Schierbaum, Ockham’s Assumption of Mental Speech: Thinking in a World of Particulars, Investigating Medieval Philosophy 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).
However, terms at the different levels of language receive their signification in different ways. Mental terms have natural signification, while spoken and written terms have conventional signification.\(^3\) I return to natural and conventional signification below; I raise the distinction here because it gives Ockham a certain amount of flexibility in interpreting spoken or written propositions without being bound to a natural and unchangeable signification of their terms. That flexibility is key to Ockham's treatment of improper authoritative sayings. An analysis of how Ockham accounts for authoritative statements that are incorrect by a strict literal interpretation gives a template to use in analyzing Luther as he defends authors who think correctly but write or speak incorrectly. Luther’s project parallels Ockham’s goal: both want to accept authoritative statements, but when the written or spoken words of those statement are incorrect, they need a method to account for what is said. By analyzing Ockham’s prescribed method for giving this account, I aim to provide a reference for Luther’s disputation, asking if Luther follows Ockham’s prescribed method.

Ockham’s strategy shifts the analysis of a statement from written and spoken language to mental language. Ockham confronts the problem of authorities who say things conflicting with his position by analyzing those statements within his three levels of language. One example is Boethius’s position that spoken words signify mental concepts. This position is at odds with Ockham’s idea that spoken words signify things directly. Yet Ockham argues that Boethius agrees with him. He makes the argument by first appealing to Boethius’s intention. This move shifts the analysis from written language to mental

\(^3\) See below for a further analysis of these kinds of signification.
language. Ockham is then able to argue that Boethius's intended meaning (that is, what Boethius thought and intended to say) is that spoken words signify the same thing as mental concepts and not the concepts directly. By that analysis Ockham reconciles more than just Boethius's ideas about signification. He groups together all authors who say that words signify concepts. Their intended meaning is that spoken words signify the things that mental concepts convey. That is, Ockham claims that they agree with him on the signification of terms. By an appeal to mental language Ockham is able to reconcile conflicting statements and claim that other authorities agree with his position.

Besides conflicting statements, Ockham also appeals to the levels of language to account for statements that are inaccurate. He appeals to mental language to analyze the claim that "human being is the worthiest creature of all creatures." Ockham agrees with the claim, but thinks it is imprecise because of the difficulties presented by the term "human being." The term cannot supposit (take the place of a thing in a proposition) for each individual human being, Ockham argues, since one human being may be worthier than another. If one human being is worthier than another, then the proposition would be false. Likewise, Ockham rejects the idea that the term supposits for an intention of the soul or mental concept because an intention of the soul is not the worthiest of all creatures.

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39 "Sic etiam intendit B o e t h i u s quando dicit voces significare conceptus. Et universaliter omnes auctores, dicendo quod omnes voces significant passiones vel sunt notae earum, non aliud intendent nisi quod voces sunt signa secundario significantia illa quae per passiones animae primario importuntur, quamvis aliquae voces primario importent passiones animae seu conceptus, quae tamen secundario important alias animae intentiones, sicut i n f e r i u s ostendetur." SL I.1; p. 8.36–42.

40 "Haec est vera 'homo est dignissima creatura creaturarum.'" SL I.66; p. 199.3–4.

“human being” is a referent for a mental concept, then the proposition amounts to the claim that a concept in one’s mind is the worthiest of all creatures, which is patently false.\footnote{Ockham’s difficulties with the passage show that his ontology, which does not include universal natures existing outside of the mind, presents a particular problem: since Ockham does not allow for the existence of a real universal human nature existing outside of the mind, the referent of the claim that “person is the worthiest creature of all creatures” is challenging.}

Ockham agrees with the intention of the saying, but must account for words that are false when taken precisely. He needs to show that the author thought correctly while lacking precision in the spoken or written words.

Ockham addresses this challenge by appealing to mental language. According to the intention of the speakers, Ockham agrees that the proposition is true. Ockham thinks that those who make the claim have the right idea in their mind. He argues that since he has ruled out the possibility that the term “human being” supposits for a mental concept, it must supposit for a human being. Yet, as Ockham has shown, if the referent is a human being, the proposition is literally false. Ockham argues:

Therefore it must be said that “human being” supposits personally, and the proposition is false according to the power of speech (\textit{de virtute sermonis}), because each singular is false. Nevertheless according to the intention of those positing it the proposition is true, because they do not intend that human being is nobler than every creature universally, but that human being is nobler than any creature which is not a human being. And this is true among corporeal creatures, but it is not true concerning intellectual substances.\footnote{“Ideo dicendum est quod ‘homo’ supponit personaliter, et est de virtute sermonis falsa, quia quaelibet singularis est falsa. Tamen secundum intentionem ponentium eam vera est, quia non intendunt quod homo sit nobilior omni creatura universaliter, sed quod sit nobilior omni creatura quae non est homo. Et hoc est verum inter creaturas corporales, non autem est verum de substantiis intellectualibus.” SL l.66; p. 201.42–47.}

Leaving aside the question of what is the worthiest creature, I am interested in the particular strategy Ockham employs with a statement that is improperly spoken. His strict
analysis of the written proposition demonstrates that it is false according to the spoken or written words. But he agrees with the sense. Or, as Ockham construes it, those who say this have a correct and true intention. By using the language of “sense” and “intention” Ockham moves the discussion to the level of mental language, distinct from the level of spoken or written language signaled by the phrase “the power of speech.” And he judges that, despite the incoherence at the level of written or spoken language, the ones who said that “human being is the worthiest of all creatures” thought correctly.

The next step in Ockham’s solution is to construct a written proposition that accurately expresses the mental intention of the author. Holding to the same intention as the original author, Ockham intervenes at the level of spoken or written language. He puts forth a more accurate expression in spoken or written words to be: “human being...is nobler than any creature which is not a human being.” By rephrasing the claim, Ockham expresses in written language what he understands as the intention of those who made the claim. Ockham’s rephrased argument adds precision and accuracy to the improper wording of the original proposition. Ockham could, in an oral context, produce a spoken proposition as well. The distinction here is between mental intention or terms on the one hand and spoken and written terms on the other.

In short, Ockham’s strategy for handling improper statements is to identify the correct intention of the statement. What the author thought governs the words that are spoken or written. Once the correct thought is identified, the next step is to develop a more

44 “Tamen secundum intentionem ponentium eam vera est, quia non intendunt quod homo sit nobilior omni creatura universaliter, sed quod sit nobilior omni creatura quae non est homo.” SL I.66; p. 201.43–46.
accurate spoken or written statement. The natural signification of mental terms means that
the signification of the intention does not change. Conversely, the conventional signification
of spoken and written terms, imposed by the will of the author, allows the reader to adjust
terms by understanding that the author wished to give the term an abnormal signification.
In problematic statements the conventional signification of the terms, determined by the
intention of the author, does not align with the typical signification of the words used.

Ockham holds that authoritative propositions frequently have improper written
expressions. He writes: “And it is often the case that authoritative and magisterial
propositions are false according to the force of the words (de virtute sermonis) of speech,
but true in the sense (in sensu) in which they were made. That is, they intended true
propositions through them.”45 Ockham gives a list of Aristotle’s claims that are false by the
force of the words as examples of these authoritative but incorrect propositions. Despite
the linguistic difficulties, Ockham argues that the Philosopher’s intentions are true even
when the words he writes are false.46 Ockham here turns his strategy of accounting for the
claim “human being is the worthiest creature of all creatures” into a general rule, even
when reading authoritative and magisterial texts. The strategy is to appeal to the true
mental proposition intended by the author and reconstruct a written or spoken proposition
to express that mental proposition accurately. The terms pointing the reader to mental

45 “Et ita est frequenter quod propositiones authenticae et magistrales sunt falsae de virtute sermonis, et
verae in sensu in quo fiunt, hoc est, illi intendebant per eas veras propositiones. Et ita est de ista.” SL I.66; p.
201.47–50.
46 “Ad secundum dicendum quod omnes tales ‘color est primum objectum visus’, ‘homo est primo risibilis’,
‘ens est primo unum’; simili ter ‘homo est primo animal rationale’, ‘triangulus habet primo tres angulos’,
‘sonus est primum et adaequatum objectu auditus’, et ceterae tales multae, sunt simpliciter falsae de virtute
sermonis, tamen illae quas P h i l o s o p h u s intendebat per istas sunt verae.” SL I.66; p. 201.51–202.56.
language are “intention” and “sense,” as opposed to various terms for “spoken words” or “written words” such as “sermo” or “vox.” Where the intention or the sense of an author’s mental language is correct, incorrect written or spoken propositions are to be handled charitably and reduced to forms that properly express the author’s or speaker’s intention.

3.3.3 Luther’s Appeal to Sense and Words

Luther, given his study of Ockham, would have known Ockham’s strategy for reconciling imprecise and improper statements. Like Ockham, Luther explicitly distinguishes mental language from spoken and written words. As noted above, in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* Luther identifies a number of problematic spoken and written Christological formulae. His most comprehensive list includes explanations of the personal union in Christ that Luther deems inadequate. These include the comparison of the union of Christ’s two natures to the union of form to matter, the union of matter to form, the union of body and soul, and the union of fire and iron. Luther completes the list by pointing to the “moderns” who say that Christ’s human nature is sustained or supposited by the divine nature. Luther labels all of these as “improper

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47 “36. Sedulius poeta christianissimus canit: Beatus autor seculi servile corpus induit, idque per totam ecclesiam, 37. Cum nihil possit magis dici haereticum, quam humanam naturam esse vestem divinitatis. 38. Non enim vestis et corpus constituentes unam personam, sicut Deus et homo constituentes unam personam. 39. Tamen piissime sensisse Sedulium, caetera carmina probant evidentissime. 40. Eadem ratione haereticum esset vulgatum illud: Tota trinitas operata est incarnationem filii, sicut duae puellae tertiam induunt, ipsa simul sese induente. 41. Ita scholastici aliqui, dum divinitatis et humanitatis habitudinem sentiunt similem esse unioni formae ad materiam, non possent defendi. 42. Alii contra esse habitudinem similem materiae ad formam, multo ineptius, si indicentur rigide, loquuntur. 43. Neque illa consideret, ubi divinitatem igni et humanitatem ferro simulant, etiamsi sit pulcherrima similitudo. 44. Neque ilam ferre liceret, quam Athanasius ponit: Sicut anima rationalis et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus. 45. Omnes enim negant, Christum esse compositum, etsi constitutum affirmant. 46. Nulli vero insulsius loquantur, quam Moderni, quos vocant, qui omnium volunt subtilissime et propriissime loqui videri. 47. Hi dicunt, humanam
expressions.” Nevertheless, he holds that they are to be granted: “But all of these
[theologians] think ("sapiunt") rightly and catholically, therefore an improper expression
ought to be granted to them.”48 Note that Luther distinguishes the thought of these authors
from the words they spoke or wrote. Like Ockham, Luther works with a theory of mental
language that allows one to interpret spoken or written words as signifying something
different than their strict literal sense by appealing to the correct thought of the author.

Luther locates truth and error at the level of mental language. His arguments about
what constitutes error rely on the distinction between spoken and written words and
sense. He locates truth and error in the sense, that is, at the level of mental language, and
not in the written or spoken words. Otherwise, Luther argues that Moses would be a
heretic for giving the Decalogue in two different wordings. Luther defends Moses against
the charge by arguing that the two versions of the Decalogue agree in sense.49 On the other
hand, a person with the wrong sense should be rejected if he speaks with the correct
words, even if he speaks Scripture itself.50 If one thinks incorrectly, nothing he says or
writes should be accepted as correct. Presumably, Luther would require the author or
speaker to correct his thought before accepting his spoken or written words. Luther
accounts for the gap between mental and written language by pointing to the work of the
Holy Spirit and Satan to produce truth and error in people. A particular goodness of the

49 “57. Igitur in sensu, non in verbis est haeresis, ut dixit recte S. Hieronymus a suis calumniatoribus
exagitatus. 58. Alioqui maximus sit haereticus Moses, qui decalogum ipsum diversa forma recitat Exod. 20 et
50 “E contra, si quis reprobus etiam commode locutus fuerit ipsamque scripturam iactarit, tolerandus non
Holy Spirit grants that people may speak falsely grammatically while speaking things that are true in sense. On the other hand, Satan’s cunning and malice is such that things that are true grammatically are nevertheless false in sense.\(^{51}\) Luther identifies sense as the location of truth and falsehood, and uses that location of truth to contend, as Ockham does, that an authority thinking or intending the correct sense may speak or write words that are not, in their proper sense, true.

Luther’s appeal to sense as the proper location of truth and error shows that Luther adopts Ockham’s theory of written, spoken, and mental language. The continuity is especially apparent as both theologians use the gap between the natural signification of thought and the conventional signification of written and spoken words to provide charitable readings to improper expressions. For Luther, as for Ockham, spoken or written words are subordinated to a higher mental language, and it is this higher level of mental language that is the realm of orthodoxy and heresy. This location of orthodoxy in sense gives Luther space to accommodate some spoken and written formulae that are inaccurate. It also allows him to reject arguments—even quotations of Scripture—raised by opponents if the one speaking them has the wrong mental intention.

Luther’s appeal to an author’s intention is further evidence of Luther’s adoption of Ockham’s thought about written, spoken, and mental language. Luther defends authors and orators who wish (\textit{volo}) to speak the ineffable. Furthermore, Luther thinks that authors

\(^{51}\) “61. Tanta est simplicitas et bonitas Spiritus sancti, ut homines sui, dum falsa loquuntur grammatice, vera loquuntur sensu. 62. Tanta est versutia et malitia sathanae, ut homines sui, dum vera loquuntur grammatico, id est, verbis, mendacia loquuntur theologice, id est, sensu. 63. Hic potest dici: Si mentiris, etiam quod verum dicis, mentiris: e contra, si verum dicis, etiam quod falso dicis, verum dicis. 64. Hoc est, quod dicitur haereticum esse, qui scripturas aliter intelligit, quam flagitat Spiritus sanctus.” WA 39/2:96.31–39.
who wish to say the same thing may use different written or spoken expressions to do so.\textsuperscript{52} Luther’s appeal to an author’s intention works within a distinction between written and mental language, as Luther’s use of “volo” parallels Ockham’s uses of “intendo.” Ockham’s use of “intendo” signals a move to the mental level of language and asks what an author thinks and wishes to express, just as Luther’s use of “volo” signals an analysis of what an author thinks and intends to express. Both Luther and Ockham follow a strategy of working back from written or spoken words to the mental language governing those words and the mental intentions of the author.

An appeal to an author’s intended sense allows Luther to grant latitude to those attempting to speak the ineffable. All the inadequate models of the personal union fall short because the authors “wish to speak the ineffable.”\textsuperscript{53} Luther’s account of misstatements attempting to speak the ineffable does not fit within a theory of performative language. Luther does not identify the problem of error as the limitations of a linguistic theory that understands words only as signifiers. Instead, he locates error and truth outside of spoken and written words. His solution is not to appeal to the performative power of words to accomplish what heretics fail to do with a static language. Instead, his solution is to inquire very precisely about the signification of terms at various levels of language and to grant a

\textsuperscript{52} “50. Quia rem ineffabilem volebant effari, deinde omnis similitudo claudicat nec unquam (ut dicunt) currit quatuor pedibus. ... 55. Cum omnibus istis formis dicendi eadem rem significare velit autor, frustra quaeritur in verbis contentio. 56. Ita cum nihil alius velint istae formae locutionis: Christus secundum quod homo, vel secundum humanitatem, vel humanitate, vel per humanitatem, vel in humanitate est creatura, quam quod habet creaturam vel assumptam creaturam humanam, vel, quod simplicissimum est, humanitas Christi est creatura; contemnendi sunt pravilogicales, qui diversis formis grammaticae loquendi diversas affingunt in eadem re sententias.” WA 39/2:96.3–4, 14–22.

\textsuperscript{53} “50. Quia rem ineffabilem volebant effari, deinde omnis similitudo claudicat nec unquam (ut dicunt) currit quatuor pedibus.” WA 39/2:96.3–96.4.
charitable reading to authors trying to express what cannot be adequately expressed in spoken words. Luther’s identification of the hypostatic union as an ineffable truth challenges theories, following Schwarz, that Luther turns to performative speech as the solution to the union of Christ’s natures. And, as Luther grants the correct sense to improper expressions of the hypostatic union, he reads charitably the scholastics’ suppositional model of the hypostatic union, allowing it to stand when understood as an approximation of a union that cannot be expressed in words. Luther achieves this charitable reading by working with Ockham’s theory about the way terms signify at the levels of mental, written, and spoken language. By taking Luther’s use of mental language into account, his criticism of the scholastic model of the hypostatic union is not as devastating as Schwarz portrays it to be. Rather, Luther thinks that the model of suppositional carrying, while not true according to a strict literal reading of the words, may be granted because those who hold it think correctly.

### 3.3.4 Formulae Given by the Spirit

Luther’s charitable reading comes at a certain epistemological cost. Luther argues that Christological statements that are incorrect should be granted when they are spoken by one who thinks correctly. Yet how does one know if an author thinks correctly? Whose statements are to be read charitably? Since truth and error are located not in the spoken or written words, how does one gain access to the mental language if not through the spoken and written words? Luther’s thought on proper formulae of speech brings the difficulty into focus.
Luther admonishes his audience to retain the formulae of speaking given by the Holy Spirit. God has given us particular formulae of spoken and written words so that we might grasp something about Christ’s person and nature in thought. Namely, God has given the formula that “Christ is God and man in one person, and there are not two persons, but two natures have been united in one person so that what is done by the human nature is also said to be done by the divine nature, and vice versa.” The formula, whatever else it may or may not be, is a particular interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon and the communication of attributes. Given Luther’s reliance on Scripture against councils and church authority, this formula raises questions about Luther’s understanding of God-given formulae of speech. Luther here gives the Chalcedonian but extra-biblical phrase “Christ is God and man in one person” as an example of a formula of speaking given by the Spirit. Luther, presumably, reads this formula as the intended sense of Scripture, an idea in the mind that stands behind the written words of Scripture. Or, Luther is granting that theological formulae arising from tradition and not Scripture are given by the Spirit. In either case the question arises: how does one know what formulae of speaking the Spirit has given? This would require access to the mental intentions of the authors of Scripture, or a criteria to gauge which fathers and councils had the right mental intentions so that their words are Spirit-given formulae.

54 “Ideo ut capere aliquomodo possimus, dedit Deus nobis formulas loquendi, quod Christus sit Deus et homo in una persona, et non sunt duae personae, sed duae naturae unitae sunt in una persona sic, ut, quod ab humana natura fit, dicatur etiam fieri a divina, et e contra.” WA 39/2:98.15–19.

55 This statement shows Luther using metaphysical categories to express the meaning of Scripture. Rather than use Scripture to eliminate metaphysical speculation, Luther turns to the metaphysical categories of “person” and “nature” to express the God-given formula of the hypostatic union. I analyze Luther’s use of the metaphysical categories of “person” and “nature” in relation to the communication of attributes in chapter four.
Luther’s identification of other statements as correct but not given by the Spirit further complicates the question of what qualifies as a Spirit-given formula. Luther bids one to flee from a formula that provides an occasion for error, as saying that “a human being created the world.” Luther thinks that the sense of this is correct, but that the formula will be a cause for error and so ought not to be spoken.\textsuperscript{56} Luther argues that such correct but potentially misleading statements should be spoken only with caution. More commonly when addressing many Christological arguments Luther holds that “we ought to retain the formulae prescribed by the Holy Spirit, especially among the weak.”\textsuperscript{57} Among strong Christians one may speak loosely without doing harm. But one ought to take care in what formulae are used among those who need to be taught.\textsuperscript{58} It seems that in Luther’s judgment the phrase “a human being created the world” is not a formula of speaking given by the Spirit. Like the formula “Christ is God and man in one person,” the formula “a human being created the world” is not found in Scripture. Both reflect what Luther thinks is correct, but Luther categorizes only one as a formula given by the Spirit. How then does Luther determine what formulae are given by the Spirit?

Luther gives a partial answer when he appeals to the sense of Scripture rather than the words. Luther grants that formulae of the fathers not found in Scripture may be

\textsuperscript{56} “Error enim non est in voluntate, sed in sensu. Quando sunt verba, quae generant errorem, sunt fugienda, si autem nullum praebent occasionem erroris, nihil refert, etiamsi utaris: Homo creavit mundum, si tantum sensus est bonus.” WA 39/2:109A.22–27.

\textsuperscript{57} “Et ut dixi, oportet nos retinere formulas a Spiritu sancto praescriptas, præsertim apud infirmos.” WA 39/2:112A.32–113A.3.

\textsuperscript{58} “...apud fortes christianos nihil nocet, quomodo loquaris, sicut apud me, quia iam non doceor talia et scio iam; apud docendos est abstinenendum. Non errante corde non erret lingua, balbutiam nostram condonat nobis Spiritus sanctus. Sed tamen inter docendum est caste, proprie et commode loquendum.” WA 39/2:113A.3–6.
retained, so long as they do not contradict the sense found in Scripture." One example is Luther’s argument that while Scripture does not say that God has suffered, this formula is to be retained. Luther thinks the formula that God has suffered is found in the sense of Scripture. So one criteria for identifying formulae of speaking given by the Spirit is that a statement agrees with the sense of Scripture. Yet that criteria is insufficient—Luther also judges the formula “a human being created the world” to be in agreement with the sense of Scripture. Though it agrees with the sense of Scripture, Luther does not count that statement as a formula given by the Spirit. Moreover, Luther leaves an epistemological question unresolved. How does one know the correct sense of Scripture well enough to identify the formulae prescribed by the Spirit? One cost of appealing to sense rather than words is a need to get behind the written words of Scripture to the intended sense. Perhaps, based on Luther’s treatment of Sedulius, his answer would be that taking Scriptures as an aggregate gives a reader an understanding of the sense of the whole, and that understanding can be used as a guide for interpreting any individual passage. Whatever the solution may be, the challenge of identifying the proper sense of Scripture does not seem to trouble Luther, who insists on the certainty of his views on Christology and other theological topics. Nevertheless, this epistemological question represents a particular cost of Luther’s appeal to a mental language as the *locus* of truth and error.


60 “Deus est passus. Ergo non est utendum his idiomaticis. R. Error non est in verbis, sed in sensu, quamvis scriptura has voces non ponit, tamen habet eandem sententiam.” WA 39/2:121A.9–12.

Luther’s argument presupposes that the sense is not determined strictly by the precise signification of written words. He is unclear about precisely how one determines the intended sense. Nor does Luther offer clear criteria for identifying formulae given by the Spirit that ought to be retained.

Luther’s appeal to mental language grants the benefit of a certain freedom in speaking. Luther takes it as a general rule that when the heart does not err, neither does the tongue, for the Holy Spirit pardons our stammering. Still, one ought to take care among the unlearned, lest one give them reason to fall into error.62 Luther’s comment about the heart not erring fits within a schema of mental language: thoughts may remain correct while the words spoken fail to mirror the mental sense precisely. When thoughts are correct, Luther can speak freely with the confidence that the Spirit will forgive any misstatements that he makes, and afford that same charitable reading to other authors.

### 3.3.5 Grammar as Written and Spoken Language

While analyzing inaccurate Christological formulations, Luther speaks of a new grammar in theology. The Holy Spirit, in Luther’s thought, “has its own grammar.”63 Stefan Streiff understands the Holy Spirit’s new grammar as effective speech: the Holy Spirit’s grammar replaces traditional understandings of terms as signifiers with an understanding of divine grammar calling things into being by words that do what they say.64 However,

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64 Streiff, Novis linguis loqui, 129, 187–188.
when Luther works out details of this grammar in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, he does not define the Holy Spirit’s grammar as effective speech. Placing Luther’s thought on grammar into the nominalist framework of mental, spoken, and written language offers a different perspective on what Luther means by the Holy Spirit’s grammar.

Luther distinguishes grammatical truth from an author’s intended sense. For instance, Luther writes: “Such is the cunning and malice of Satan that his people, when they say things that are true grammatically, that is, in words, nevertheless say falsehoods theologically, that is, in sense.”

In this argument Luther equates “grammar” with words that are spoken. He distinguishes grammar from “sense,” the level of language he identifies as the place of theological truth. It is difficult to read Luther’s appeal to “grammar” as a turn to performative speech. If speech is performative, how can opponents of Christ speak something true grammatically without having the words effect the proper theological end? Or, if words achieve a theological end, why does Luther say that Christ’s opponents speak falsehoods? If, however, Luther uses “grammar” to mean spoken or written words that signify by convention, then his distinction between grammar and intended sense signals a switch between levels of language in Ockham’s hierarchy. By distinguishing grammar from theological truth, Luther creates space to analyze and formulate written and spoken words in a way that aligns them with theological truth.

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65 “62. Tanta est versutia et malitia sathanae, ut homines sui, dum vera loquuntur grammaticè, id est, verbis, mendacia loquantur theologice, id est, sensu.” WA 39/2:96.23–25.
Luther sees flexibility in grammar as a useful characteristic for the alignment of words with theological truth. He thinks that grammar permits multiple formulae of words that signify the same thing. A person who is skilled in grammar knows how to say the same thing using many different words. Luther cites the white teeth of an Ethiopian as an example. He lists seven ways that one might say that the Ethiopian has white teeth in Latin. These include “The Ethiopian is white according to his teeth,” “The Ethiopian is white in respect to his teeth,” “The Ethiopian has white teeth,” or “The teeth in the Ethiopian are white.” The simplest formula, Luther judges, is “The teeth of the Ethiopian are white.”

Luther holds that, since the speaker wishes to signify the same thing with all of these verbal formulae, debates about the words are in vain. Luther’s analysis of these different grammatical possibilities demonstrates how Luther places grammar at the level of written and spoken language while locating intention and sense at the level of mental language. The “one thing,” that is, the intended sense in mental language, may be expressed by multiple formulae of speech in written or spoken language. Luther equates written and spoken language with “grammar” as he reads the church fathers’ Christological statements charitably.

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66 Not all of these ways translate neatly into English. In Latin they are “Aethiops secundum dentes est albus,…Aethiops est albus dentibus vel alborum dentium vel albis dentibus. … Aethiops habet albos dentes, vel dentes in Aethiope albent, vel simplicissime, dentes Aethiopis sunt alibi.” WA 39/2:96.9–13. I have provided one translation for the various Latin forms “Aethiops est albus dentibus vel alborum dentium vel albis dentibus. … Aethiops habet albos dentes,” all of which come into English as “the Ethiopian has white teeth.”

67 “51. Si non placet vel non intelligitur ista, Christus secundum quod homo est creatura, consolatur grammaticus. 52. Is eandem rem variis modis eloqui doctus inbeatur quam potest simplicissime loqui. 53. Ut Aethiops secundum dentes est albus, potest grammaticus aliter sic dicere: Aethiops est albus dentibus vel alborum dentium vel albis dentibus. 54. Quod si hoc non placet, dicat: Aethiops habet albos dentes, vel dentes in Aethiope albent, vel simplicissime, dentes Aethiopis sunt alibi. 55. Cum omnibus istis formis dicendi eandem rem significare velit autor, frustra quaeritur in verbis contentio.” WA 39/2:96.5–15.
3.3.6 Interpreting Improper Statements of the Fathers and Scripture

Luther grants a limited license to use improper wordings to express doctrines in writing or speech by locating theological truth at the level of mental language. Luther, using the same strategy he did to analyze statements signifying that “the teeth of the Ethiopian are white,” works with expressions about Christ’s humanity and creaturehood. He lists seven verbal formulae that wish to make the same point:

In the same way, since these forms of speech—Christ insofar as a human being, or according to the humanity, or in respect to the humanity, or by the humanity, or in the humanity is a creature—wish nothing other than that Christ has a creature or assumed a human creature or (what is simplest) that the humanity of Christ is a creature, the false logicians are to be condemned who assign different meanings to different grammatical forms of speaking the same thing.\(^6^8\)

Luther’s strategy for granting a charitable reading is first to identify the proper sense of what is said of spoken. Note how Luther signals the switch to mental language by indicating what authors “wish” to say. He then reduces the improper expressions of those who think correctly to an expression that aligns properly with the intended sense. Whatever words these speakers use, Luther determines that they intend to say: “Christ’s humanity is a creature,” which Luther identifies as the simplest verbal expression. Since these statements all wish to say the same thing, Luther thinks that it is pointless to argue over any one

\(^{68}\) “56. Ita cum nihil aliud velint istae formae locutionis: Christus secundum quod homo, vel secundum humanitatem, vel humanitate, vel per humanitatem, vel in humanitate est creatura, quam quod habet creaturam vel assumpsit creaturam humanam, vel, quod simplicissimum est, humanitas Christi est creatura; contemnendi sunt pravilogicales, qui diversis formis grammaticae loquendi diversas affingunt in eadem re sententias.” WA 39/2:96.16–22.
particular verbal formula. Instead, Luther advocates granting charitable readings to those who think correctly.

Luther calls for this kind of charity in reading the church fathers. As Luther analyzes the “things and phrases of Scripture and of the fathers,” he argues that the “phrases” of the fathers are to be interpreted correctly when they have spoken improperly. The fathers think correctly as evidenced by many of their clearer statements and suitable expressions. Luther hopes that his hearers learn to agree with the sayings of the fathers, or to pardon the fathers when they cannot agree with them, since no person can always be correct without occasionally stumbling and falling in speech. Luther’s strategy applied to the fathers uses a distinction of mental language from written and spoken words to account for times when the fathers slipped. However, Luther outlines certain limitations to reading the church fathers charitably. Where the fathers speak improperly, they are to be read charitably but not imitated. While the pattern of speech found in Scripture and the fathers is to be preserved, improper statements are not to be imitated. That restriction, and the whole project of reading the fathers charitably, builds on Luther’s conviction that the fathers sometimes err. Where they speak correctly, the verbal formulations of the fathers

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70 “Deinde etiam observanda sunt phrases sanctorum partum. Quod si aliquando incommode dixerint, id recte interpretandum est, non depravandum, ut papistae faciunt, qui detorquent et allegant patrum dicta depravata contra nos pro defendendis suis idolatriis, purgatorio et bonis operibus, cum tamen recte senserint, ut testantur multa dicat eorum clarius et commodius pronuntiatu.” WA 39/2:98.22–99.1.
71 “Nos autem discamus patrum dicta concordare, vel si non possimus concordare, ignoscamus illis, quia nullus homo potest sic sapere, ut non aliquando impingat et labatur, praeassertim in linguis, ubi facilis lapsus est.” WA 39/2:99.7–9.
are to be preserved and imitated; where they err, their formulations are to be corrected.\(^\text{73}\)

Luther calls for careful analysis of the statements of the fathers to determine what is error in need of charitable correction and what is truth that can and should be imitated.

Such an analysis of the fathers again raises the unresolved epistemological difficulties in Luther’s location of theological truth in mental language. How does one know when the fathers thought correctly and when they did not? How does one know who thinks correctly at all, and who does not? Luther points to the many clear statements and suitable expressions of the fathers as evidence that they thought correctly. While this gives some direction, unanswered questions remain. By what standard are statements to be ranked and judged? How does one determine what is a clear statement or a suitable expression, or when a church father slipped into not only verbal but also mental error? What access does one have to the mental sense that Luther puts forward as the real place to look for orthodoxy and heresy? In some way written and spoken words must point to and grant this sense, but Luther offers no developed theory of how to identify the clear words that reveal an author’s intended sense. The closest he comes to offering criteria is to appeal to the Spirit’s guidance in reading Scripture as a means to guard against heresy.\(^\text{74}\) With this move

\(^{73}\) Luther identifies Bernhard as an example, who in places “speaks most unsuitably and most improperly, as if he were a heretic.” But when Bernhard speaks about a serious matter or speaks with God, he speaks as correctly as Peter or Paul. Luther concludes that the fathers are to be imitated when they “spoke and thought” correctly. Where, however, “they spoke or even thought improperly, they ought to be tolerated and interpreted suitably.” “Responsio: Patres aliquando labuntur iudicando, aliquando recte dicunt. Ergo non licet ubique eos mutari. Sic Bernhardus aliquando incommodissime et impropriissime loquitur, ac si esset haereticus. Quando autem res seria agitur et cum Deo loquitur, tunc et ipse Petrus et Paulus. Ergo sunt patres imitandi, ubi recte dixerunt et senserunt, ubi vero incommodius dixerunt vel etiam senserunt, sunt tolerandi et commode interpretandi, ut papistae faciunt, qui etiam illos in suam sententiam ire cogunt.” WA 39/2:112A.3–10.

\(^{74}\) “64. Hoc est, quod dicitur haereticum esse, qui scripturas aliter intelligit, quam flagitat Spiritus sanctus.” WA 39/2:96.38–39.
Luther points to a correct interpretation of Scripture given by the Holy Spirit. Yet this standard remains vague, as he gives no further means to identify what the Holy Spirit’s interpretation is as opposed to false interpretations. Luther’s reading of the church fathers underscores the epistemological difficulties of his location of truth in sense and in thought.

What is clear from Luther’s treatment of the fathers is that he follows Ockham’s strategy to deal with improper expressions. Like Ockham, Luther’s analysis begins with an appeal to the correct intended sense of an author who has written or spoken something using improper words. Once the proper intended sense is established, Luther then reduces the improper formula of speech to a more accurate expression. With this step Luther aligns the spoken or written words with the proper intended sense. Luther does not point to performative language as the way to deal with improper expressions, nor does he give a performative interpretation of the fathers’ improper statements in the Christological disputations. Rather, Luther analyzes them by following Ockham’s prescribed formula for handling improper authoritative statements. Luther finds Ockham’s philosophical theories about different levels of language to be a powerful tool for theological work. He uses the levels of language to locate and define heresy as sense and to account for authoritative but improper statements.

Luther also applies Ockham’s strategy to what he identifies as improper statements in Scripture. Luther uses this strategy on John 1:14: “John 1 says: ‘The Word was made flesh,’ when by our judgment it would have been more suitable to say: ‘the Word became
incarnate’ or ‘was made of the flesh.’”\textsuperscript{75} This move is unexpected, given Luther’s well-established reliance on Scripture as an authority. Luther thinks the written words of John 1 are less suitable than other formulae of speech, and offers two alternative formulae that express more precisely the sense of this scriptural passage. Luther uses the same strategy to analyze Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (NRSV). The difficulty Luther addresses in Galatians is conceiving “curse” as an abstract term, in which case the passage would incorrectly predicate an abstract term of Christ. Luther’s solution is to argue that in the Galatians passage “curse” signifies a concrete thing, bringing to mind that Christ was made a sacrificial victim for us.\textsuperscript{76} The sense of the passage, in Luther’s reading, is that Christ was made a “victim.” He uses this concrete term to formulate the intended sense of Scripture. In both cases, Luther appeals to the sense of Scripture as justification to put forward a more precise written or spoken formula than he finds in the grammar of Scripture.

Conversely, Luther defends claims that do not match the written words of Scripture by an appeal to Scripture’s sense. He contends that there are times when “Scripture does not use these words, but nevertheless it has the same sense.” These kinds of statements that agree with Scripture in sense ought to be affirmed.\textsuperscript{77} While Luther on the one hand


\textsuperscript{76} Luther addresses the question when an \textit{oppoens} proposes that since Galatians says that Christ was made a “curse,” it can be said that Christ was made humanity, arguing that both “curse” and “humanity” are abstract terms. “Paulus dicit: Christus est factus maledictum. Ergo eadem ratione potest dici: Christus est factus humanitas. Responsio: non est sequenda analogia, sed ductus Spiritus sancti, quemadmodum ipse praescrispit, ita loquendum est. Christus est factus maledictum, ibi significat valde concretum, id est, Christus est factus hostia, victima pro nobis.” WA 39/2:109A4–9.

\textsuperscript{77} “Error non est in verbis, sed in sensu, quamvis scriptura has voces non ponit, tamen habet eandem sententiam.” WA 39/2:121B.10–12.
offers more precise wording to certain difficult scriptural passages, on the other hand he allows wording not found in Scripture to stand when those statements agree with the sense of Scripture. In both cases his arguments distinguish sharply between the words and the sense of Scripture and depend on knowing the sense of Scripture. There are cases where the sense of Scripture differs from the precise wording found in Scripture.

Luther’s analysis of Scripture using the distinction of written language and sense raises questions about Luther’s stance toward Scripture. As Luther grants statements that disagree with the wording of Scripture and offers suggestions to make scriptural statements more precise, it is clear that Luther sees the sense of Scripture as authoritative rather than the grammatical words. That appeal to sense raises the epistemological questions noted above, questions that complicate how Luther understands the authority of Scripture. These questions, as important as they are for understanding Luther’s theology, go beyond the scope of this work. Luther does not address them in the Christological disputations. What is clear from the disputations is that Luther appeals to the sense of Scripture over the words when addressing Christological questions. His appeal to sense is evidence that in this Christological work Luther works with a theory of language as significative rather than performative.

3.4 The Signification of Terms

3.4.1 The Question of New Signification

Understanding how Luther uses the levels of mental, spoken, and written language in the Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ offers a lens that allows one to see
Luther’s semantic theories more clearly. I have shown above that Luther understands the function of terms to be signifying a thing at all levels of language. The signification of terms is key to Luther’s new language. As shown above, Luther offers new signification for terms like “creature” and “human person.” Another similar example is Luther’s treatment of the term “verbum” (“word”) in Luke 2:15. “Verbum” may signify a thing that has happened, as it does in the Vulgate’s translation of Luke 2:15. In the verse the shepherds say to one another “videamus hoc verbum quod factum est.” (Literally, the Latin says “let us see this word which has happened.”) In other places, however, Luther writes that “verbum” signifies the second person of the Trinity who was made flesh.78 What force does “signification” have in this analysis of the signification of “verbum”?

Critically, what does “signification” mean when Luther appeals to a new theological language? Luther writes in the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14): “Therefore we would do well to leave dialectic or philosophy in its own sphere and learn to speak in a new language in the realm of faith beyond every sphere.”79 A new theological language arises as words “receive new signification in Christ in the same thing signified.” All words that are said of Christ become new words. A word spoken of Christ “does not signify a new or different thing, but signifies in a new and different way, unless you wish also to say a new thing.”80 Luther here claims that new words signify in new and

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78 English translations typically translate this as “let us ... see this thing that has happened” (NRSV).
79 “40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relicitis discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram.” WA 39/2:5.35–36.
80 “20. Certum est tamen, omnia vocabula in Christo novam significationem accipere in eadem re significata. 21. Nam creatura veteris linguae usu et in allis rebus significat rem a divinitate separatam infinitis modis. 22. Novae linguae usu significat rem cum divinitate inseparabiliter in eandem personam ineffabilibus modis coniunctam. 23. Ita necesse est, vocabula: homo, humanitas, passus etc. et omnia de Christo dicta nova esse
different ways, yet signify the same thing. He also indicates that the will of speaker plays a role in determining the signification of a word. Luther’s new language hinges on new words that signify in different ways. I hypothesize that Luther’s new language works within late medieval nominalist conceptions of signification. If this is the case, signification in Luther’s new language is bringing a different thing to mind, or bringing a thing to mind in a new way. As I test this hypothesis it is necessary first to give a brief overview of Ockham’s understanding of signification, particularly attending to his distinction between natural and conventional signification.

3.4.2 Ockham on Natural and Conventional Signification

Medieval theories of signification built on Augustine’s thought. In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine defines a “sign”: “For a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself.” Augustine gives examples, such as a footprint or smoke, that strike the senses but also bring something else to mind. In these cases a footprint brings to mind the animal that left it, while smoke brings to mind a fire. Augustine also lists the example of the voice of a man bringing to thought the affection of his soul, or a trumpet calling soldiers to battle. Augustine divides these signs into natural and conventional. Natural signs lead to the knowledge of something else apart from any intention to do so, such as the footprint or vocabula.

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smoke. Conventional signs are signs that involve intentionality as people assign meaning to these signs, such as a trumpet blast calling soldiers to battle. Living beings exchange conventional signs to show the motions of their souls or their thoughts. Augustine classifies mental terms as natural signs and spoken or written terms as conventional signs. The key point medieval scholastics took from this passage was that signs are things that bring something to mind. Like Augustine, the scholastics developed theories that distinguished between natural and conventional signification. Conventional signification in many instances was understood as imposing a name on something. The primary debate among the scholastics centered on what kind of thing was signified by a name. A key voice in the scholastic debates was William Ockham.

82 “3. Data vero signa sunt, quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos, quantum possunt, motus animi sui, vel sensa, aut intellecta quaelibet. Nec ulla causa est nobis significandi, id est signi dandi, nisi ad depromendum et trajiciendum in alterius animum id quod animo gerit is qui signum dat. Horum igitur signorum genus, quantum ad homines attinet, considerare atque tractare statuimus; quia et signa divinitus data, quae in Scripturis sanctis continentur, per homines nobis indicata sunt, qui ea conscripserunt. Habent etiam bestiae quaedam inter se signa, quibus produnt appetitum animi sui. Nam et gallus gallinaceus reperto cibo, dat signum vocis gallinæ ut accurrat; et columbus gemitu columbam vocat, vel ab ea vicissim vocat; et multa hujusmodi animadverti solent. Quae utrum, sicut vultus aut dolentis clamor, sine significandi voluntate sequantur motum animi, an vere ad significandum dentur, alia quaestio est, et ad rem quae agitur non pertinet: quam partem ab hoc opere tanquam non necessariam removemus. 4. Signorum igitur quibus inter se homines sua sensa communicant, quaedam pertinent ad oculorum sensum, pleraque ad aurium, paucissima ad caeteros sensus. Nam cum innuimus, non damus signum nisi oculis ejus quem volumus per hoc signum voluissent nostra participem facere. Et quidam motu manuum pleraque significant: et histriones omnium membrorum motibus dant signa quaedam scientibus, et cum oculis eorum quasi fabulantur; et vexilla dracones militares per oculos insinuant voluntatem ducum: et sunt haec omnia quasi quaedam verba visibilia. Ad aures autem quae pertinent, ut dixi, plura sunt, in verbis maxime. Nam et tuba, et tibia, et cithara, dant plerumque non solum suavem, sed etiam significationem sonum. Sed haec omnia signa verborum comparata paucissima sunt. Verba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandorum quaeque animo concipiuntur, si ea quisque proderit velit. Nam et odore unguential Dominus, quo perfusi sunt pedes ejus, signum aliquid dedit (Joan. XII, 3 et 7); et Sacramento corporis et sanguinis sui praegustato, significavit quod voluit (Luc. XXII, 19, 20); et cum mulier tangendo fimbriam vestimenti ejus, salva facta est, nonnihil significat (Matth. IX, 21): sed innumerabilis multitudo signorum, quibus suas cogitationes homines exerunt, in verbis constituta est. Nam illa signa omnia quorum genera breviter attigi, potui verbis enuntiari; verba vero ills signis nullo modo posse.” Augustinus Hipponensis, De doctrina christiana 2:2–3, in PL 34:37–38.

Ockham defines a sign as a thing that brings something to mind. Ockham gives a twofold definition of “sign”: “In one sense, ['sign'] is taken for everything that brings something apprehended into cognition.” In this broad definition of “sign,” signs signify naturally rather than conventionally. Ockham is most interested in a second, narrower sense:

In a second sense “sign” is taken for that which makes something come into cognition and is suited to supposit for that thing, or to be added to such in a proposition, of which sort are syncategoremata and verbs and those parts of speech that do not have a defined signification, or which is suited to be composed from such, as an expression is. And when the word "sign" is taken in this way an utterance is not a natural sign of anything.84

Signs in this narrower sense signify by convention, because they are not natural signs having signification by their very nature. Ockham offers a disjunctive definition of sign in this narrower sense: signs are things that can be used in propositions, either by suppositing for the thing signified, or by modifying a proposition in some way.85 For Ockham, these kinds of signs signify by convention rather than by nature. Signification must be imposed upon these kinds of signs, including the terms of spoken or written language.

Ockham works with a robust concept of conventional signification. Terms that are written or spoken signify by convention, while mental terms signify naturally. The natural

84 “Propter tamen propter vos est scendum quod signum dupliciter accipitur. Uno modo pro omni illo quod apprehensum aliquid alid facit in cognitionem venire, quamvis non facit mentem venire in primam cognitionem eius, sicut ali quod est ostensum, sed in actualis post habitualem eiusdem. Et sic vox naturaliter significat, sicut quilibet effectus significat saltem suam causam; sicut etiam circulus significat vinum in taberna. Sed tam generaliter non loquor hic de signo. Aliter accipitur signum pro illo quod aliquid facit in cognitionem venire et natum est pro illo supponere vel cali addi in propositione, cuiusmodi sunt syncategoremata et verba et illae partes orationis quae finitam significationem non habent, vel quod natum est componi ex talibus, cuiusmodi est oratio. Et sic accipiendo hoc vocabulum 'signum' vox nullius est signum naturale.” SL I.1; pp. 8.53–9.65.

85 For a discussion of the passage, see Panaccio, Ockham on Concepts, 46–51. For another discussion of Ockham on narrow and wide signification, see Schierbaum, Ockham's Assumption, 24–37.
signification of mental terms means that a concept or affection of the soul possesses a certain signification by the nature of the concept itself. Mental terms gain their signification from things like a causal relationship or maximal similarity to a thing. Because mental terms acquire their signification naturally, one cannot change their signification. On the other hand, spoken and written terms signify by convention and not naturally. Ockham observes there is no inherent connection between a word in Latin (or any other spoken language) and the thing that term signifies. Instead, the signification of written and spoken words is imposed by the will of those who speak or write the terms. Because written and spoken terms signify by convention, they are subject to changing significations. The conventional signification of written and spoken terms provides a reader or hearer space to redefine them by convention or by imposition. Written and spoken words in this understanding of language can be redefined, or new words can be created to signify things in different ways—a point that is critical for Luther's new theological language.

87 For Ockham, these terms signify things directly rather than mental concepts of the things. While spoken and written terms are in some sense subordinate to mental terms, they do not signify mental concepts directly. Adams, *Ockham*, 1:72–73. This point is misunderstood by Dennis Bielfeldt, who argues that scholastic theories of signification see terms signifying concepts. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Luther's Philosophy of Language," in *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Hockenberry Dragseth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 62–63. While that is true for many scholastics, it is not the case for the late medieval nominalists, and so not the case for those scholastics who were formative for Luther.
88 "Inter istos autem terminos aliquae differentiae reperiuntur. Una est quod conceptus seu passio animae naturalet significat quidquid significat, terminus autem prolatus vel scriptus nihil significat nisi secundum voluntariam institutionem. Ex quo sequitur alia differentia, videlicet quod terminus prolatus vel scriptus ad pl dictum potest mutare suum significatum, terminus autem conceptus non mutat suum significatum ad pl dictum cuiuscumque." *SL I.1*; p. 8.46–52.
89 Ockham does not work out in detail how conventional signification is formed, but points to the voluntary imposition of those who use the language as the source of conventional signification. Adams, *Ockham*, 1:71–73. For further analysis of what Ockham does say about conventional signification, see Schierbaum, *Ockham's Assumption*, 93–101.
3.4.3 Luther on Signification

Ockham’s understanding of signification as calling a thing to mind gives a point of comparison for analyzing Luther’s thought on signification. For instance, Luther’s discussion of Luke 2:15 and the signification of “verbum” can be profitably analyzed in light of Ockham’s thought. Luther argues that “verbum” signifies a “thing that has happened” in some contexts and the second person of the Trinity in others. This argument fits within Ockham’s theory of the conventional signification of written terms. In both cases the term “verbum” is calling a thing to mind. The term signifies different things in different propositions because the authors intend different meanings. Note that Luther readily ascribes unusual significations to “verbum” in both Luke 2 and John 1. The ease of understanding such diverse significations for “verbum” is evidence that Luther works with a theory of conventional signification for spoken or written words.90 In these passages the differing signification of “verbum” is a difference in what things are called to mind.

Luther maps the various significations of “verbum” onto the distinction of philosophy and theology. When scriptural authors predicate “verbum” of Christ, they are using the term in theology and the term has a theological signification. When predicated of Christ, “verbum” signifies “a divine and uncreated Word, which signifies substance and person, because the divine Word is divinity” rather than a mathematical or physical word.

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90 Dennis Bielfeldt argues that Luther uses a nominalist view of signification in his theology, and sophisticated tools of nominalist philosophy in his analysis of propositions. While I agree with Bielfeldt on Luther’s use of nominalist tools in analyzing terms and signification, I use a different vocabulary. Bielfeldt frames the question in modern terms, so that Luther is interested in the meaning of propositions. Bielfeldt, “Luther’s Philosophy of Language,” 61–68. My concern is that modern conceptions of meaning do not map exactly onto theories of signification as what a term or proposition calls to mind. For that reason I maintain the language of calling things to mind and signification rather than inquiring into meaning.
On the other hand, philosophy defines the signification of “verbum” as a “sound” or “spoken word” (“vox”). Luther distinguishes the signification of “verbum” in theology from its signification in philosophy, so that when one speaks theologically “Word” signifies the Son of God. In this passage “signify” means to bring to mind. The various definitions of “verbum” that Luther offers are all things that the term brings to mind when “verbum” is read or heard. When he compares the signification of “verbum” in philosophy to its signification in theology, he identifies the difference as a difference in what the term brings to mind. From this evidence it seems that Luther adopts and uses the scholastic theory of signification as calling a thing to mind. Moreover, the untroubled way Luther identifies different significations points to Luther’s adoption of Ockham’s theory of conventional signification. By that theory of conventional signification various authors are free to impose different significations on the term in different contexts.

Further analysis is required, however. Luther, as noted, writes that words in theology signify the same things in a new and different way. As noted, many scholars see the new way of signifying as a turn to a performative kind of word in theology. If this is the case Luther would mean that the new and different way words signify is by effecting the things they signify. Alternatively, I suggest that Luther is thinking with Ockham about different ways that a word may signify. Ockham identifies and uses properties of terms as potential tools to intervene so that terms signify in new and different ways. I turn now to

three of these tools as analytical lenses for Luther’s new theological language, asking if
Luther uses these tools to assign new significations to terms. The tools I consider here are a
distinction between concrete and abstract terms, the distinction between nominal and real
definitions, and an understanding of connotative terms.

3.5 Concrete and Abstract Terms

3.5.1 Luther’s References to Concrete and Abstract

Luther distinguishes between concrete and abstract terms in his Christology. He
restricts abstract predications of attributes of Christ’s human nature. It is true that “Christ
is thirsty, a servant, or dead” (in Latin, these are all concrete adjectives: “Christus est sittiens,
servus, mortuus”). Yet it is false that “Christ is thirst, servitude, or death” (in Latin, these are
all abstract nouns: “ergo [Christus] est sitis, servitus, mors”). The difference between
concrete and abstract terms is key to Luther’s determination of what may be predicated of
Christ. This is especially true for his understanding of the communication of attributes,
which I analyze in chapter four. Here I take up the semantic question of how concrete and
abstract terms differ. As we will see, Luther’s understanding of “creatura” in the new
theological language hinges on a distinction between concrete and abstract, illustrating that
the distinction is important for Luther’s development of a new language as he addresses
the central theological question of the disputation.

92 “5. Non tamen haec rata sunt in abstractis (ut dicitur) humanae naturae. 6. Non enim dicere licet, Christus
est sittiens, servus, mortuus, ergo est sitis, servitus, mors.” WA 39/2:93.10–12.
Luther’s distinction between concrete and abstract terms includes related word pairs. He identifies the pairs “sanctum/sanctitas” and “bonum/bonitas” as pairs of related terms, one concrete and one abstract. He identifies the difference between these terms as the difference between concrete and abstract or between substance and accident. Luther uses the pair “album/albedo” (“white thing/whiteness”) to illustrate the difference between concrete and abstract, arguing that these related terms are not synonyms. They differ because the concrete term “album” signifies a substance while the abstract term “albedo” signifies an accident. Luther, when working with some pairs of concrete and abstract nouns, allows the concrete to be predicated directly of a subject in the nominative case but not the abstract. Luther gives an example using the subject “John” and the abstract term “whiteness.” Even if whiteness inheres in John, it cannot be said that “John is whiteness (albedo),” since this would predicate the abstract term of the subject in the nominative case. While the abstract term cannot be predicated of John in the nominative case, the concrete term can: “Whiteness inheres in John, therefore he is a white person (albus).”

In other cases, Luther identifies the concrete and abstract nouns in a pair as synonyms. He holds that “human person” and “humanity” are synonymous when considered in philosophy: “In philosophy they [‘homo’ and ‘humanitas’] are synonyms simply signifying the same thing.” Luther defines synonyms as those terms that “signify

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the same thing simply in all modes." As a result, "synonyms are predicated interchangeably of the same substance, for that is the nature of synonyms." In some instances Luther treats concrete and abstract pairs as synonymous, and in others not. Luther’s arguments raise questions: How does Luther distinguish between a concrete and an abstract term? Why does he see some pairs of concrete and abstract nouns as synonyms, and others not? To address these questions, I turn to Ockham’s work on concrete and abstract terms, with a particular eye to how Ockham construes the terms across philosophy and theology.

3.5.2 Non-Synonymous Pairs of Concrete and Abstract Terms

Ockham thinks that concrete and abstract terms frequently come in pairs related by similar signification. Some of these pairs are synonyms, while others are non-synonymous pairs. A related but non-synonymous pair of concrete and abstract terms has a similar beginning but different endings, as “iustus” and “iustitia” or “animal” and “animalitas.” These examples work in English as well: “just” and “justice,” “animal” and “animality.” Ockham observes that often the abstract term is the longer of the pair. More importantly for Luther's disputations, Ockham thinks that often times the concrete term is an adjective and the abstract term is a substantive (that is, a noun). This latter point is often clearer in

96 “Synonyma dicuntur eo, quod simpliciter omnibus modis idem significant.” WA 39/2:115A.17–18.
98 “Omissis autem aliis partibus orationis, de nominibus est dicendum, et primo de divisione nominis per concretum et abstractum est disserendum. Et est advertendum quod concretum et abstractum sunt nomina consimile principium secundum vocem habentia, sed non consimiliter terminantur, sicut patet quod ‘iustus’ et ‘iustitia’, ‘fortis’ et ‘fortitudo’, ‘animal’ et ‘animalitas’ a simil littera vel syllaba incipiunt, sed non terminantur in consimilem. Et semper vel frequenter abstractum plures habet syllabas quam concretum, sicut
Latin than it is in English. From the examples Ockham gives here, we can see the relationship in the abstract noun “justice” paired with the concrete adjective “just,” particularly by noting that in Latin an adjective is often used as a substantive. In this case, “iustus” as a substantive adjective signifies “a just person” and functions as a concrete term. “Iustitia” is an abstract term signifying the quality or virtue of justice that can be predicated of a person or thing.

Ockham writes that often the concrete name signifies, connotes, or even supposits for something that the abstract term never does. When related terms do not signify the same thing in the same way, Ockham judges that the terms in that pair are not synonyms. He identifies “just/justice” as such a non-synonymous pair, in which “just” primarily signifies a person while “justice” signifies a quality. Ockham gives an example, arguing that in the proposition “the just person is virtuous” (“iustus est virtuosus”) the term “just person” must signify and supposit for a person and not the quality “justice,” since the quality “justice” can never be described as “virtuous.” Likewise, Ockham writes that “white thing” (the concrete adjective “album” used as a substantive adjective) supposits for a thing that has the quality of whiteness but ”whiteness” supposits for a quality.99 While Ockham’s discussion here focuses on supposition, what he says also applies to signification. In

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Ockham’s thought concrete adjectival terms bring to mind first substances and secondarily a quality that the substance has. Accordingly the concrete adjective “just,” in Ockham’s interpretation, primarily signifies a person while connoting the quality of justice that the person has. Most of the other scholastics take the opposing view, that a concrete adjective signifies primarily the quality and not the substance in which the quality inheres. Since Ockham holds to a minority opinion, his view of the signification of concrete adjectival terms is a useful reference for tracking his influence on Luther.

Ockham divides non-synonymous concrete and abstract pairs into three categories. In the first, the abstract term supposits for an accident inhering in a subject, as in the examples given above. In these cases the concrete term supposits for the subject in which the accident inheres. Ockham lists examples such as “albedo/album,” or in English “whiteness/white [thing].” In the second category either the concrete or the abstract term supposits for the whole while the other term supposits only for a part. Ockham gives the example of “anima/animatum,” or “soul/ensouled” in English. A “soul” supposits for a part of a person in Ockham’s anthropology, while “ensouled thing” supposits for the entire person. However, this category is flexible, as Ockham notes that these terms may be

100 Adams, Ockham, 1:325–327.
101 There are pairs, however, that work the opposite way: “fiery/fire” ("ignis/igneus") is one such pair. Here the adjective “fiery” supposits for the accident. Likewise, in the “humanum/homo” pair, the adjective is the abstract term while the substantive is the concrete term. "Sunt autem, ad praesens, tres species seu differentiae talium nominum inferiores. Prima est quando abstractum supponit pro accidente vel est de talibus ‘albedo-album’, ‘calor-calidum’, ‘sciens-scientia’, loquendo de creaturis. Et sic de alis. Nam in omnibus talibus abstractum supponit pro accidente inhaerente subiecto et concretum supponit pro subiecto eiusdem. E converso autem accidit de talibus ‘ignis-igneus’, nam ‘ignis’ supponit pro subiecto et ‘igneus’, quod est concretum, pro accidente eiusdem. Dicimus enim quod calor est igneus et non ignis; similiter dicimus quod ista scientia est humana et non homo.” SL 1.5; p. 17.24–34.
102 “Secunda differentia talium nominum est quando concretum supponit pro parte et abstractum pro toto vel e converso sicut in istis ‘anima-animatum’; homo enim est animatus et non anima, et ita ‘animatum’ supponit
equivocal, since “ensouled” can also supposit for only a part of a person, namely the body that receives a soul.\textsuperscript{103} The third category includes pairs that supposit for different things. Here Ockham gives “\textit{homo/humanum}” (“human being/human”) as an example. In this instance “human being” supposits for a person, while the adjective “human” is often used to signify something that a person does. By this understanding, one may describe a work with the adjective “human” but not identify that work as a “human being.”\textsuperscript{104}

Like Ockham, Luther identifies and discusses pairs of concrete and abstract terms that are not synonyms. Luther, like Ockham, identifies “\textit{album/albedo}” (“white thing/whiteness”) as one such non-synonymous pair, along with \textit{sanctum/sanctitas} and “\textit{bonum/bonitas}” (“holy thing/holiness” and “good thing/goodness”). These pairs consist of a concrete adjective signifying a thing bearing a certain quality (“white thing, holy thing, good thing”) paired with a non-synonymous abstract noun signifying a quality (“whiteness, holiness, goodness”). Like Ockham, Luther accounts for the difference as the difference between substance and accident.\textsuperscript{105} Luther’s thought follows Ockham that such pairs of

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\textsuperscript{103} “Est autem advertendum quod quandoque idem concretum accipitur aequivoce, quia quandoque idem concretum est tam in prima quam in secunda differentia, sicut hoc nomen ‘animatum’ potest supponere pro toto, quia dicimus quod homo est animatus; et potest supponere pro subiecto recipiente animam, quia dicimus quod corpus, quod est altera pars, est animatum. Et sic est de isto nomine ita est de multis aliis, quod sic possunt aequivoce accipi.” \textit{SL} I.5; pp. 17.41–18.2.

\textsuperscript{104} “Tertia differentia talium nominum est quando concretum et abstractum supponunt pro distinctis rebus, quarum tamen neutra est subjectum nec pars alterius. Et hoc contingit fieri multis modis: nam tales res quandoque se habent sicut causa et effectus, sicut dicimus quod hoc opus est humanum et non homo; quandoque sicut signum et significatum, sicut dicimus quod differentia hominis est differentia essentialis, non quia est essentia, sed quia est signum aliiuis partis essentiae; quandoque sicut locus et locatum, sicut dicimus quod iste est Anglicus et non Anglia. Multis etiam aliis modis contingit hoc fieri, quae discutienda ingeniosis dimitto.” \textit{SL} I.5; p. 18.48–57.

concrete adjectives and abstract nouns are not synonymous. Beyond that correspondence, Luther shares Ockham’s minority view that concrete adjectives signify the thing primarily and the quality secondarily. This point is clear from Luther’s distinction between substance and accident to account for the differences of the words in these pairs. This view of concrete adjectives shows that Luther follows Ockham’s thought on the signification of concrete terms.

Furthermore, Luther distinguishes permissible predications for terms of non-synonymous concrete and abstract pairs. Luther illustrates the distinction with the abstract substantive “albedo” (“whiteness”): “Whiteness inheres in John, therefore he is a white person (albus), but this does not follow in the abstract,” so that it would be wrong to say “John is whiteness.”

Luther allows the concrete adjective to be predicated directly of a subject in the nominative case, but not the abstract noun. Luther uses the difference between non-synonymous concrete and abstract pairs to make a Christological argument. He takes “humanity” as an abstract term, and argues that since humanity inheres in Christ, it is proper to say that “Christ is a human being,” but improper to say that “Christ is humanity.” This is the case, Luther argues, because a concrete term signifies personally, while an abstract term signifies in the mode of nature, bringing to mind the nature that a person has rather than the person. Luther even cites Aristotle in support of this distinction between concrete and abstract terms.

107 “Homo et humanitas significant idem. Ergo recte dicitur: Christus est humanitas. Responsio: Illa non conceditur, sed illa: Ergo Christus est homo, quia est hoc concretum significans personaliter, sed abstractum significat modum naturae vel naturaliter, sicut igitur falsum est: Christus est humana natura, id est,
“homo” can be predicated of Christ directly in the nominative, while the abstract
“humanitas” cannot be directly predicated of Christ in the nominative case. Though he
names Aristotle, Luther’s particular understanding of concrete and abstract pairs depends
on Ockham’s reception of Aristotle’s thought on concrete and abstract terms. Luther uses
philosophical thought to analyze concrete and abstract terms and how to predicate them
properly. He uses this thought as a philosophical tool in the service of Christology.

Luther uses the distinction of concrete and abstract terms to resolve other
Christological difficulties. Luther thinks that terms expressing idioms of Christ’s human
nature can be distinguished as concrete or abstract. Abstract terms expressing idioms of
the human nature may not be predicated of Christ. As noted above, it is accordingly
incorrect to reason that because Christ is thirsty, a servant, or dead (in Latin, these are all
concrete adjectives: “Christus est sitiens, servus, mortuus”), therefore Christ is thirst,
servitude, or death (in Latin, these are all abstract nouns: “ergo [Christus] est sitis, servitus,
mors”). That is, while concrete adjectives may be predicated of Christ, their corresponding
abstract nouns may not be predicated directly of him in the nominative case. For this
reason, it is improper to say that “Christ is humanity,” although it may be said that “Christ is
divinity.” The distinction between concrete and abstract does not apply to the idioms of
Christ’s divine nature. Luther’s careful analysis of concrete and abstract terms follows

humanitas, sic Christus est humanitas. Aristoteles dicit: Abstracta sonant naturam, concreta personam.” WA
108 “5. Non tamen haec sunt in abstractis (ut dicitur) humanae naturae. 6. Non enim dicere licet, Christus
est sitiens, servus, mortuus, ergo est sitis, servitus, mors. 7. Unde et illa damnatur: Christus est humanitas,
109 “9. In divinis praedicatis seu idiomaticibus non est differentia talis inter concreta et abstracta.” WA
39/2:93.16–17. This point depends on a particular metaphysical view of Christ’s divine nature. I consider this
in chapter four, where I analyze metaphysics in Luther’s understanding of the communication of attributes.
Ockham’s theories on non-synonymous pairs. This distinction plays a crucial role in Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes, analyzed further in chapter four.

Luther’s analysis of concrete and abstract word pairs that are not synonymous suggests a dependence on Ockham’s theories about signification. Like Ockham, Luther distinguishes concrete substantive adjectives from their parallel abstract nouns, and bases arguments on the theory that concrete substantive adjectives signify the substance primarily and the quality inhering in it secondarily. This distinction works with the different ways that words signify things, accounting for the different ways that a concrete and abstract term signify. Here a nominalist distinction allows words to signify the same thing, but in different ways—the move that Luther identifies as central to the new theological language. Signifying things in different ways is related to the next point I take up, synonymous pairs of concrete and abstract terms.

3.5.3 Synonymous Concrete and Abstract Pairs

Besides pairs of concrete and abstract terms that signify different things, Ockham argues that other pairs of related concrete and abstract terms are synonyms. In Ockham’s thought “synonym” can be taken either broadly or narrowly. In the narrow sense, Ockham says that synonyms are terms which signify the same thing and are intended to signify the same thing by all who use them. According to the broad sense, synonyms are terms which signify the same thing in all ways without qualification. Specifically, in the broad sense there is no qualification tied to the intention of the speaker. Terms synonymous in a broad sense are synonyms whether the speaker intends them to be or not. When terms are
synonyms in the broad sense they signify the same thing in the same way, so that neither term signifies something different or signifies something in a different way than the other term.\textsuperscript{110} This point is important as Ockham modifies improper statements of authorities he wishes to reconcile with his views.

Ockham holds that sometimes an abstract noun and its corresponding concrete noun are synonyms. When analyzing concrete and abstract pairs that are not synonyms (those noted above), Ockham discusses pairs involving an adjective and a noun. When discussing pairs that are synonyms, Ockham discusses pairs of related concrete and abstract terms including two nouns. He gives examples of these synonymous pairs including “God/deity,” and “human being/humanity” ("Deus/deitas, homo/humanitas"). In Ockham’s interpretation, ancient philosophers intended to use such terms as synonyms; they were synonyms in the narrow sense. As synonyms these terms do not differ in signification, but signify the same thing in the same way. This quality allowed the ancients to use different synonymous terms in different places as ornamentations of speech. The ancients did not, Ockham claims, distinguish between abstract and concrete nouns in respect to their signification.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{110} “Large dicuntur illa synonyma quae simpliciter idem significant omnibus modis, ita quod nihil aliqiu modo significatur per unum quin eodem modo significetur per reliquum, quamvis non omnes utentes credant ipsa idem significare sed decepi aectiment aliqiu significari per unum quin non significetur per reliquum, sicut si aliqui aetimarent quod hoc nomen ‘Deus’ importaret unum totum et ‘deitas’ partem eius. Isto secundo modo intendo uti in isto capitulho, et in multis alis, hoc nome ‘synonyma.’” \textit{SL} I.6; p. 19.8–16.

\textsuperscript{111} Ockham argues that all names of substances and the abstract nouns derived from them fall into this mode of signifying. Yet he adds some precision by restricting this category of synonyms to terms that do not supposit for an accident, nor for a part of the whole, nor for any extrinsic thing completely different than the concrete individual. This reading of pairs of abstract and concrete substantive nouns dovetails with a nominalist conception of ontology in which a nature is identical to a concrete individual substance. “Et dico quod concretum et abstractum quandoque sunt synonyma, sicut secundum intentionem \textit{Philosophia} ista nomina sunt synonyma ‘Deus’ et ‘deitas’, ‘homo’ et ‘humanitas’, ‘animal-animalitas’, ‘equus’ et ‘equinitas’. Immo sicut apud \textit{antiquos philosophos} ista nomina sunt synonyma ‘calor-caliditas’, ‘frigus-
Understanding pairs of concrete and abstract nouns to be synonyms gives Ockham a tool for refining improper authoritative statements. The synonymy of these terms allows Ockham to substitute a concrete term for an abstract term in written or spoken language to preserve the truth of a statement that, read literally according to the force of the abstract or concrete term, would be false. In particular, since he claims that the ancients intended the terms to be used as synonyms, Ockham can read the ancients charitably by substituting an abstract for a concrete term to give the sense that they intended. By this exercise Ockham aims to express the thought of the ancients more clearly than they did in their own words. Ockham can easily justify switching one synonymous term for another because, as intended synonyms, the ancients thought that they signified the same thing in the same way. By providing a more accurate term, Ockham adds precision to what he considers to be ambiguity in older authors.

Luther also identifies pairs of synonymous concrete and abstract terms. Luther argues: “In philosophy they (‘homo’ and ‘humanitas’) are synonyms simply signifying the same thing.” Luther identifies this pair of nouns as synonyms, at least in philosophy. Luther defines synonyms as those terms that “signify the same thing simply in all

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frigiditas’, ita ista erunt synonyma apud eos ‘equus-equinitas’, ‘homo-humanitas’. Nec in talibus curabant distinguere inter nomina concreta et abstracta quantum ad significationem, quamvis unum illorum haberet plures syllabas et formam absumtorum primo modo dictorum et aliud non, sed magis formam concretorun primo modo dictorum. Nec tali diversitate talium nominum utebantur nisi causa ornatus loctionis vel aliqua alia causa accidentalis, sicut nec nominibus synonymis. Sub isto modo nominum concretorun et absumtorum, secundum intentionem Philosophi et Commentatoris comprehenduntur omnia nomina substantiarum concreta et abstracta ficta ab eis, quae nec pro accidente nec pro parte nec pro toto illius quod importatur per nomen concretum secundum formam nec pro aliqua re disparata ab eo supponunt, cuismodi secundum eos sunt ‘animalitas’, ‘equinitas’ et huiusmodi. Non enim animalitas stat pro aliquo acciendente animalis, nec pro parte nec pro aliquo toto cuius pars sit animal, nec pro re aliqua extrinseca totaliter ab animali distincta.” SL I.6; p. 19.16–20.45.

modes."\(^{113}\) As a result, “synonyms are predicated interchangeably of the same substance, for that is the nature of synonyms.”\(^{114}\) On each of these points Luther agrees with Ockham: like Ockham, Luther agrees that the pairs “homo” and “humanitas” and “Deus” and “divinitas” are synonyms in philosophy.\(^{115}\) Furthermore, Luther uses Ockham’s definition of a synonym as terms that signify the same thing in the same way.

Luther’s thought on synonymous pairs demonstrates that his theory of signification works with nominalist linguistic theories. Of particular interest for the question of how Luther understands signification in the new theological language is his adoption of Ockham’s thought on terms signifying in different ways. Ockham’s definition of synonyms (terms that signify the same thing in the same way) indicates that nominalist thought included a theory of the way that words signify. Different terms can signify the same thing in different ways. Accordingly, when Luther argues for a new language in which words signify the same thing in new and different ways, the claim fits neatly within Ockham’s theory of language. Luther’s new signification need not break with nominalist thought in order to achieve a new way for words to signify. Luther’s analysis of synonymous terms also fits within nominalist theories of signification as what a thing calls to mind.

Like Ockham, Luther substitutes synonymous concrete and abstract terms for one another to reconcile imprecise authoritative sayings. Luther acknowledges that Scripture and the fathers frequently fail to distinguish between concrete and abstract terms. Luther

\(^{113}\) “Synonyma dicuntur eo, quod simpliciter omnibus modis idem significant.” WA 39/2:115A.17–18.
\(^{114}\) “Synonyma praedicantur convertibiliter de eadem substantia, illa enim est natura synonymorum.” WA 39/2:115A.13–16.
\(^{115}\) “8. Licet homo et humanitas sint alias synonyma, sicut Deus et divinitas.” WA 39/2:93.15.
cites two examples. The first is found in the “Te Deum” (which Luther calls a “Symbolum” and therefore an authoritative text) and is also found frequently in Augustine, according to Luther. The “Te Deum” reads: “You have taken up a human being in order to liberate.” By Luther’s analysis, it ought to say “You have taken up humanity or a human nature (humanitatem seu humanum naturam) in order to liberate.” Luther’s second example is his critique of John 1:14 referenced above; I return to it here as an example of concrete and abstract terms. Although John 1:14 says “the Word was made flesh (caro),” it would have been more suitable “in our judgment” to say “the Word was incarnate or made of the flesh (carneum).” In both cases, Luther substitutes an abstract term for a concrete term. He makes the substitutions freely, since Luther holds that discrepancies in correctly using concrete and abstract terms should not be surprising. He observes that use often goes against the rule in all manner of things and arts. The switch between abstract and concrete is made easily when one holds that the authors intended the terms to be taken as synonyms, signifying the same thing in the same way. If later interpreters judge that the terms differ in signification, they can readily put the more precise term in place of the less precise term without violating the intention of the original author.

When substituting abstract terms for concrete terms in these examples, Luther follows the same principle Ockham put forth: many statements can be preserved when an

abstract is taken for a concrete term, or vice versa. Luther points explicitly to this as a traditional move between concrete and abstract. When addressing the “Te Deum” clause in the theses, Luther says that the concrete “homo” is to be taken as an abstract in the verse, so that it is understood as the abstract equivalent: “You have taken up a human nature (humanitas).” Luther does not see this interpretation of the phrase as an innovation, but claims that all understand the verse in the same way, interpreting the concrete “homo” to signify the abstract “humanitas.” Luther’s strategy for dealing with the passage from John 1 follows the same move. There Luther substitutes an abstract adjective “carneum” for the concrete noun “caro.” Later in the disputation Luther offers a more precise verbal rendering of the passage to be that Christ “assumed a human nature.” This later rendering shows that Luther intends to substitute an abstract term for a concrete one.

While Luther does not name Ockham as he makes these moves, Luther understands this strategy to be common and universal. This suggests that Luther’s conception of abstract and concrete is a distinction he is borrowing from his predecessors, and points to an understanding of signification that Luther retains from the nominalists. At the very least,

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122 “Verbum caro factum est. Caro autem est creatura. Ergo verbum, id est Deus, est factus creatura. R. Ioannes dicit de Christo, quod sit caro factus, hoc est assumpserit humanam naturam, cum alioqui sit Deus.” WA 39/2:119A.27–28. Ockham, as shown above, identified some pairs of adjectives and nouns where the adjective was the abstract term and the noun the concrete term; it seems that Luther is treating “caro/carneum” in this way.
Luther’s observation that the move is universal suggests that Luther does not see himself introducing a completely new theory of language.

Luther claims that the fathers should be tolerated when they confuse concrete and abstract terms for rhetorical effect. Luther holds that the authorities employed abstract and concrete terms imprecisely to achieve greater rhetorical flourish. He points to Augustine as one example. Augustine worked to inspire wonder at the mysterious by employing extravagant rhetoric. Understanding this striving for rhetorical force, one ought to allow such rhetorical flourishes to the fathers. At the same time, one should not employ such extravagant language among the weak who are easily offended. There is no harm, Luther insists, in telling him or others trained theologically that “Christ is thirst, humanity, captivity, creature.”

No harm is done because those trained in nominalist semantics know how to substitute concrete adjective for their equivalent abstract nouns when the nouns are imprecisely predicated of Christ. Luther’s argument here parallels Ockham’s, who argued that philosophers used abstract and concrete terms interchangeably for rhetorical effect. Luther identifies a similar imprecise use of concrete and abstract terms

for rhetorical effect in the church fathers. And, like Ockham, Luther interprets those sayings charitably by reducing them to a more precisely-worded formula. Luther makes no effort to justify the retention of such rhetorical flourish based on something like a medial theory of language working to establish faith or the category of promise; rather, his concern is to delineate more precisely what thing the words signify.

Luther’s handling of imprecise use of concrete and abstract terms is part of a broader nominalist project to add precision to theological language. Luther and the nominalists work with a more rigorous set of linguistic and semantic rules than they find in Scripture or the fathers. In the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* Luther analyzes Scripture and the fathers with semantic rules more rigorous than those employed by the authors. Like Ockham, Luther uses concrete and abstract terms as one tool to add precision to authoritative propositions about Christ. Where Ockham argued that philosophers intended the same thing with concrete and abstract terms, Luther thinks that church fathers used concrete and abstract terms interchangeably for rhetorical force. Luther’s project is, in part, to give the more precise formula by borrowing from Ockham’s theories about concrete and abstract terms and how to use the distinction to reconcile difficult passages.

Luther turns to the strategy of substituting a concrete term for an imprecise abstract term when dealing with the question of Christ as a creature. He seems to treat “creatura” as an abstract term in several instances. He includes “creatura” in a list of abstract terms that
may be said of Christ, so long as one understands the sense to mean the concrete terms.\textsuperscript{124} He suggests at one point that it would be better to say that Christ is “\textit{creatus},” a concrete adjective meaning “created person.”\textsuperscript{125} By changing the question to ask if Christ is a concrete “created person” rather than an abstract “creation,” Luther makes the question one about an attribute of Christ: does the person of Christ have the attribute of being created? That question depends further on the signification of “\textit{creatus},” and Luther offers a new definition to express the signification of the term when it is predicated of Christ.

3.6 Nominal Definitions

3.6.1 Luther’s New Definitions

Luther offers new definitions of terms when they are predicated of Christ. For instance, Luther offers a new definition of “\textit{creatura}” when it is predicated of Christ: “21. For ‘creature’ (‘\textit{creatura}’) when used in the old language and in other things signifies a thing separated from divinity in infinite ways. 22. When used in the new language [‘creature’] signifies a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways.”\textsuperscript{126} Similarly, Luther offers a new definition for “\textit{homo}” when it is predicated of Christ. As a concrete term, “\textit{homo}” signifies an independently existent human being and not something assumed in the old language. When predicated of Christ, the

\textsuperscript{124} “Apud infirmos non licet uti istis vocabulis, quod facile offenduntur, sed apud doctos et radicatos in illo articulo quocunque modo loquaris, nihil refert, ut mihi nihil nocet, si dicis: Christus est sitis, humanitas, captivitas, creatura.” WA 39/2:105A.16–19.

\textsuperscript{125} “13. Ita non verentur aliqui dicere: Christus est creatura, cum dicendum videatur: Christus est creatus.” WA 39/2:94.3–4.

existent human being is the divine person. Luther says: “*Homo* signifies differently in
‘Christus homo’; ‘Christus homo,’ that is, the divine person who has assumed a human
nature.” These definitions point to a new signification. But more than that, they follow a
particular pattern of definition. To recognize this pattern, I turn now to scholastic
categories of definitions. In particular, I turn to Ockham’s category of nominal definitions.

3.6.2 Ockham on Nominal and Real Definitions

Ockham distinguishes between real and nominal definitions. In scholastic thought
one could give two kinds of definitions for a term: “*quid rei*,” a real definition that defines
the thing, and “*quid nominis*,” a nominal definition that defines the term. A real definition
defines the metaphysical structure of a thing. For instance, Ockham gives the real definition
of “*homo*” as “rational animal,” a definition that lays out the metaphysical structure of a
human as the union of matter and the form of intellective soul. A nominal definition does
not lay out metaphysical structure, but defines the extension of a term, indicating what is
imported by a single term. In this way a nominal definition indicates the boundaries of
what a term may signify.

Ockham uses the distinction between nominal and real definitions to distinguish
between absolute and connotative terms. Absolute terms signify one thing without
signifying a relationship to another thing. Ockham holds that absolute terms do not have a

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127 “Homo autem non significat assumptam, sed existentem personam. Ergo aliter significat in Christo homo;
Christus homo, id est, persona divina, quae suscepit humanum naturam, persona enim non suscepit
personam.” WA 39/2:117B.35–118.4.

nominal definition, based on his conviction that a term that has a *quid nominis* has only one definition expressing the *quid nominis*. Since absolute terms have multiple expressions that would be equally valid ways of expressing the nominal definition, they fail to qualify as the kind of terms that may have a nominal definition. Ockham cites the example of the absolute term “angel.”\(^{129}\) He writes:

> And there is not a certain single definition expressing the *quid nominis* of that term, for one person explains what this term signifies by saying, “By ‘angel’ I understand a substance abstracted from matter”; another person says, “‘angel’ is an intellectual and incorruptible substance”; another person says, “‘angel’ is a simple substance, not joining with another.” And so one explains what this term signifies as well as the other. And yet a certain term placed in one expression signifies something that is not signified in the same way by the term in another expression. Therefore none of them is properly a definition expressing the *quid nominis*.\(^{130}\)

Ockham uses the various and equally valid (but not synonymous) nominal definitions for “angel” as evidence that “angel” does not have a proper nominal definition. Accordingly, Ockham categorizes “angel” as an absolute term since it can have equally valid but various nominal definitions. He lists several further examples of absolute terms without commenting further on them, including a couple of interest for Luther’s Christological disputations, such as “human being” and “whiteness” ("*homo*" and “*albedo*”).\(^{131}\) These

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\(^{129}\) The Latin term for “angel,” like the Greek word, literally means a “messenger.” Ockham grants that in some cases the term could be used to signify the function of delivering a message. But he is not concerned with that use of the term here.

\(^{130}\) “Et istius nominis non est aliqua una definitio exprimens quid nominis, nam unus explicat quid hoc nomen significat, sic dicendo ‘intelligo per angelum substantiam abstractam a materia’; alius sic ‘angelus est substantia intellectualis et incorruptibilis’; alius sic ‘angelus est substantia simplex, non componens cum alio’. Et ita bene explicat unus quid significat hoc nomen sicut alius. Et tamen aliquid terminus positus in una oratione significat aliquid quod non significatur eodem modo per terminum alterius orationis, et ideo nulla earum est proprie definitio exprimens quid nominis.” *SL* I.10; p. 36.24–32.

terms have only a real definition, a definition that expresses the metaphysical structure of the thing.

Ockham associates connotative terms with nominal definitions. A connotative term denotes or primarily signifies one thing while connoting or secondarily signifying another thing. The nominal definition of a connotative term contains both the thing denoted and the thing connoted by the term. The nominal definition of such a term is synonymous with the term and may be substituted for the term itself. As a synonym, the nominal definition must signify the same things in the same way. In the instance of a connotative term, the nominal definition must express the things signified and the relationship between those things. This relationship is often expressed by placing one thing in the nominative case and another thing in an oblique case. A definition that places things in different cases serves as a sign that the term is a connotative term. Definitions of this pattern are nominal definitions in Ockham’s analysis.

Nominal definitions are apparent in Ockham’s treatment of concrete adjectives. Ockham understands concrete adjectives as connotative terms. He therefore conceives of their definitions as nominal definitions. One example is the term “album” or “white thing.” Ockham gives the nominal definition of “album” as “something informed by whiteness” or “something having whiteness.” This definition has one thing in the nominative case, (“something”) and a second thing in an oblique case (“whiteness”). This nominal

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132 Adams, Ockham, 1:322–323.
133 “Nomen autem connotativum est illud quod significat aliquid primario et aliquid secundario. Et tale nomen proprie habet definitionem exprimentem quid nominis, et frequenter oportet ponere unum illius definitionis in recto et alia in obliquo. Sicut est de hoc nomine ‘album’, nam ‘album’ habet definitionem exprimentem quid nominis, in qua una dictio ponitur in recto et alia in obliquo. Unde si quaeras, quid significat hoc nomen ‘album’, dices quod illud idem quod ista oratio tota ‘aliquid informatum albedine’ vel ‘aliquid habens
definition does not identify the metaphysical structure of a thing by descending from genus to species. Instead, this and other nominal definitions signify different existent things while also signifying how they are related. In this case “album” signifies a particular relation between a substance and the quality of whiteness that inheres in that substance.

Ockham’s appeal to nominal definitions is closely tied to his ontological conviction that relations are not real things outside of the mind. He constructs nominal definitions to show this by reducing a connotative term to the absolute things signified by the term. He uses the definition to show that there is no ontological requirement for something beyond those absolute simple things to exist outside of the mind. The primary thing signified in a nominal definition points to a larger group than the term signifies, while the thing connoted by the term narrows down the signification. The terms signify that things in the world are ordered (that is, things that exist in the world are related before the term signifies the order) without committing to an ontologically real concept of “order” between things.134 One obtains a nominal definition when one cognizes multiple things at once and the relation between them, forming a connotative term with a nominal definition in the mind.135 For Ockham, the role of the author or speaker is crucial for defining connotative terms. The author recognizes a relation between things and devises a nominal definition that accurately reflects how the things are related. This function of connotative terms and nominal definitions will prove important for Luther’s Christology, as the function of a

albedinem’. Et patet quod una pars orationis istius ponitur in recto et alia in obliquo.” SL I.10; p. 36.38–47. See also Adams, Ockham, 1:320–323.


nominal definition to signify a real ordering in the world allows one to redefine a term in light of a new ordering between things. Luther identifies this kind of new ordering in the world in the person of Christ.

### 3.6.3 Nominal and Real Definitions in Luther

Luther offers new nominal definitions of terms in the new language. Luther’s definitions of “creature” in both the old and the new language match Ockham’s criteria of a nominal definition. In the old language Luther defines a “creature” as “a thing separated from divinity in infinite ways.” In the new language, Luther defines “creature” as “a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways.” In neither definition does Luther point to the metaphysical structure of the thing. Instead, he uses the term to signify a particular relation between a thing that has been made and the divine nature. The shift to a new language is a change in the nominal definition of “creature.” In the old language the relation is one of separation, while in the new language the relation is one of unity.

Luther’s definition of “homo” when predicated of Christ also fits Ockham’s concept of a nominal definition. Luther defines “homo” as “the divine person who has assumed a human nature.” Luther compares this to the term “albus,” (“white person”), which

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137 “Homo autem non significat assumptam, sed existentem personam. Ergo aliter significat in Christo homo; Christus homo, id est, persona divina, quae suscepit humanum naturam, persona enim non suscepit personam.” WA 39/2:117B.35–118.4.
signifies a person with the quality of whiteness. Luther’s definition of “homo” signifies a person and its relation to a human nature. Luther makes no attempt to offer a real definition by defining the species and genus of a human being. Instead, his definition of “homo” defines the kind of things that the word signifies; in this case a divine person in relation to an assumed human nature. His comparison to “white person” parallels Ockham’s thought on “white person” as a term with a nominal definition, suggesting that Luther depends on and uses Ockham’s thought on nominal definitions.

By offering a nominal definition for “homo,” Luther defines the term as a relative term. Yet, as noted above, Ockham identifies “homo” as an absolute term without a nominal definition. These differing kinds of definition, at first glance, point to a difference between Ockham and Luther. However, a closer look shows that Ockham and Luther make similar moves in their definitions for the term. Luther offers a new, nominal definition of “homo” when predicated of Christ; Ockham also changes the definition of “homo” to account for the person of Christ. A closer look at Ockham, Luther, and Biel’s treatment of “homo” in light of nominal definitions reveals them working with similar concepts of definitions to offer different definitions of “homo” to resolve Christological problems.


3.6.4 William Ockham on “homo”

Ockham changes his definition of “homo” in light of theological truth. Ockham claims that Aristotle thinks “homo” and “humanitas” are synonyms, but Ockham disagrees in light of theological truth. Ockham argues:

Although this [i.e., that the terms are synonyms] was Aristotle’s intention,140 nevertheless according to the truth of the theologians it should not be said to be so. For those terms "homo" and “humanitas” are not synonyms...Indeed, those names can supposit for distinct things and one term can signify or co-signify a certain thing that the other name in no way signifies.141

Ockham claims here that the signification of “homo” must be reconsidered in light of the truth of theologians. The truth of the theologians refers to truths about Christ’s person. While Ockham argues that “homo” supposits for and signifies the Son of God, “humanitas” does not supposit for or signify the Son of God, no more than “whiteness” ("albedo") signifies the Son of God. So it is right to say “the Son of God is homo” but wrong to say “the Son of God is humanitas.” Therefore the terms cannot be synonymous.142 When considering these terms, Ockham distinguishes between philosophy and theology to offer a new definition suited for use in the region of theology.

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140 That is, this is Ockham’s reading of what Aristotle meant. He is arguing against others, particularly John Duns Scotus, who read Aristotle differently.
142 “Nam hoc nomen ‘homo’ vere supponit pro Filio Dei, et ideo Filium Dei significat vel aliquo modo importat, hoc autem nomen ‘humanitas’ non supponit pro Filio Dei nec aliquo modo Filium Dei significat, non plus quam hoc nomen ‘albedo.’ Propter quod ista est concedenda ‘Filius Dei est homo’, haec autem falsa est ‘Filius Dei est humanitas.’ Et ita, cum non quidlibet quod per unum istorum importatur, eodem modo importetur per reliquum, non sunt synonyma.” SL I.7; p. 25.61–67.
Ockham uses nominal definitions to account for the difference between “homo” and “humanitas.” In Ockham’s view “humanitas” signifies “nothing beyond one nature composed of body and intellective soul. It does not connote that that nature is sustained by another suppositum, such as by the divine person, nor that it is not sustained.” Accordingly, “humanitas” cannot supposit for the Son of God, for the Son of God cannot be that nature. 

On the other hand, “homo” signifies a nature composed of body and intellective soul while connoting either that it is sustained by another suppositum or that it is not sustained by another suppositum. Accordingly, Ockham gives a nominal definition of “homo”: “a human being (homo) is a nature composed of body and intellective soul, sustained by no suppositum, or is some suppositum sustaining such a nature composed of body and intellective soul.” Because this definition of “homo” is disjunctive, Ockham’s definition can be verified of every human being. Ockham gives examples: Socrates is a human being in the sense that he is a nature composed of body and intellective soul not sustained by another suppositum.

The Son of God, however, is a human being in the second sense of the definition, as a suppositum sustaining a nature composed of body and intellective soul.

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143 “Hoc enim nomen ‘humanitas’ nihil significat nisi naturam unam compositam ex corpore et anima intellectiva, non connotando quod ista natura sustentetur ab aliquo supposito, puta a persona divina nec quod non sustentetur, et ideo semper pro illa natura supponit. Propter quod numquam potest supponere pro Filio Dei, cum Filius Dei non possit esse illa natura.” SL I.7; p. 25.70–75.

144 “Hoc autem nomen ‘homo’ significat illam naturam, dando intelligere illam naturam esse per se subsistentem et non sustentatam ab alio supposito vel esse sustentatam ab alio. Unde definitione exprimente quid nominis posset sic definiri, homo est natura composita ex corpore et anima intellectiva, a nullo supposito sustentata, vel est aliquod suppositum talem naturam compositam ex corpore et anima intellectiva sustentans. De quolibet enim homine ista descriptio pro altera parte verificatur. Nam haec est vera ‘Socrates est natura composita ex corpore et anima intellectiva, non sustentata ab alio supposito, quamvis haec sit falsa de virtute sermonis ‘Socrates est suppositum sustentans talem naturam.’” SL I.7; pp. 25.75–26.85.
The definitions that Ockham gives here for “homo” and “humanitas” are nominal definitions. These nominal definitions function to identify what kinds of things the terms can signify. Ockham, in light of theological truth, adjusts even the kind of definition he imposes on “homo.” In order to include the person of Christ, Ockham switches from a real to a nominal definition of the term.

The character of nominal definitions in Ockham’s thought allows them to be altered easily in light of new evidence. This ease of modification is evident from Ockham’s treatment of “homo” in light of theological truth. In this case, the new evidence is the unique person of Christ. In light of this theological truth Ockham constructs a disjunctive definition of “homo” that bridges the regions of philosophy and theology. A new definition is in order as the things considered in the region of theology change to include another person, the person of Christ. Once the things that “homo” can signify or supposit for include this person, a new nominal definition is required to include this unique person among those things that the term can pick out. The ease of modification accorded to nominal definitions makes this kind of definition a philosophical tool especially apt for the theological task of considering the unique person of Christ.

Ockham uses the capacity of a nominal definition to be changed in light of new evidence to read theological truths back into philosophical definitions. By offering a single disjunctive definition of “homo,” Ockham maintains a single definition that remains the same in theology and philosophy. Luther, as noted, posits a separate language in

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146 “Haec autem ‘Filius Dei est homo’ non est vera quia Filius Dei sit talis natura composita ex corpore et anima intellectiva, sed quia Filius Dei est suppositum sustentans talem naturam et terminans dependentiam eius.” SL I.7; p. 26.111–114.
philosophy and theology. Yet even as Luther departs from Ockham’s definition of “homo” by crafting a new definition for the term in theology, he uses the same philosophical concept of a nominal definition as a tool in theology to define the terms of a new theological language.

3.6.5 Gabriel Biel on “homo”

Gabriel Biel aims to provide a univocal definition of “homo” so that a single definition of the term may be predicated of Christ and other people. In light of Christ's person, Biel insists that “homo” and “humanitas” have different definitions. Biel writes that “‘homo’ signifies a suppositum subsisting in human nature, whether the suppositum is the same thing as human nature or not.” In this nominal definition “homo” primarily signifies a suppositum, and secondarily signifies the human nature in which the suppositum subsists. This nominal definition sets the boundaries of the things that the term can signify. Biel rejects definitions of “homo” such as “a composite of matter and rational form” or “a substance or animal composed of matter and rational soul” because of the Christological difficulties that would result. According to these definitions, there would be two persons in Christ. Biel thinks that these definitions fit “humanitas” rather than “homo,” as they convene to something that is not a person, namely the assumed human nature of Christ. Instead, Biel offers the real definition of “homo” as “rational animal,” which he argues convenes to all

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148 “Pro solutione autem non tamen quod ‘homo’ est concrectum praedicamenti substantiae hujus abstracti ‘humanitas’, non tantum voce, sed etiam significatione. Nam ‘homo’ significat supputum subsistens in natura humana, sive ipsum sit idem naturae humanae sive non.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 169, L.15–18.
people but not to anything else. Like Ockham, Biel offers definitions of terms with Christ in mind, and specifically offers a definition of “homo” so that the term can be predicated of Christ and other people. He turns to semantics to establish the similarity of Christ with all other people. Biel offers both a nominal and a real definition of the term.

Biel demonstrates how his nominal definition of “homo” can be predicated of Christ and other people. He argues that every suppositum subsisting in a human nature is truly and properly a homo. This definition fits not only traditional Christological accounts that see the person of Christ subsisting in human nature, but also ordinary people. Biel argues that in ordinary people, human nature left to itself is a homo since in these cases the human nature itself is a suppositum. With these arguments Biel accounts for a difference

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151 “Humanitas’ vero significat naturam humanam, a qua suppositum denominatur homo, quae realiter nihil aliud est quam compositum ex corpore seu materia at anima rationali, ut vult beatus Hieronymus in Explanacione fidei ad Damasum papam, sive tale compositum sit suppositum sive non. ... Tectio sequitur quod natura humana sibi derelicta est homo. Tals enim est suppositum et persona subsistens in natura humana. Subsistit enim in seipsa, eo quod non communicatur alteri aliquo quattuor modorum in definitione personae expressorum.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; pp. 169–170, L.21–24, 52–55. Biel lists these types of communication when discussing the definition of “person” in Christology. He is drawing here on Ockham, who lists “person” as a species of the genre “suppositum.” As such, “person” falls under the definition
between Christ and other people. Christ’s human nature does not self-supposit, but is
instead assumed by the person of the Word—the suppositum of Christ’s person. Despite
this distinction in the kind of suppositum, Biel holds that by his definition the same word
“homo” can be predicated of Christ and other people, for in all cases there is a suppositum
subsisting in human nature.

The cost of this univocal definition of “homo” is a number of logical difficulties. Biel
acknowledges that his definition of “homo” complicates predications and inferences. He
observes that according to his definition it is true to say that “a certain humanity is a homo”
and also true that “a certain humanity is not a homo.” Likewise, that “a certain homo is
humanity” and “a certain homo is not humanity.” The affirmative propositions are true of
human nature left to itself; the negative propositions are true of an assumed human nature
(that is, of Christ’s human nature). Likewise, it is false to say that “every humanity is a
homo” because the humanity of Christ is not a self-suppositing human nature.\textsuperscript{152} Despite
the difficulties, Biel rejects the objection that “homo” is used equivocally when predicated
of Christ. Biel thinks that this objection is based on an overly restrictive understanding of
univocal terms. A term can be used univocally, Biel argues, even when it signifies things of
different species. When univocal is taken in this strictest sense excluding any difference in
species, Biel thinks that there are many equivocations, and concludes that an overly

\textsuperscript{152} “Quarto sequitur quod hae sunt verae: ‘Aliqua humanitas est homo’, ‘Aliqua humanitas non est homo.’
Similiter earum conversae: ‘Aliquis homo est humanitas,’ ‘Aliquis homo non est humanitas.’ Affirmativae sunt
verae de humanitate sibi derelicta, negativae sunt verae de humanitate assumpta. Sicut et contrariae harum
subcontrariae sunt simul falsae, scilicet: ‘Omnis humanitas est homo’, ‘Nulla humanitas est homo.’ Etiam
cum suis conversis; quia earum contradictoriae sunt simul verae, ut dictum est statim.” Coll. dist. 7, qu. un.,
art. 3, dub. 1; p. 170, L.56–62.
restrictive view of univocity is untenable. Biel offers clarifications that acknowledge the difficulties arising from a univocal definition of “homo,” accepting his required restrictions as costs outweighed by the benefit of a univocal definition.

Luther judges Biel’s attempt at univocity differently. Biel argues that the logical problems arising from his definition of “homo” are invalid deductions. Luther works further to show how and why they are invalid. One element of Luther’s strategy is to offer a new definition of “homo” in theology. Luther objects to Biel’s efforts to achieve univocity by his definition of “homo” and offers a different solution to account for the claim that “Christ is a homo.” Luther’s solution is to offer a new theological definition of “homo.”

3.6.6 Luther on “homo” and “creatura”

Luther, like Ockham and Biel, offers a new definition of “homo” in light of Christ’s person. Seeking to avoid the equivocation he identifies in the definitions of Ockham and Biel, Luther posits two words with two definitions, one word in philosophy and another new word in theology. Luther offers definitions of “homo” and “humanitas” that are similar


or identical to those of the late medieval nominalists. Luther offers several philosophical definitions of “homo” in the Christological disputations, such as “a subsisting person,”155 “a person subsisting in itself,”156 or “corporeal substance subsisting in itself.”157 Alternatively, he identifies “homo” as a “sensitive animal” and more precisely a “rational animal.”158 Luther’s definitions align with Biel’s: both offer a real definition of “homo” as a “rational animal.” Luther’s nominal definitions focus on self-subsistence and in this respect parallel Biel’s efforts to define “homo” as a suppositum bearing a human nature. According to this conception of “homo,” Luther thinks that “homo” and “humanitas” are synonyms in philosophy.159 As a result, in philosophy there is no difference between “homo” and “humanitas” defined as the union of soul and body.160 On this point Luther reflects the thought of Ockham that in the case of people other than Christ there is no difference

158 This passage presents difficulties. Luther in the Disputation on the Sentence: “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14) replies to a respondent who claims that “homo” is predicated univocally of God. For this reason, the respondent argues, it ought also to be argued that God is a sensitive animal. No comment is made in the disputation to suggest why this respondent understands “homo” as “sensitive animal” rather than “rational animal.” In the Aristotelian scheme held by medieval theologians, “rational animal” is a sub-species of “sensitive animal.” Perhaps the use of the broader “sensitive animal” is intentional, to push the claim further; perhaps this is an error. In either case, Luther silently corrects the oddity. He grants that when the claim is made that God is man, one cannot deny that God is a sensitive animal. He immediately adds that the scholastics grant that Christ is a rational animal and homo, substituting the more precise “rational animal” in place of the broader “sensitive animal.” “Homo praedicatur univoce nomine et significacione de Deo. Ergo debet etiam de eo praedicari, quod sit animal sensitivum etc. M. L. Quando dico Deum hominem, non possum negare, quod et sit animal sensitivum; hic theologi scholastici conceyserunt, quod Christus esset animal rationale et homo. Distinxeunt autem homines, et significat aequivocum, ut, quando significat aliquem de genere humano extra incarnationem, significat personam per sese subsistentem. Haec est significatio philosophica.” WA 39/2:10C.21–29.
between “human being” and “humanity.” While differences arise in the precise formulations of definitions of “homo,” Ockham, Biel, and Luther think that in ordinary human beings, a person is a self-suppositing individual subsisting in a human nature.

Luther differs from his predecessors primarily by conceiving of “homo” as two different words. When “homo” is predicated of an ordinary person, Luther describes this as a philosophical signification, and the word as a philosophical word. When “homo” is predicated of Christ, Luther describes this as a new word in a new theological language. In theology “homo” signifies the Son of God who assumes humanity, so that “homo Christus” signifies the divine person who assumed a human nature. Theological signification of “homo” comes when the word is predicated of Christ. In that case “homo” becomes a new word (vocabulum) signifying a divine person sustaining our humanity, just as “albus (white person) signifies a person sustaining whiteness.” While Luther’s theological definition of “homo” differs from Biel’s definition of a “rational animal,” Luther follows Biel’s strategy of focusing the definition on the suppositum that sustains a human nature. Luther differs by restricting this definition to theology, that is, when the term is predicated of Christ. Unlike Ockham and Biel, Luther does not read the theological definition back into a single definition of “homo.”

161 “In theologia est talis differentia, quia homo significat personam, et Deus est persona. ... Et homo quando de Christo est personale verbum. ... Homo autem non significat assumptam, sed existentem personam. Ergo aliter significat in Christo homo; Christus homo, id est, persona divina, quae suscepit humanam naturam, persona enim non suscepit personam.” WA 39/2:117B.16–118A.1.
Luther’s account of “homo” here works within nomalist theories of signification. The traditional account of signification is most evident when Luther compares “homo” to “albus.” First, his analysis of “white person” adopts Ockham’s theory of concrete substance adjectives which primarily signify the substance and secondarily signify a quality inhering in the subject. Luther uses that model to illustrate the new signification of “homo” primarily signifying the substance (the person of Christ) and secondarily the human nature sustained by the substance. Second, Luther’s definitions of both “homo” and “albus” are nominal definitions, signifying the relationship of the primary and secondary significates of the terms. When seen from this medieval perspective, the definitions represent a careful delineation of the kind of relationship between Christ’s person and human nature that the term calls to mind. The comparison to “albus” brings the significative character of words to light. Luther defines “albus” as one that brings to mind a relationship between a person and an accident. Luther’s description and definition of the term correspond to Ockham’s thought on nominal definitions. Given the ease with which Ockham’s semantics allow new nominal definitions to be assigned to terms, Luther can easily adopt nominal definitions as a philosophical tool to craft his new theological language.

Luther’s adoption of nomalist thought on signification is also evident from his treatment of “humanitas” in theology. While Luther grants that “homo” and “humanitas” are synonyms in philosophy, he holds that they signify differently in theology; in this region they are not synonyms. In theology “homo” signifies human nature in the concrete, while
“humanitas” does not signify the person but the nature.\textsuperscript{163} Luther illustrates the difference between the terms by comparing them to “white” and “whiteness,” so that the “homo” sustains “our humanity” as a “white person signifies a person sustaining whiteness.”\textsuperscript{164} Luther’s insistence that homo and humanitas are not synonyms in theology aligns with Ockham’s thought. In his treatment of “homo” and “humanitas,” Luther’s new theological language retains a traditional theory of signification while using nominal definitions to define new theological words.

Luther’s new definition of “creature” assigns the term a new nominal definition. Luther defines “creature” in the old language as a thing separated from divinity, but in the new language as “a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways.”\textsuperscript{165} These definitions are not real definitions, since they do not descend via genus and species. Instead, they mark out the kind of things that the term “creature” calls to mind in philosophy and in theology. The definitions put one thing in the nominative case (here: “thing”) and another thing in an oblique case (here: “separated from God” or “conjoined to God”). By using a nominal definition, Luther can redefine the group of things picked out by the term in theology to include the human nature of Christ.

\textsuperscript{163} “Responsio: In philosophia sunt simpliciter eadem significantia synonyma, sed non in theologa, quia hic est unus homo, cui nullus est similis. Homo hic in concretis significat humanam naturam, quia est persona, sed humanitas non significat personam. Ergo differit in theologa et philosophia.” WA 39/2:115A.31–116A.7. And again: “In philosophia enim nulla est differentia inter hominem et animam et carnem coniunctas, sed in theologa est magna differentia.” WA 39/2:118A.1–3


Luther’s other examples of terms with new signification fit the pattern I have analyzed for “homo” and “creatura.” I cite more examples below; however, before analyzing them, I analyze the concept of connotative terms mentioned in passing above. For Ockham, terms like “creatura” are connotative terms, a category of relative terms with nominal definitions. As the concept of a connotative term is useful for reading Luther’s disputation, I introduce it here before analyzing the signification of other terms in the new language.

3.7 Connotative Terms

3.7.1 Ockham on Connotative Terms

Ockham draws a distinction between absolute and connotative terms. Ockham uses connotation to solve problems in philosophy and in theology, so that the concept plays a large role in his approach to both philosophy and theology.166 Here I survey and analyze how Ockham understands absolute and connotative terms, a distinction that he correlates to real and nominal definitions. Of great interest to Luther’s disputation is Ockham’s thought on how an understanding of connotative terms shows how words signify in different ways. I turn to Ockham’s theory as a lens to interpret Luther’s thought on new ways of signification.

In Ockham’s thought an absolute term has a single, primary signification. Absolute terms for Ockham do not signify one thing principally and another thing secondarily. Rather, absolute terms signify only primarily. One method that Ockham offers to identify absolute terms is to consider the definition of a term. In the definition of an absolute term

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166 Panaccio, Ockham on Concepts, 65.
there is no need to place one thing in the nominative case and another thing in an oblique case. For instance, the term “animal” signifies nothing other than cattle, donkeys, people, etc. The term does not signify one thing primarily with a second thing placed into an oblique case. That is, it does not have a nominal definition. Instead, absolute terms have real definitions that descend from genus to species.

Unlike an absolute term, a connotative term signifies one thing primarily and another thing secondarily. In Ockham’s thought a connotative term has a nominal definition that contains both of the things signified, one of them in the nominative case and the other in an oblique case. Ockham identifies concrete adjectives as connotative terms. For instance, “album” or “white thing” primarily signifies (denotes) the thing that is white and secondarily signifies (connotes) the whiteness inhering in the thing. Ockham argues that all such concrete adjective terms are connotative. Ockham categorizes all relative

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167 “Unde sciendum quod nominum quaedam sunt absoluta mere, quaedam sunt connotativa. Nomina mere absoluta sunt illa quae non significant aliquid principaliter et aliud vel idem secundario, sed quidquid significatur per illud nomen, aequo primo significatur, sicut patet de hoc nomine ‘animal’ quod non significat nisi boves, asinos et homines, et sic de aliis animalibus, et non significat unum primo et aliud secundario, ita quod oporteat aliquid significari in recto et aliud in obliquo, nec in definitione exprimente quid nominis oportet ponere talia distincta in diversis casibus vel aliquod verbum adiectivum.” SL I.10; p. 35.5–13.


169 Adams, Ockham, 1:319–323.

terms as connotative terms. This is the case because the definitions of relative terms always include "diverse terms signifying the same thing in different ways, or distinct things." Absolute terms have only primary signification, while connotative terms also have secondary signification as another way of calling a thing to mind.

Ockham includes a theory of different ways of signifying the same thing in his analysis of connotative terms. Ockham thinks that “diverse terms signify the same things in diverse ways.” In Ockham’s thought the diverse ways of signification include some terms that are absolute: they can be predicated of something without an oblique case being added to them. The term “human being” is such a term in the proposition “someone is a human being.” In this example “human being” can be predicated in the nominative without anything added to the predicate of the proposition. Terms like “human being” are absolute terms that do not signify something beyond the primary thing signified, in this case a certain human being. Other terms signify their significates in such a way that they can be verified only when another term is included in an oblique case. For instance, it is impossible that someone be a father unless he is the father of someone; it is impossible for something to be similar unless it is similar to something. The prepositional phrases “of someone” and “to something” are indicators in English of oblique cases in the predicates of

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172 “Huiusmodi etiam nomina sunt omnia nomina relativa, quia semper in sua definitione ponuntur diversa idem diversis modis, vel distincta, significantia, sicut patet de hoc nomine ‘simile.’” SL I.10; p. 37.59–61.
173 “Est autem ista opinio quod praeter res absolutas, scilicet substantias et qualities nulla res est imaginabilis, nec in actu nec in potentia. Verumtamen illas easdem res diversa nomina diversimode significant. Quia aliqua nomina sic sua significata significant quod absolute possunt de aliquo praedicari absque hoc quod addatur eis aliquis casus obliquus, sicut aliquis est homo, quamvis non sit alicuius homo vel alicui homo, et sic de aliis casibus obliquis.” SL I.49; pp. 154.23–155.29.
Latin propositions. Ockham identifies terms requiring an oblique case in predication as relative terms.\(^ {174} \) Depending on whether a term is absolute or relative, it may signify the same thing in different ways. Whether a term denotes or connotes a thing is identified by considering the kind of grammar needed to develop a definition of the term. Different terms may signify the same thing in different ways.

Ockham holds that people are free to invent a relative term when no suitable term exists for a given relation. Ockham defends this claim by pointing to Aristotle, who grants permission for people to invent a term when no term is available that accurately signifies a particular relation.\(^ {175} \) Ockham uses this to argue for a particular ontological position on relations: namely, that they are not real entities existing outside of the mind independent of the absolute things that are related.\(^ {176} \) Since nearly all relations exist only in the mind, they


\(^{175}\) Ockham argues that people cannot invent a real metaphysical relation, but can invent a term. Accordingly, when Aristotle grants the capacity to devise relatives to people, Ockham takes this as evidence to support the view that Aristotle thinks of relatives as terms, and not as real metaphysical entities. “Item, Philosophus in Praedicamentis ponit quod omnia relativa dicuntur ad convertentiam si convenienter assignentur. Ubi etiam ponit quod ubi deficiunt nobis nomina, licitum est fingere nomina ad quae alia relativa dicuntur. Ex istic arguo sic: nos non assignamus nisi nomina, sicut nec utimur nisi nominibus; cum igitur nos assignemus relativa, ipsa nomina erunt relativa. Praeterea, secundum intentionem Philosophi, nos fingimus relativa ad quae dicuntur alia; sed non fingimus nisi nomina; igitur ipsa nomina sunt relativa. Et s i dicas quod secundum Philosophum non fingimus relativa sed fingimus nomina relativorum; unde dicit Philosophus: ‘Aliquotiens et forte nomina fingere ncessesse est, si non fuerit nomen impositum ad quod convenienter assignetur.’ Igitur videtur quod possimus fingere nomen relativum et non ipsum relativum: Sed istud non vale ad intentionem Philosophi, quia ipse intendit quod fingimus ipsum relativum. Quando enim non est nomen relativum impositum ad significandum correspondens alteri correlative, tunc licitum est fingere nomen relativum.” Ockham, SL I.49; p. 157.81–97. Ockham’s point here is tied to his argument that Aristotle meant only terms when he spoke of relatives. Ockham makes this argument in Summa Logicae, I.49; pp. 153.1–159.143.

\(^{176}\) For an extensive discussion of Ockham’s view of relation, see Adams, Ockham, 1:215–276.
are particularly liable to new terms with new definitions. When the mind perceives a new relation between real absolute things, one is free to devise a new relative term to call to mind this new relation. That move is especially required when no term has been assigned to a given relation, making it necessary to define a new term to signify the way absolute things are related. Connotative terms with nominal definitions are invented with no difficulty, particularly in light of new evidence. Ockham’s concepts of relative terms, nominal definitions, and conventional signification give license to devise new terms where no suitable terms exist to signify a relation between two things. That license gives Luther space to create a new theological language when Christ is studied, a language consisting of new terms signifying the unique ways that things are related in the person of Christ.

3.7.2 Connotative Terms in Luther

Luther’s definitions of terms in the new language treat many terms as connotative terms. To return to examples cited above, Luther’s definition of “\textit{albus}” (‘white person’) reflects the definition of a connotative term. Luther says that “\textit{albus}’ (‘white person’) signifies a person sustaining whiteness (\textit{albedo}).”\textsuperscript{177} Luther’s analysis of the term matches Ockham’s view that it is a connotative term, an adjective that denotes or primarily signifies the subject (person) while connoting a certain quality (whiteness). Luther’s definition of “\textit{creatura}” also understands “creature” as a connotative term. Luther writes that in the old use of language, “\textit{creatura}” signifies a thing separated from divinity by infinite modes. When “\textit{creatura}” is spoken of Christ, however, the term signifies a thing conjoined

\textsuperscript{177} “\textit{...ut albus significat hominem sustentantem albedinem.” WA 39/2:10C.31–32.
inseparably with divinity. In this way, Luther writes, “creatura” signifies the same thing in a new and different way when spoken of Christ.\textsuperscript{178} According to Ockham’s theories, the new way of signifying is calling a new relation to mind. For most creatures, the relation connoted by the term is one of separation; for Christ, the relation connoted is union.\textsuperscript{179} By redefining the type of relationship signified by the connotative term “creature,” Luther can claim that Christ is created and also claim that Christ is God without signifying a separation between God and Christ. The new word calls to mind a new relation between God and a creature that exists in Christ before the new word is spoken.

Luther’s new connotative definitions work within the space Ockham gives to create new relative terms where none are extant. Luther makes “creatura” a new word by redefining its nominal definition to create a new relative term, a move Ockham allows when no term exists to signify a particular relationship. Luther’s new language works from the unique relationship between Christ and the creator to define a new term signifying that relationship. The term signifies the same thing, but in a different way. In the new language it signifies the same things: a creator and a created thing. But the term signifies these things differently as it connotes a different relationship between the thing and the creator.


\textsuperscript{179} Paul Hinlicky also describes Luther’s move here as ascribing different connotations to words that retain the same denotations. Hinlicky sees Luther as a nominalist, although he also argues that there are points where Luther’s thought does not qualify as nominalist. Hinlicky, “Luther’s Anti-Docetism,” 145, 162–163.
Similarly, Luther treats the term “mother” as a connotative term and assigns it a new signification in theology. In philosophy the word “mater” (“mother”) signifies an “impure woman,” while in theology it signifies a “woman who is pure and a virgin.” In theology the word “mother” signifies something different when it is used in a proposition about the virgin Mary. When predicated of Mary, the word “mater” still signifies a woman who has borne a child. The change when the word is spoken of Mary is only a change in regard to what is connoted about virginity. In this case Luther’s new word signifies the same relationship between mother and child, but the new and different way it signifies is a change in the relationship between mother and virginity signified by the term. Luther treats the term as a connotative term and offers a definition that calls to mind a new relationship between a mother and virginity, but says nothing about the term effecting that relationship.

Luther also speaks of different significations for the word “flesh” (“caro”). In 1 Corinthians 15:50, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (NRSV), Luther holds that “flesh” signifies flesh “born of woman and original sin. Christ is not such flesh.” Luther suggests that syllogisms built on different senses of “flesh” lead to error because of equivocation. That is, it is wrong to argue: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Christ inherits the kingdom of God. Therefore Christ is not flesh.” Luther rejects the

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syllogism because the term “flesh” takes on a new signification when the term is predicated of Christ. “Flesh” is taken for lustful vices in other contexts, but not when predicated of Christ. Accordingly, when “flesh” is predicated of Christ, it does not signify that Christ is flesh “born of...original sin” and therefore incapable of inheriting the kingdom of God. Though Luther does not offer a definition of what “flesh” signifies when predicated of Christ, presumably he means that Christ has a physical body but is free from sin. Luther’s identification of equivocation in this argument points to a traditional, scholastic sense of signification as calling to mind. Luther objects that the word “flesh” signifies different things in the major premise and in the conclusion of the syllogism, an objection which assumes that to signify is to call something to mind. The same word “flesh” may call different things to mind, depending on whether the word is predicated of Christ or of other people. Luther attends to the semantic properties of the term to resolve a Christological difficulty arising from the interpretation of scriptural passages.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the moves that Luther makes to build a new theological language through semantic theories of Ockham. I have discovered that Luther’s new language is built with tools borrowed from Ockham. Luther uses those tools to solve Christological difficulties related to semantics. One such difficulty is accounting for authoritative statements in the church fathers or Scripture that are not accurate. Luther

accounts for these by distinguishing between mental language and written and spoken languages. He appeals to the correct intended sense of an author to accept improper statements while amending them to add precision to spoken or written propositions. Luther uses Ockham’s prescribed strategy for handling these misstatements, appealing at times to further linguistic concepts like the relation of concrete and abstract terms. These moves occur within an understanding of signification as a term calling a thing to mind. They do not reflect a turn to effective language or performative speech.

Luther’s treatment of “verbum” in theology illustrates the significative character of the new theological language in Christology. Luther says that “verbum” becomes a “new and different word in theology and signifies a divine person.” Luther describes the change as a shift in what “verbum” signifies. Since the signification of “verbum” changes, the signification of the verse “the Word was made flesh” also changes. The verse does not signify “that a promise of God has been fulfilled.” Luther explicitly sets the incarnation apart from a divine promise, distinguishing the hypostatic union from a promise of God.

This passage is problematic for Oswald Bayer’s reading of Luther’s Christology that locates the hypostatic union within a divine promise. Instead, Luther treats the hypostatic union as a thing called to mind by the words used in John 1, rather than located within the promise.

Working within Ockham’s theory of signification, Luther has access to semantic tools useful for resolving Christological difficulties. When Luther argues for new theological words signifying the same thing in new ways, he is building a theological language with the

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semantic tools of late medieval nominalism and within a concept of the conventional signification of spoken and written language. Luther retains a distinction between words and things, and works from an understanding of things to define the terms that signify them. When no words exist to call to mind certain relations in the context of Christ’s person, Luther offers new words to signify the unique realities, often by changing the connotation of terms like “creature.” Luther’s move to provide new definitions of words follows the strategy of Ockham and Biel, who also redefine terms so that they are suitable for Christology. But, where Ockham and Biel read their new definitions back into philosophical terms, Luther takes a different approach. Rather than using theological significations to correct otherwise incomplete philosophical definitions, Luther leaves philosophical words in their own region and posits a different set of theological words. Luther assigns nominal definitions to many of these words, definitions that bring to mind relationships not signified by the philosophical use of the same word. In many instances he redefines the kind of relationship connoted by the term. He also works with concepts of abstract and relative terms to bring clarity to Christology. That is, Luther’s doctrine of the person of Christ uses significative language. Luther’s new theological words for Christology evolve out of nominalist thought on language and theology, retaining a nominalist concept of signification as calling a thing to mind rather than performative speech. This language suggests that Luther is interested in the person of Christ as a doctrine for its own sake, including what kind of metaphysical being this Christ is. I turn now to metaphysics and the communication of attributes in Luther’s Christological disputations.
Chapter 4
Metaphysics: The Communication of Attributes

4.1 Metaphysics in Luther?

The communication of attributes is the aspect of Christology that considers how the attributes of Christ’s two natures are related to the person of Christ and the natures. A theologian’s approach to the communication of attributes determines what things may be predicated of Christ’s person and natures. Luther addresses the communication of attributes in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*:

The communication of attributes ought to be heeded closely. By this a property of either nature is attributed in the person of Christ. Even if Christ is one and the same with the Father, nevertheless, because Christ is incarnate, has suffered, and been crucified for us, all things have been subjected to Christ by the Father. For the person is God and a human being. Insofar as the person is God, the person has not suffered because God is not possible. Insofar as the person is a human being, the person suffers. Nevertheless, since in one person God and a human being could not be separated, we ought to say that Christ—true God and a true human being—has suffered for us, and the entire person is said to have died for us. ... These two natures in Christ ought not to be separated, but united as far as possible, that the Son of God [or] God has suffered, been crucified, died and rose. Paul likewise says that they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.¹

Luther identifies problems associated with the communication of attributes. From an exegetical viewpoint, one problem is interpreting scriptural passages that speak of “the Lord of glory” being crucified. This passage appears to attribute suffering to God, whom theologians hold to be impassible. This points to the systematic problem of ascribing suffering to Christ while maintaining the impassibility of God. Another problem is keeping the two natures united while accounting for how the person of Christ can suffer. Luther points to the union of God and a human person even in the suffering of Christ. How an impassible God can be united to a suffering human being in one person is a systematic problem. How Luther addresses these problems is the question I consider in this chapter.

In particular, in this chapter I ask how metaphysics functions in Luther’s understanding of the communication of attributes. Luther frames the communication in metaphysical terms like “person” and “nature.” For instance, according to the communication of attributes Luther says: “It is true, since what the human person cries out, God also cries out. Moreover, it is impossible according to the divine nature that the Lord of glory be crucified, but it is possible according to the human nature. Yet because there is a unity of the person, that one is crucified is attributed also to the divine nature.” Luther here distinguishes what is possible according to each nature. He distinguishes Christ’s natures from the person, and makes an argument based on the unity of the person. He uses the metaphysical concepts to explain how the communication of an attribute occurs in

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2 1 Corinthians 2:8.
Christ. These observations lead to the question of how Luther understands and defines metaphysical concepts such as “person” and “nature” in Christology.

Scholars of a modern Luther interpret Luther’s approach to the communication of attributes as a rejection of substance metaphysics. Benjamin Gleede argues that Luther recovers the thought of John Damascene. John Damascene mediates to Luther an earlier, pre-Chalcedonian understanding of the communication of attributes. That understanding frees Luther from the strictures of substance metaphysics. Similarly, Marc Lienhard interprets Luther’s approach to the communication as a return to John Damascene. Luther intentionally ignores nominalist debates to recover John’s thought. Lienhard points to John’s concept of *perichoresis*, understood as a true participation of Christ’s natures in the properties of the other nature, as the central idea in Luther’s Christology. Since scholastic theologians, particularly William Ockham and Gabriel Biel, restrict the communication of Christ’s attributes from the natures to the person, Lienhard sees Luther’s idea that attributes are communicated between the natures as a radical departure from scholastic thought. From a slightly different perspective, Joar Haga distances Luther from the

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6 Lienhard, *Luther*, 22, 27.

scholastics by arguing that Luther equates the person of Christ with the communication of attributes and categorizes the person as an event, leaving scholastic metaphysics behind in favor of a modern account based on event rather than substance. These scholars concur that Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes leaves substance metaphysics behind in favor of a patristic concept of *perichoresis*. They agree that by positing communication between the natures of Christ Luther breaks radically with the scholastics. This argument builds on standard accounts that see the communication of attributes in scholastic thought as a communication only from Christ’s natures to Christ’ person. In this chapter I will challenge this account of scholastic Christology, as well as interpretations of a modern Luther based on this account.

New research suggests that the modern interpretation of Luther overlooks key elements of philosophical theology in his thought. David Luy has noted that these interpretations fail to account for the medieval distinction between concrete and abstract. By attending to this distinction, Luy argues persuasively that Luther ascribes suffering to the person of Christ but not to the divine nature. A lack of attention to metaphysics as understood by the late medievals is evident in the work of Dennis Ngien. Ngien interprets terms like “God” and “human being” as equivalent to Christ’s divine and human nature. He does not ask if these terms are correlated to the concrete person of Christ, but simply assumes that they are equated with the abstract natures of Christ.

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Ngien’s work focuses on the suffering of God in Luther’s thought. Since he equates “divine nature” with “God” as he interprets Luther, Ngien concludes that Luther’s claim that God must suffer means that the divine nature suffers. Ngien interprets the ascription of suffering to the divine nature in Luther’s Christology as a departure from scholastic Christology. While the scholastics understood the communication of attributes to extend only to Christ’s person, Luther expands the communication to the natures of Christ. Luther’s rhetoric complicates the issue: Ngien correctly observes that Luther holds that suffering is ascribed to Christ’s divine nature. However, Ngien does not ask the metaphysical question whether the term here is concrete or abstract, whether it signifies the concrete person of Christ or the abstract nature. That question was pivotal for late medieval theologians. Gabriel Biel, as I will show, gave a great deal of attention to that very question when considering the communication of attributes.

The significance of concrete and abstract points to the role of metaphysics in Luther’s Christology. I have considered the distinction between concrete and abstract terms in chapter three, and shown there how Luther distinguishes these terms. In this chapter I turn to the things signified by concrete and abstract terms, and ask if Luther is following nominalist approaches to the metaphysical concepts of concrete persons and abstract natures. The nominalists had much to say about how a metaphysical distinction between concrete and abstract functions in Christology, particularly as they address the

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12 Dennis Ngien, “Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther’s Understanding of the Communicatio Idiomatum,” The Heythrop Journal 45, no. 1 (January 2004): 54–68; see especially page 59.
14 Ngien, Luther’s Theology of the Cross, 215–218.
communication of attributes. Yet the distinction originates long before the scholastics. John Damascene’s Christology makes use of a clear distinction between Christ’s concrete person and abstract natures. John, as I will show, uses the distinction as he discusses the communication of attributes. Accordingly, the argument that Luther returns to John Damascene’s understanding of the communication of attributes cannot prove that Luther rejects substance metaphysics.

But can correlation between John Damascene and Luther prove that Luther rejects the Christology of the late medieval nominalists? Marc Lienhard argues that it does, yet fails to inquire carefully into the medieval reception of John Damascene and other patristic authors. Lienhard grants that Luther may have read patristic Christology through medieval authors such as Peter Lombard. But he does not consider how authors such as Peter Lombard were influenced by John Damascene, or how those authors shaped Luther’s reception of John by framing the Damascene’s arguments in their own works. Since the medievals knew John Damascene and commented on his thought, a more precise question is how Luther’s reception of John correlates to medieval receptions of Damascene.

In this chapter I work to locate Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes in its medieval context. This type of contextualization is critical for understanding Luther’s thought and his relation to the nominalists. I will show that Ockham and Biel make many of the same radical claims about Christ’s person that Luther does by the communication of attributes (such as the claim that God died or that a human being created the world). This correspondence suggests that Luther’s departure is not as radical as typically portrayed,

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and provides the occasion for a closer look at Luther and the scholastics on the communication of attributes. To consider the role of metaphysics in Luther’s Christology, in this chapter I outline the scholastic reception of John Damascene. I pay particular attention to an overlooked Christological question about the adoration of Christ, and consider the importance of this question for understanding the communication of attributes. Luther comments on the question in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, providing an excellent point of reference to compare Luther’s reception of John Damascene to Lombard’s and Biel’s reception. I attend to the metaphysical aspects of Luther’s Christology by focusing on his use of the communication of attributes. I compare Luther’s practice to the rules of Gabriel Biel for the communication of attributes. The philosophical tools discussed in previous chapters—such as suppositional logic and nominal definitions of terms—appear in Luther’s account of the communication of attributes as well. As a result, I consider the broader question of the place of philosophical tools in Luther’s Christology as I analyze Luther’s approach to the communication of attributes.

### 4.2 Hypostatic Agency and the Adoration of Christ

#### 4.2.1 Luther on the Adoration of Christ

Luther discusses the adoration due to Christ’s human nature in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*. The argument Luther responds to is: “No creature is to be adored. Christ is to be adored. Therefore Christ is not a creature.”¹⁶ Luther notes that

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this is one of Schwenckfeld’s arguments, and says that: “it fails in the communication of attributes. Human nature joined with divinity is adored; the human nature of Christ is adored. This is not false because it is inseparable from the divine nature. By the addition of the genitive ‘Christ’ the argument is resolved.”¹⁷ After framing the question as one about the communication of attributes and defining the question as the adoration of Christ’s human nature, Luther then points to the categories of adoration used by earlier theologians to address the problem:

The old theologians tormented themselves to resolve the question whether human nature is to be adored. They established three species [of adoration] according to which one may adore human nature: “Dulia,” when Peter, Paul, and all other saints are adored; “hyperdulia,” when the virgin Mary is adored—and there they included the human nature of Christ, since that is also called hyperdulia—and “latria,” when Christ is adored in relation to the divine nature. Christ clearly resolves the argument: whoever adores the human nature of Christ (since by phrasing it this way the union of the natures is signified) does not adore a creature excessively, but the very creator, because the basis is in the union.”¹⁸

Luther thinks that the communication of attributes resolves the question of what kind of adoration is due to Christ’s human nature. The human nature of Christ, united to the divine nature, participates in the adoration of the divine nature.

This passage provides an opportunity to analyze Luther’s approach to the communication of attributes. He points to earlier theologians who took up the question,

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showing a familiarity with their answers. Medieval theologians, as I will show in this section, approached the question as it was framed by John Damascene. John addressed the question by turning to metaphysics, working out detailed definitions of “person” and “nature” in order to determine the proper adoration to be given to Christ’s human nature. In order to analyze the place of metaphysics in Luther’s approach to this question—and the communication of attributes more broadly—it is necessary first to trace out John’s answer to the question. Then, I turn to the medieval reception of John Damascene on this question. By analyzing both of these, I provide a lens to look at Luther’s thought and trace out its continuity not only with John Damascene, but also with medieval authors. From that perspective the place of metaphysics in Luther’s approach to the communication of attributes can be addressed. The concept of perichoresis is central to this analysis. Marc Lienhard sees this as the central component of Luther’s Christology: Luther used John Damascene’s concept of perichoresis to develop a Christology different than the scholastic theologians. I attend to perichoresis throughout this analysis to test Lienhard’s argument.

4.2.2 John Damascene on the Adoration of Christ

John Damascene’s answer to the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature hinges on his understanding of the metaphysical concepts of “nature” and “person.” John systematizes and frames Eastern Christological debates from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the eighth century, centuries that saw debates over questions such as

19 Lienhard, Luther, 22–27.
monophysitism and monothelitism. In working through these debates, John provides definitions for the terms “person” (”hypostasis”) and “nature” (“physis”) that the Council of Chalcedon left undefined. John defines a “person” as a particular instantiation of an essence or nature, identifying “hypostasis” (”person”) with “atomon” (”individual”). He distinguishes the term “hypostasis,” a broad term which refers to any kind of individual (not limited to a human person), from terms that refer to what individuals have in common such as “nature.” In John’s ontology reality is primarily hypostatic, meaning that he thinks the basic unit of existence is an individual person. Natures, on the other hand, are concepts, since what individual hypostases have in common is only conceptual in John’s view. Natures in this view do not subsist in themselves. John defines “nature” (”physis”) as a being’s principle of motion, and equates the term with substance (ousia).

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20 In the centuries after Chalcedon, Eastern theologians worked to equate the hypostasis of the incarnation with the hypostasis of the second person of the Trinity. Andrew Louth, St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology, Oxford Early Christianity Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39, 47–48, 96–97. For a brief survey of these developments, see Charles C. Twombly, Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 48–53. For John as one bringing system out of these debates, see Twombly, Perichoresis and Personhood, 58.


22 Louth, St John Damascene, 52. Louth observes that John makes no effort to work out a concept of hypostasis as a rational individual being.

23 Louth, St John Damascene, 112–114.

24 Instead, natures depend upon hypostases for subsistence. According to John’s vocabulary a nature that is given subsistence by a hypostasis is described as “enhypostaton,” that is, hypostasized. Christ’s human nature is enhypostaton in the hypostasis of God the Word who assumed it. Apart from the hypostasis, Christ’s human nature, like other natures, has no existence. John writes: “In its proper sense ... the enhypostaton is either that which does not subsist in itself but is considered in hypostases, just as the human species, or human nature, that is, is not considered in its own hypostasis but in Peter and Paul and other human hypostases.” John of Damascus, Dialectica [Peri enhypostatou] 7–22, trans. in Saint John of Damascus, Writings, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 68–69, quoted in Twombly, Perichoresis, 68. See also DFO 53; pp. 197–199.

thought a nature gives an individual the principle (that is, the cause of and capacity for) its motion and repose. Since John holds that a nature is a common thing in contrast to an individual or person, he thinks that common things like nature or substance are predicated of persons and considered within a hypostasis. John’s understanding of Chalcedon is shaped by these definitions. Christ, in his thought, is one composite person out of two natures (“unam...hypostasim ex utrisque compositam”). While Christ’s human nature does not have its own proper idiom of being a person, it is hypostatic as the hypostasis of the Word assumes the human nature and gives the human nature individual existence in the

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26 “1. Communia et universalia praedicantur de subjectis sibi ipsis particularibus. Commune igitur substantia, [particulare vero hypostasis (id est persona)]. Particulare autem, non quoniam partem naturae habet, sed particulare numero ut atomum (id est individuum): numero enim et non natura differre dicuntur hypostases. Praedicatur autem substantia hypostaseos (id est de persona), quia unaquaque homoidon hypostaseon (id est earum quae sub eadem specie personarum) perfecta substantia est.” DFO 50.1; p.186. “Etsi enim non est natura anhypostatos (id est in non individuo), vel substantia aprosopos (id est impersonalis), — in hypostasibus enim et personis et substantia et natura consideratur, — sed non necesse eas, quae ad invicem unitae sunt, naturas secundum hypostasim, unamquamque propriam possidere hypostasim: possunt enim in unam concurrentes hypostasim, neque anhypostatoi (id est in non individuo) esse, neque propriam unamquamque habere hypostasim, sed unam et eandem utrasque. Eadem enim Verbi hypostasim, utrarumque naturarum hypostasis existens, neque anhypostaton (id est in non individuo) earum unam esse concedit, neque utique heterohypostatus (id est alterius hypostaseos) ab invicem esse permittit; neque quandoque quidem huius, quandoque autem illius, sed semper utrarumque indivisibilibet et inseparabiliter existit hypostasis: non secta et divisa, et partem quidem sui ipsius huius, partem autem huius distribuens, sed omnis huius et omnis illius in miser et holoscheros (id est totaliter) existens. Non enim idiosystatos (id est separabiliter) substituta est Dei Verbi caro, neque altera hypostasis generata est, praeter Dei Verbi hypostasim; sed in ipsa subsistens, enhypostatos (id est in individuo) magis et non secundum seipsam idiosystatos (id est separate consistens) hypostasis facta est. Ideo, neque, anhypostatos (id est in non individuo) est, neque alteram in trinitate infert hypostasim.” DFO 53; pp. 197–199.

27 “2. In Domino igitur nostro Iesu Christo, quia duas quidem naturas cognoscit, unam autem hypostasim ex utrisque compositam, quando quidem naturas respicimus, divinitatem et humanitatem vocamus; quando autem eam quae ex naturis compositam hypostasim, quandoque quidem ex utroque Christum nominamus, et Deum et hominem secundum idem, et Deum incarnatum; quandoque autem ex una partium Deum solum et Filium Dei, et hominem solum et Filium hominis; quandoque quidem ex excelsis solum, quandoque autem ex humilibus solum. Unus enim est qui et illud et hoc similiter existit, hoc quidem ens semper anetios (id est incausaliter) ex Patre, hoc autem factus postea propter philanthropian (id est amorem hominem).” DFO 48.2; p. 181. The “ex” here reflects the language of Cyril of Alexandria. John’s account is that “out of two natures” implies Chalcedon’s “in two natures,” and need not reflect a Monophysite Christology. See Louth, St John Damascene, 161.
person of Christ. The result is that Christ’s human nature is best considered within the person of Christ.

Within that person, John speaks of the *perichoresis* of the two natures. The word is usually translated as “interpenetration” or “coinherence,” and expresses the mutual indwelling of two things. In Christology, John uses *perichoresis* to mean that the divine nature penetrates and fills the human nature. The divine nature then gives the human nature its own *perichoresis* so that the human nature also penetrates the divine nature. Luther scholars, such as Marc Lienhard, point to John’s concept of *perichoresis* as a key to Luther’s Christology. Lienhard understands “*perichoresis*” as the mutual exchange of properties between the two natures of Christ. Yet John’s concept involves more. John’s understanding of the term includes clear metaphysical aspects. He incorporates the idea that the divine nature gives existence to the human nature, allowing the human nature to interpenetrate the divine nature. The human nature, according to John’s metaphysics, cannot exist or interpenetrate the divine nature without receiving subsistence from a *hypostasis*. John’s concept of *perichoresis* in Christology builds on his metaphysical ideas.

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28 Twombly traces John’s use of this term in treating the Trinity, the person of Christ, and salvation. Twombly’s study shows that John uses this term to express union while maintaining distinction within a union. Twombly, *Perichoresis*, 5–7.

29 “Propter hunc igitur tertium modum, praedicti duo modi dicuntur. Per unitionem enim ostenditur quod habet alterutrum ex subsistente ei harmonia et circumincessione. Propter unitionem enim quae est secundum hypostasim caro deificata dicitur, et Deus fieri et homotheos Verbo (id est simul Deus cum Verbo); et Deus Verbum incarnatus esse et homo fieri et creatura dicit et "ultimus" vocari; non ut duabus naturis transmutatis in unam naturam compositam: impossibile enim in una natura simul contraria naturalia fieri; sed ut duabus naturis secundum hypostasim unitis, et circumincessionem quae est ad invicem inconfusibilem et intransmutabilem habentibus. Circumincessio autem non ex carne, sed ex deitate facta est. Impossibile enim carinm circumincedere per deitatem; sed divina natura, cum semel circumincessisset per carnem, dedit et carn i ineffabilem circumincessionem quae est ad ipsam, quam utique unionem dicimus." *DFO* 91.6; pp. 343–344.

Yet, of greater importance for the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature, *perichoresis* is not the only basis for the communication of attributes in John’s thought.

For John, the divine and human natures of Christ have their own proper attributes that are communicated from the natures to the person and to the other nature. The *perichoresis* of Christ’s natures is one way that John argues for the communication of attributes between natures. The natures that co-inhere in Christ’s person share attributes in common because of their coinherence. But alongside *perichoresis*, John also bases the communication of attributes on two other principles: Christ’s personal union and theandric activity. John works to preserve the distinction between the natures in all three of these approaches to the communication of attributes. He does not want these approaches to muddy the metaphysics of the divine and human natures of Christ. The last argument John makes for the communication of attributes—an argument based on theandric activity—is key to understanding the communication of attributes in the scholastics and in Luther.

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31 “7. Propria sibi facit humana Verbum: ipsius enim sunt quae sanctae eius carnis sunt; et tradit carnii sua propria secundum retributionis modum, propter eam quae ad invicem partium circumincessionem, et eam quae secundum hypostasin unitonem. Et quoniam unus erat et idem, qui et divina et humana agebat in alterutra forma cum alterutrius communione, ideo utique et ‘Dominus gloriae’ crucifixus esse dicitur, et nimirum divina eius non patiente natura, et Filius hominis ante passionem in caelo esse in confessione duxit, ut ipse Dominus dixit. Unus enim erat et idem ’Dominus gloriae,’ qui natura et veritate Filius hominis, scilicet homo genitus; et eius et miracula et passiones cognoscimus, et si secundum aliud mirificatbat, et secundum aliud passiones ipse sustinebat. Scimus enim quemadmodum unam eius hypostasin, ita et naturarum substantialem differentiam servari. Qualiter autem servabitur differentia, non servatis hiis quae differentiam habent ad invicem? Differentia enim differentium est differentia. Igitur ratione quidem qua differunt ab invicem naturae Christi, id est ratione substantia, inquimus copulari ipsum extremis: secundum quidem deitate Patri et Spiritui, secundum autem humanitatem et matris et nobis. Consupstantialis est enim idem, secundum quidem deitate Patri et Spiritui, secundum humanitatem autem et matris et omnibus hominibus. Qua autem ratione copulantur naturae eius, differre ipsum inquimus et a Patre et Spiritu, et matre et reliquis hominibus; copulantur enim naturae eius hypostasi (id est persona), unam hypostasin compositam habentes, secundum quam differunt et a Patre et Spiritu, et matre et nobis.” *DFO* 47.7; pp. 178–179.
John's metaphysical views on hypostasis and physis underlie his conception that Christ's theandric activity is a basis for the communication of attributes. For John, it is improper to speak of Christ's natures as the agents of actions. John will not permit Christ's actions to be neatly divided into divine and human actions, as if the divine nature did divine works and the human nature did human works. John understands this conception of Christ's natures as agents to be Nestorian. Instead, John understands the agent of Christ's actions to be the hypostasis. Christ—the hypostasis—does divine and human actions in both natures and in communion with both. For John (and for the other theologians considered here), these actions are counted as attributes of either nature. In John's view Christ did not do human things in a human way, for Christ was not only a human being, but also God. Nor did Christ do divine things divinely, for Christ was not God alone, but also a human being. Instead, Christ's theandric activity is a term expressing the idea that after the

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32 Leo takes the opposite view. In his Tome, Leo divides Christ's activities between his natures so that one of Christ's natures is seen as the agent of the action. Leo writes "each form does what is proper to it in communion with the other, namely the Word working what is of the Word, and the flesh carrying out what is of the flesh." These two views remain relevant to questions of Christology in the West through at least the sixteenth century, and inquiring whether these views inform debates between Zwingli and Luther and later between Reformed and Lutheran theologians are questions for further research. Leo writes: "agit enim utraque forma cum alterius communione quod proprium est, verbo scilicet operante quod verbi est, et carne exequenti quod carnis est." Quoted in Louth, St John Damascene, 172n188. Louth sees this as difficult to reconcile with John's thought. For an alternative interpretation, see Twombly, Perichoresis, 78.

33 "Et quoniam unus erat et idem, qui et divina et humana agebat in alterutra forma cum alterutrius communione, ideo utique et 'Dominus gloriae' crucifixus esse dicitur, et nimirum divina eius non patiente natura, et Filius hominis ante passionem in caelo esse in confessione ductus est, ut ipse Dominus dixit. Unus enim erat et idem 'Dominus gloriae,' qui natura et veritate Filius hominis, scilicet homo genus; et eius et miracula et passiones cognoscimus, et si secundum aliquid mirificabat, et secundum aliquid passiones ipse sustinebat." DFO 47.7; p. 179. John gives the example in this passage that "the 'Lord of glory' is said to be crucified," yet his divine nature did not suffer. This can be said because "the 'Lord of glory' is one and the same, who by nature and in truth is the Son of man, namely, born a man." The one person of Christ, named here with a divine name, suffers with the divine nature in communion with the human nature. Luther, as noted, brings up this passage from Corinthians to illustrate the communication of attributes.

34 "20. Igitur proprias quidem glorificationes deitas corpori tradit, ipsa autem carnis passionum permanet expers. Non enim quemadmodum per carnem deitas Verbi agebat, ita et per deitatem caro eius passa est. Instrumentum enim caro deitatis extitit. Et si igitur ex summa conceptione nihil divisum fuit alterutrius
incarnation the person of Christ acts as both God and a human being. Christ does not act merely as one or the other kind of being. The metaphysical status of Christ as one person with two natures underlies everything that the person of Christ does.

While John ascribes the principle of motion to a nature, he distinguishes this capacity from the actual doing. Each of Christ’s natures provides Christ with the capacity to do certain things. Neither of those natures, however, is the agent of actual works. John identifies the *hypostasis*, the concrete individual, as the agent which does actions rather than one of Christ’s natures.35 While human nature possesses the capacity (*operatio*) to will and to act, it is only a *hypostasis* (such as Peter, or critically, Christ) who does the willing and acting. Accordingly, in Christ what wills and acts is the *hypostasis*, rather than one of the natures.36 While Christ thirsts and drinks as a human, the *hypostasis* does these things,
not the human nature. What applies to the actions of a person also apply to a person’s passions—by which I mean the things done to a person. John thinks that things are done to a hypostasis and not a nature, so that for him a person is the proper patient of those actions. John uses this understanding that passions are properly received by persons (not natures) in his discussion of specific things that happen to Christ, so that it is the person of Christ, not just Christ’s human nature, that is born or is crucified. I call John’s view that a person (and not a nature) is the proper agent and patient of actions “hypostatic agency.” In
Christology this view holds that Christ's person is the proper agent of works and patient of actions done to Christ. This view of the proper patient of actions proves pivotal in John's account of the adoration of Christ.

John uses the metaphysical concepts sketched out above to resolve the question of whether Christ's human nature is to be adored. John approaches the question by understanding “being adored” as a passion and therefore something properly done to a person rather than a nature. John's central argument addressing the question brings the idea of hypostatic agency to bear. John writes:

“One therefore is Christ, perfect God and perfect human being; whom we adore with the Father and the Spirit, by one adoration with his uncontaminated flesh, not calling the flesh inadorable. For it [flesh] is adored in the one person of the Word which has been made the flesh of Christ’s hypostasis; not producing veneration of the creature: for we do not adore [it] as bare flesh, but as [flesh] united to the divinity, and as into a single person and single hypostasis of God the Word, the two natures having been brought together. I fear to touch the coal on account of the fire united to the wood. I adore Christ synamphoteron (that is, both at the same time) on account of the divinity united to the flesh.39

John begins this passage by pointing to Christ's singularity: we adore one Christ with one adoration. The one Christ we adore is a hypostasis, not a nature. Since a nature exists only in a hypostasis, it is incorrect to think of the adoration of Christ as adoration of the divine nature apart from the hypostasis. Because this hypostasis possesses a human nature (here

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named “flesh”), Christ’s human nature is also adored in the \textit{hypostasis}. By approaching the question this way, John uses the idea of hypostatic agency to ground the communication of an attribute. The adoration due to the divine nature is communicated to the human nature as that adoration is received by the singular person of Christ.

John grants that Christ’s flesh according to its nature is inadorable as a creature. But this claim can only be made when one divides by “subtle understandings” what is seen from what is understood. John suggests with this point that the distinction between nature and person is a subtle difference of understanding. Outside of the mind, natures exist only in hypostases for John. To think of Christ’s flesh only insofar as it is a nature is to conceptualize the human nature of Christ apart from its substantiation in the person of Christ. When a person does that mental exercise, then John grants that Christ’s flesh is inadorable. But John points out that Christ’s flesh does not stand alone in actuality: it has been united to God the Word and on account of and in the Word the flesh is adored.\footnote{“Filium Dei cum Patre et Sancto Spiritu adoramus, incorporeum quidem ante inhumanationem, nunc autem eundem incarnatum et factum hominem, cum existendo Deum. Caro itaque eius, secundum eius quidem naturam, si dividis subtilibus intelligentiis quod videtur ab eo quod intelligitur, inadorabilis est ut creatura; unita autem Deo Verbo, propter ipsum et in ipso, adoratur.” \textit{DFO} 76; p. 279.}

Standing behind this argument is the idea of hypostatic agency. Christ’s human nature is not adored as a mental abstraction, but as it exists in the \textit{hypostasis} of the Word. When Christ’s single \textit{hypostasis} is adored, then the human nature given existence in the \textit{hypostasis} participates in the reception of adoration.

John illustrates the adoration of the natures possessed by Christ’s \textit{hypostasis} with two pictures. One is the picture of a burning coal, essentially the same as the more common
Christological illustration of glowing iron. Wood that is not joined to fire is accessible to the touch, while a glowing coal is inaccessible. The wood is like Christ’s human nature. As wood is tangible according to its nature separate from fire, so the flesh of Christ is inadorable in its own nature separate from the divine nature. However, Christ’s flesh is adored in the incarnate Word of God so that we do not adore bare flesh, but the flesh of God, just as the wood of a glowing coal is heated by the fire and shares in the fire’s inaccessibility. The second picture is the image of a king and his purple garment. The king is adored whether clothed in purple or not. The purple is adored only when it is worn by the king. Here the divine nature is like the king, adored according to the attributes proper to the divine nature subsisting in the person of Christ. The human nature is compared to the purple to illustrate that when the human nature is considered apart from the Word, it is as inadorable as the king’s garments hanging in a closet. But when the purple is worn by the king it is adored in the single adoration given to the king, just as the human nature participates in the single adoration given to Christ’s hypostasis. The first picture of the burning wood could illustrate perichoresis or hypostatic agency. If the picture illustrates hypostatic agency, then it shows that one touches not just the wood or just the fire, but the hypostasis of the burning coal. However, the picture of the king and his purple cannot function to illustrate perichoresis since the king and his purple do not mutually indwell in one another. Rather, this picture

41 “Quo enim modo rex et nudus adoratur et indutus, et purpura ut nuda quidem purpura et conculcatur et proicitur, regale autem facta indumentum honoratur et glorificatur, et si quis hanc perforaverit, morte plerumque condemnatur; sicut autem et lignum nudum non est tactui inaccessibile, igni autem connexum et carbo factum, non propter seipsum, sed propter copulatum ignem inaccessibile fit, et non ligni natura existit inaccessibilis, sed carbo, scilicet ignitum lignum; ita caro secundum sui ipsius quidem naturam non est adorabilis, adoratur autem in incarnato Deo Verbo, non propter seipsam, sed propter unitum ei secundum hypostasis Deum Verbum; et non aimus quoniam carnem adoramus nudam, sed carnem Dei, scilicet incarnatum Deum.” DFO 76; pp. 279–280.
illustrates John’s concept of hypostatic agency. The adoration given to the one person of the king is given also to the purple he wears. The illustration shows that John uses hypostatic agency to argue that Christ’s human nature is adored.

4.2.3 Lombard on the Adoration of Christ’s Human Nature

The scholastics, from the time of Peter Lombard, knew and used John Damascene’s writing. John’s thought was not rejected by the scholastic theologians as incorrect, but adapted and incorporated into their work. They made use of John’s metaphysical concepts of “person” and “nature” to bring clarity to Christological terms. For instance, Peter turns to John’s metaphysical concepts, particularly hypostatic agency, when considering what assumed what in the incarnation. Rather than a person taking on a person, Peter concludes that it is safest to say that a person took on a nature. The most precise way of understanding this, Peter writes, is that “it was specifically in the hypostasis of the Son, not jointly in the three persons, that divine nature united the human one to itself.” As proof, Peter cites John Damascene, “who clearly asserts that the whole divine nature became incarnate in one of the hypostases.” Peter cites John extensively as an authority whose

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43 This claim does not, Peter argues, exclude the divine nature from taking on a human nature. Instead, it excludes two persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit, from taking on a nature. Lombard, On the Incarnation of the Word, Book 3, dist. 5, ch. 1.1–2; pp. 17–18. Peter’s writing on the incarnation shows a distinction between “human being” and “humanity,” despite passages where Peter conflates the terms. Peter’s thought on “homo” and “humanitas” allows that “homo” may be used as a general term for all humanity, an idea he gets from Gilbert of Poitiers, so that it may be said that Christ assumes a “homo” as well as “humana natura.” However, when pushed, he denies that the humanity of Christ is a human being and instead maintains that it is a nature. Marcia L. Colish, “Gilbert, the Early Porretans, and Peter Lombard,” in Studies in Scholasticism (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2006), 229–250; Colish, Lombard, 1:420–424.
44 Lombard, On the Incarnation of the Word, Book 3, dist. 5, ch. 1.11; p. 2.
voice is key to settling theological questions. Peter specifically applies John's notion of hypostatic agency to conclude that the hypostasis of the second person of the Trinity does what is proper to a person. On the question of the incarnation, that metaphysical point leads to the conclusion that Christ's hypostasis is the agent who takes on a human nature.

In the Sentences, Peter adopts John's thought on the adoration of Christ's human nature. He frames the question differently than John does, introducing concepts of latria and dulia not found in John's treatment. Peter asks what adoration is due to Christ's humanity, whether the flesh and soul of Christ are to be adored by one and the same latria as the Word. He defines latria as the service or adoration due to the creator alone. Peter uses this definition to clarify the problem behind the question: since the soul or flesh of Christ is a creature, if it received latria then that which is due to the creator alone would be extended to a creature. That adoration would be idolatry. In contrast to latria, dulia is the honor due to a saint. The technical terms of dulia and latria bring to a fine point the question of whether the adoration due to God alone is also given to Christ's human nature.

Peter summarizes two schools of thought on this question. He notes that some theologians answer the question by saying that dulia is due to Christ's human nature. The

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46 The question was current and charged in the twelfth century. Peter was attacked for having a heretical view on this point. Colish, Lombard, 1:448. Peter had addressed the question previously while writing a gloss on Psalm 98:5. In this earlier work Peter determines that the human nature of Christ is to be adored with dulia, that is, veneration, or the honor given to created things as distinguished from the worship due to God, that is, latria. Colish, Lombard, 1:175–176. A critic of Peter’s Christology, Gerhoch of Reichersberg, wrote letters to his bishop and the pope complaining that the Lombard was wrong in thinking that Christ’s humanity was due dulia rather than latria. Gerhoch, apparently, did not keep up with Lombard’s later thought in the Sentences, where Peter reverses his earlier position and follows John’s thought that Christ’s human nature is due latria. When Gerhoch’s bishop, Eberhard of Bamberg, pointed out the change in Lombard’s position, Gerhoch dropped his complaints. Colish, Lombard, 1:427–428.

47 Lombard, On the Incarnation of the Word, Book 3, dist. 9, ch. 1.1; p. 39.
other school of thought, following John Damascene, thinks that Christ’s humanity is adored in one adoration with the Word. This adoration is not idolatry, since the humanity is adored with the divine person; or, in John’s terms, the creature is worshipped as one worships the creator in Christ’s humanity. John’s quotation about serving the humanity in the single person of Christ features centrally in Peter’s argument, along with the illustration of the glowing coal. Peter does not include the picture of the king and his purple. Peter adopts this position as his own, so that he aligns his view of the adoration of Christ’s human nature with the view of John Damascene. Peter therefore agrees with John’s concept of hypostatic agency and its relevance to the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature.

Peter’s answer to the type of adoration due to Christ’s human nature results in the communication of one attribute—receiving adoration—from Christ’s divinity to the humanity through the mechanism of hypostatic agency. Peter endorses this position and this instance of an attribute communicated from the divinity to the humanity of Christ through the one person of Christ. Since this endorsement appears in the Sentences, Peter’s view that an attribute is communicated between Christ’s natures would have been familiar to all medieval theologians who studied and commented on the Sentences. This communication between the natures of Christ in Peter means that at least one strand of scholastic thought allows for a communication from Christ’s divine to human nature, and

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49 For medieval reception and use of the Sentences, see Philipp W. Rosemann, The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard’s Sentences, Rethinking the Middle Ages (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007).
not merely from the natures to the person of Christ. Gabriel Biel, as I show next, was familiar with this position, so that Luther had ready access to the idea.

4.2.4 Biel on the Adoration of Christ’s Human Nature

Luther, being familiar with Biel’s Christology, would have known how Biel used metaphysical concepts to address Christological problems. While John Damascene’s thought remained known and used at the end of the medieval period, the metaphysical concepts used in Christology were altered between the beginning and end of medieval theology. After the twelfth century (that is, after the time of Peter Lombard), theologians inherited a larger vocabulary of terms from the reception of Aristotle in the West.50 Key concepts in Christology were refined by scholastic theologians in conversation with Aristotle, and they employed these refined concepts in their treatments of Christ. These refined metaphysical definitions are crucial to understanding Biel’s thought on the communication of attributes and feature prominently in his discussion of the adoration of Christ’s human nature.

Biel, following William Ockham, defines “person” as a species of the genre “supposit.” Biel uses Ockham’s definition of “supposit” in metaphysics as “a complete being, not constituting several ones, not designed to inhere, nor to be sustained by another.” “Person” as a species of supposit signifies an intellectual nature while connoting a negation of dependence. By dependence, Biel means dependence for existence such as a part has when depending on the whole, or as a form has when depending on its subject. This

50 Colish, Lombard, 1:470.
definition of “person” excludes any essential part (matter or form) as well as any integral part (a part of the whole such as a hand or a foot). Biel notes that the last exclusion, “not designed...to be sustained by another” is included in the definition to distinguish Christ’s human nature from a person. By defining the person of Christ in metaphysical terms as a supposit, Biel lays the groundwork for addressing the communication of attributes.

Biel thinks it crucial to distinguish between Christ’s person and human nature. As it is used in Christology, Biel defines “nature” as a certain positive entity that is not formally non-dependent. In other words, a nature does not necessarily exist independently. Human nature is the composite of matter and form that may depend on another as a supposit, as in the Word, or subsist in itself, as in Socrates or Plato. Even when a nature subsists in itself it is not formally a person, for it could potentially depend on another supposit. Biel gains this flexibility by arguing that independence is not part of the formal definition of “nature.”

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51 The difference between person and nature is the negation of dependence. That is, the term “person” adds nothing to an intellectual nature, but only signifies a mental act that divides that nature from any dependence and dependent predicates. Biel compares “person” to privative terms like blind, poor, or dark, which add nothing to the subject, but only signify an absence of sight, wealth, or light. “Natura est res aliqua positiva habens esse reale, non tantum esse objectivum in anima. ... Est autem ‘persona’ terminus privativus supponens pro natura intellectuali, connotans negationem quadruplicis communicabilitatis seu ininitiitiae, scilicet qua pars communicatur seu innititur toti, constituentes constituto, forma subjecto, sustentificatum sustentificanti. ... Ex quibus colligitur haec definitio personae secundum Occam I dist. 23 et q. I sui tertii, et tactum fuit supra II dist. 3 q. I: »Persona est suppositum intellectuale.« Vel, explicando nomen suppositi: »est ens completum, non constituentes aliquod unum, nec natum inhaerere, nec ab alio sustentatum.« Per ly ‘ens completum’ excluditur omne ens partiale, sive sit pars integralis sive essentialis. ... Dicitur »non constituentes aliquod unum«; per hoc excluditur essentia divina, similiter et proprietates relative, ut paternitas, filio, spiratio, etiam constitutum ex essentia et spiratione activa, quorum neutrum est formaliter persona, quamvis quodlibet horum sit ens completum. Dicitur »nec natum inhaerere«; per hoc excluditur omnis forma tam substantialis quam accidentalis, tam coniuncta quam separata. Dicitur »nec ab alio sustentatur« propter naturam humanam in Christo. Coll. III, dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 1, not. 1, p. 5–6, B.6–C.24. See Biel’s discussion of the entire question for more details.

52 “Quantum ad primum notandum quod differentia est inter naturam et personam. Et licet ‘natura’ multis modis accipitur, tamen in proposito, ut distinguitur contra personam, accipitur pro qualibet entitate positiva, quae non est formaliter incommunicabilis quadruplici incommunicabilitate, de qua dictum est q. 1 dist. 2. — Persona vero est, quae ibidem definita est.” Coll. III, dist. 5, qu. un., art. 1, not. 1; pp. 128–129, A.5–10.
When Biel applies these definitions to Christology, he concludes that Christ can have a human nature that is formally like any other human nature. The only difference is an accidental one: it happens that Christ's human nature depends on the divine person for existence while other human natures subsist independently. Biel aligns the name Christ with the supposit or person. “Christ” designates the divine supposit (the complete being who is the second person of the Trinity) subsisting in two natures. By defining metaphysical concepts carefully and aligning them with terms and names for Christ, Biel uses philosophical tools to address theological questions.

In his commentary on the Sentences Biel chooses to comment on the adoration of Christ’s human nature. Addressing this question in his commentary on the Sentences shows that the question is important to Biel, since by the late Middle Ages commentators did not write exhaustive commentaries on the Sentences. Instead, they worked selectively on questions of interest. Biel's metaphysical conceptions of supposit and nature underlie his treatment of the question of the proper adoration due to Christ’s human nature. He considers the question from the standpoint of the communication of attributes. In order to clarify the question Biel defines three species of adoration: latria, dulia, and hyperdulia.

53 “Pro cuius solutione duo premitto preambula. Primum quod nomen christus nominat suppositum verbi divinum subsistens in duabus naturis, divina scilicet et humana; unde Damascenus, lib. 3:2: Hoc nomen ‘christus’ persone dicimus, non monotropos (id est uno modo) dictum, sed duarum naturarum esse significativum scilicet divinitatis et humanitatis.” Exp., lect. 42; 2:137N. While the definitions of nature and person have changed significantly from John Damascene and Peter Lombard, important parallels remain. This suggests that the Chalcedonian logic was a powerful tool in shaping theology through the period surveyed here. Even as definitions of person and nature shifted, the distinction between them remained crucial and was conceptualized along similar lines.
55 Biel takes this question up in both his Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum and his Canonis Misse Expositio. In the Collectorium he makes explicit reference to the longer treatment of the question in the
Latria is the adoration due to the creator alone. In contrast to latria, dulia is an act of veneration given to a creature on account of its excellence or perfection. Hyperdulia is the highest form of dulia reserved for the most eminent of creatures, the glorious Virgin as the mother of God. For some theologians hyperdulia is also the kind of adoration given to the human nature of Christ. Like Lombard, Biel uses the distinction between creature and creator to distinguish between different kinds of adoration.

Biel reports differing authoritative opinions on the question of what kind of adoration is due to Christ’s human nature. One opinion says that Christ’s human nature is to be adored with hyperdulia when considered as united to the Word. This opinion says the...

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_Canonis Misse Expositio. Coll. III, dist. 9, qu. un.; p. 186, A.1–5. The two accounts are substantially the same, though the treatment in the Commentary on the Canon of the Mass is significantly longer.

56 “Quantum ad primum articulum notandum quod, capiendo adorationem large pro qualibet veneratione, qua aliquid honoratur, tres ponuntur species adorationis, quae Graece ‘theosebia’ seu ‘latria,’ ‘dulia’ et ‘hyperdulia’ nominantur. (1.) Latria sive theosebia est cultus soli Deo debitus, qui et ‘adoratio’ stricte sumpto vocabulo dici potest. Et quia Deus colitur actu interiori et exteriori, duplex est latria: interior et exterior. Item utraque est duplex: habitualis et actualis. Actus latiae interioris est actus fidei, spei ac caritatis secundum beatum Augustinum in Enchiridion, id est actus intellectus vel affectus, quo feror in Deum ut in summum bonum, omnium rerum principium atque finem. Et omnis talis actus aut est actus fidei, extendendo nomen fidei ad omnem assensum intellectus veri, sive sit evidens sive non, vel est actus voluntatis, quo diligo Deum ut summum bonum in se sive ut summum bonum mihi. »Latria exterior signum est aliud sensibile in protestationem latiae interioris exhibitum», ut sunt oblatio sacrificii, laudum et canticorum voces, capitis inclinatio, pectoris tunsio, manuum complicatio vel extensio, genuflexio, in terram prostratio, luminarium accensio, turis accensio, aliarumque rerum oblatio, quibus foris protestamur nos in Deum credere, sperare vel eum ut summum bonum amare. — Verum, quod signa illa exteriora »aequivoca sunt, quia et Deo exhibentur et creaturae, non tamen simili, sed diversa intentione. Et secundum hoc sunt quandoque actus adorationis latiae, quandoque duliae.» (2.) Actus duliae est actus veneracionis creaturae exhibitus propter eius excellentiam vel perfectionem, sive interior sive exterior. Et illo modo est genus ad hyperduliam, qua est dulia maior. (3.) Est enim hyperdulia servitus quaedam reverentialis exhibita creaturae ratione excellentiæ eminantis et singularissimæ; qualis est reverentia exhibita Virginis gloriæ ut est matres Dei. »Dulia minor sive simpliciter dicta est reverentia communis aliqui exhibita« creaturae ratione excellentiæ communis multis aliis. Et habitus ex actibus cuiuslibet harum specierum acquisitus dictur latria vel dulia habitualis." Coll. III, dist. 9, qu. un., art. 1, not. 1; pp. 186–187, A.10–39. For a longer discussion, see Exp., lect. 49, 2:255–263. Latria includes, in Biel's analysis, an internal component: acts of the intellect and will that recognize the creator as the highest and universal principle of all and loves the creator above all things. External acts of adoration are also part of latria, bodily gestures and postures that are signs of interior adoration. The external acts are equivocal because the same gestures, such as bowing, are used to adore God with latria and creatures with dulia. The internal component distinguishes the various types of adoration.
humanity should not receive latria because one of Christ’s natures does not communicate its idioms to the other nature. As the human nature is not called God, nor eternal, infinite, or creator, so also it does not receive divine dignity worthy of latria nor the actual latria given to Christ. That is, the opinion that Christ's human nature is to be adored with hyperdulia follows a careful interpretation of the communication of attributes as the predication of attributes of Christ’s natures to the person but not to the other nature. This type of communication is typically presented as the only type of communication granted by the scholastics.

Yet Biel reports a second opinion which holds that Christ's human nature is adored with latria not as inadorable flesh, but as the one hypostasis of the Word is adored. In this school of thought the human nature is considered as it exists in one hypostasis with the divine nature. Biel notes John Damascene's and Peter Lombard's influence on this school, and includes John's illustration of fire and coal and his illustration of a king and his purple clothing. Theologians holding this opinion, Biel determines, treat honor differently than


58 The inclusion of the picture of the king and his purple shows that medieval scholastic theologians were familiar with more of John Damascene than Peter quoted. There were four medieval Latin translations of De Fide Orthodoxa: a partial one done in Hungary before 1145 (perhaps by Cerbanus), Burgundio's version of 1153–1154, a version by Robert Grosseteste done between 1235–1240, and a late translation by Johannes Baptistat Panetius (d. 1497). See the introduction to DFO, vii. Biel had access either to one of these, or to other theologians who included the picture. Either way, the inclusion of the picture shows that the medievals knew and used John's Christological thought.
other attributes, relating honor to the person rather than the nature. There is one person in Christ to whom reverence is due, and that person is adored in both natures. As the purple of the king participates in the king's honor but not the king's other attributes such as heat or cold, so honor is treated differently than Christ's other attributes. Because there is one person in Christ to whom reverence is due, one adoration is due to both natures, divine and human, as one person is adored head and foot. This school holds to what I am calling hypostatic agency: the proper patient of the honor given to Christ is not the divine nature, but the person. Biel's conclusion is that this opinion sees honor given to the person of Christ extended to both natures.

After reporting the various opinions on the question, Biel offers his analysis of the opinions. Biel builds his analysis on a careful distinction between nature and person, and first answers the question when one thinks of Christ's human nature apart from Christ's person. He determines that Christ's human nature, a composite of flesh and soul, remains a

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59 "Dicunt igitur illi quod secus est de exhibitione honoris et aliis proprietatibus. Honor enim non respicit hanc partem vel illam, sed respicit ipsum personam. Unde quamvis purpura et vestimentum regis non participet proprietates eius absolutas, communicat tamen in honore et reverentia. Et ideo, quia est una persona in christo, cui debetur reverentia summa, una adoratione latrie est adoranda quantum ad utranque naturam, divinam scilicet et humanam, sicut eadem adoratione adoratur in uno homine caput et pes." Exp., lect. 50; 2:273D. See also Coll. III, dist. 9, qu. un., art. 1, not. 3; pp. 188–191, C.1–D.14.

60 A third opinion that Biel reports holds that the humanity of Christ united to the Word is adored by latría, but not latría in a strict sense. I do no more than mention this opinion, as the first two opinions are more relevant for my purposes here. The third opinion is based on a distinction between different types of latría. Latría broadly understood means the servitude due by a creature not only to the creator, but also to the creature united to the creator. This school judges that the names of things are communicated from God to the creature, but not the things themselves. In this sense, the names of common attributes such as wise, just, and good are predicated of the human nature, but the divine things—wisdom, justice, goodness—are not communicated. See Exp., lect. 50; 2:274D–E; and Coll. III, dist. 9, qu. un., art. 1, not. 3; pp. 189–190, C.32–53. According to this understanding, the name latría is communicated to the human nature, but not the actual divine worship. This definition of latría in the broad sense is one strategy to worship the human nature of Christ with latría without ascribing divine worship to a creature. This third opinion does show clearly that the communication of honor to Christ's human nature in the second opinion is a communication of the thing itself and not just a name.
creature. No creature, whether united to the Word or not, is to be honored with *latria*. The human nature united to the Word is not the highest and universal principle of all, nor is it to be loved as the greatest good. Since Biel understands *latria* in these very terms—thinking of something as the highest and universal principle of all and loving it as the greatest good—Biel concludes that the human nature is not to be worshiped with *latria*. Although united to the Word, the human nature is really distinguished from the Word and the divine nature.61 It seems, based on this analysis, that Biel would judge the proper adoration of the human nature to be *dulia*, and in doing so would follow a restrictive view of the communication of attributes that does not allow attributes to be communicated between Christ’s natures. And indeed Biel concludes that Christ’s human nature, being a creature, is not to be adored with *latria*. Even though it is united to divinity, it remains a creature and is not to receive divine adoration.62 But this is only the first part of Biel’s

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61 “Veritas huius questionis, utrum humanitas christi coniuncta verbo adoranda sit latria, facile investigatur si loco huius vocabuli latria eius quid nominis ponatur, et quis sit actus latrie interior qui principalis est intelligatur. Nam de exteriori non est difficultas, cum eodem actu exteriori adoramus latria et dulia creatorem et creaturam secundum subordinationem tamen ad alium et alium actum interioriorem, ut frequenter dictum est. Latria enim, ut supra habitum est lec. xlix, est reverentia exhibita alicui ut summo et universali omnium principio. Actus interior latrie aut est actus intellectus aut voluntatis vel utriusque, preter illos non est alius. In intellectu autem respectu universalis boni non est alius actus nisi cognitione sive professio eius tanquam summi boni, qui est actus fidei, extendendo nomen ad scientiam et omnem firmam adhesionem veri. In voluntate non est actus alius ordinatus nisi diletio eius tanquam summi boni in se, et summi boni creature rationalis. Nullus huius actuum haberi potest respectu cuiuscunque creature sive unete verbo sive non. Quero enim utrum humana natura unita divine in supposito verbi sit summum et universale omnium principium? Item utrum ut sic unita sit summum bonum super omnia diligendum? Certum est quod neutrum conceditur, ergo ad naturam humanam verbi (que licet unita sit verbo distinguitur tamen realiter a verbo et a divina natura) non potest terminari actus latrie qualitercunque consideretur.” *Exp.*, lect. 50; 2:274–275E.

62 “Tertia propositio, natura humana ut divine in christo hypostatice unita non est adoranda latrìa proprie dicta, patet ex premissis quia latría proprie dicta solus deus adoratur. Humana autem natura unita deitati in christo non est deus, quia per illam unionem licet excellentissimam non exit terminus creature, nec mutatur quantum ad substantialia, et ita manet creature. Et patet hec propositio satis ex supra inductis post recitationem trium opinionum.” *Exp.*, lect. 50; 2:277H.
answer to the question, answering what kind of adoration is due Christ’s human nature when considered apart from Christ’s person.

Biel reaches a different conclusion when the question is asked of the person of Christ. It is different to speak of the human nature and the *homo Christus*, the “human being Christ.” Biel reads “*homo*” as the name of a supposit—a person—and not a name for the human nature. Accordingly, “*homo Christus*” names the divine person who subsists in a human nature. While there are two really and essentially distinct natures (divine and human, creature and creator), there is one person of the Word who assumes the human nature in time. Biel applies the distinction of person and nature to the question of *latria* and determines that when the person of Christ is considered, the person is to be adored with one adoration: *latria* proper. The human nature shares in this *latria*. Biel cites John Damascene to explicate and confirm this way of ascribing *latria* to the human nature of Christ in the person.63 Biel thinks that this point is clear because the *homo Christus* is the person of the Word and therefore God. As God, the person is to be adored with the adoration proper to God, *latria*. The *homo Christus*, unlike Christ’s human nature, is the

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63 “Prima, homo christus una adoratione que est latria proprie accepta est adorandus, patet quia homo christus est persona verbi et ita deus, et per consequens ea adoratione que solius dei est adorandus. Hec autem est latria proprie dicta. Item credendum et profiteendum est hominem christum esse summum et universale omnium principium, quia deum secundum illud symboli: Dominus noster iesus christus dei filius deus et homo est. Ab hac ergo adoratione natura humana secludenda non est, non quod natura humana sit terminus huius adorationis, sed quia tota persona verbi (hoc est persona verbi in humana et divina natura subsistens) adoratur. Hec enim persona (qua vere est homo) est summum et universale omnium principium. Et ad hoc servit similitudo purpure et diadematis regis. Similiter igniti carbonis. Ideo Damascenus postquam dixerat: Adoro christi dei mei simul utranque naturam, propter carni unitam divinitatem, addit: Non enim quartam appono personam in trinitate, sed confiteor personam unam verbi et carnis eius. His verbis insinuare videtur christi humanitatem cum verbo una adoratione esse adorandum attingendo unitatem persone quod nihil aliud est dictu, quam adoro simul utranque naturam ad hunc sensum, id est adoro christi personam in utraque natura subsistentem. Hoc idem pretendunt verba beati Augustini supra allegata.” Exp., lect.50; 2:275–276G.
highest and universal principle of all things. Moreover, the person of the Word is the proper terminus of the adoration. As the person is adored, and the person subsists in a human nature, that nature shares in the latria given to the person, the homo Christus.64

Biel solves the problem of the adoration of Christ’s human nature by using metaphysical concepts. He distinguishes between person and nature to identify precisely what question is being asked. He then provides the answers he deems correct for each question based on those metaphysical distinctions. He turns to hypostatic agency as a key consideration for the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature. Biel argues that because the person of Christ is the proper object of adoration, and since the person adored by latria subsists in divine and human natures, the human nature participates in the latria given to the person. Biel cites John as an authority and agrees with John’s conception of the communication of honor to Christ’s human nature. He includes John’s picture of the king’s purple, showing that Biel is thinking in terms of hypostatic agency and not perichoresis. The king and his purple robe do not mutually indwell one another, but the robe when worn by the king participates in the honor due to the king. Since Peter Lombard did not include this picture in the Sentences, Biel must have found it elsewhere, suggesting that John Damascene was a source known and used by the medievals.

64 “Quarta propositio accipiendo latriam communiter, humana natura in christo adoranda est latria, patet quia hec adoratio nihil aliud est quam recognitio eius ut summe et singulariter unite deo et eius ut sic dilectio. Et hic actus intellectus et voluntatis est actus latrie large accepte. Et per has propositiones dare et resolute intelligitur quomodo adoranda sit humanitas christi. ... Illa ergo adoratione qua adorat personam que latria est, adorat etiam coniunctam humanitatem, id est adorat personam in humanitate coniuncta subsistentem. Unde actus ille quo personam illam, id est christi in humanitate simul et divinitate subsistentem confiteor mente esse verum deum et hominem, et sumnum ac universale omnium principium, est actus adorationis latrie, qui principaliter terminatur ad personam verbi sed partialiter ad naturam humanam. Est enim assensus propositionis cuius extrema totalia supponunt pro persona verbi, connotant tamen etiam naturam humanam per partem unius extremi significatam.” Exp., lect. 50; 2:277H.
The question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature adds an important element to contemporary understanding of scholastic Christology. While I have analyzed only two scholastic theologians on the question, it is clear from Lombard and Biel that scholastic theologians knew and used John Damascene’s Christology. In particular, Lombard and Biel granted the communication of one attribute—divine honor—from the divine nature to the human nature in the person of Christ. Biel reports others who hold this opinion. This communication depends on the conviction that a person is the proper agent and patient of action rather than a nature. When a person subsists in two natures, as Christ does, then the actions of the person involve each nature. The divine honor ascribed to the person of Christ on account of the divine nature is honor that the human nature also participates in through the communication of attributes. Luther knew this view of the adoration of Christ’s human nature and the communication of an attribute from Christ’s divine to human nature. When Luther speaks of Christ’s natures communicating attributes between the natures, he is not rejecting scholastic thought in favor of John Damascene, but working with an understanding of the communication of attributes held in common by John Damascene, Peter Lombard, and Gabriel Biel.

Moreover, the discussion of the adoration of Christ’s human nature offers clues about how Luther conceptualizes the communication of attributes. The medieval reception of John Damascene reveals the central role that metaphysical concepts play. Medieval theologians used concepts of “person” and “nature” to identify agent and patient. Those identifications were central in their work on the communication of attributes. As I turn now to Luther and his understanding of the adoration of Christ’s human nature, I look to
see if Luther also uses metaphysical concepts. Among the metaphysical concepts, I look especially to see if Luther uses hypostatic agency. I also inquire whether Biel’s definition of “homo Christus” with its careful delineation of person and nature is similar to Luther’s definitions. If so, then a continuity in the metaphysics used to articulate the communication of attributes will be found between Luther and late medieval nominalism.

4.2.5 Hypostatic Agency in Luther’s Thought

Luther uses metaphysical concepts to identify the proper agents of actions. For instance, Luther says that “the Son of God has died and is buried in the ground as all others, and the Son of Mary ascends into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, etc.” Both “Son of God” and “Son of Mary” identify the person of Christ as the agent of the actions listed. The subjects are concrete terms, primarily signifying the person of Christ while connoting one of the natures. The terms signify the underlying metaphysical concepts of person and nature, and how those metaphysical entities function is important for Luther’s approach to the communication of attributes. Luther shares John Damascene’s conviction that the person of Christ is the proper agent of actions and passions. Based on that conviction, Luther consistently gives formulations of the communication of attributes that identify the person of Christ as the agent or patient of works. This means that hypostatic agency is a key concept in Luther for the communication of attributes. Luther uses this

65 “Ideo ut capere aliquomodo possimus, dedit Deus nobis formulas loquendi, quod Christus sit Deus et homo in una persona, et non sunt duae personae, sed duae naturae unitae sunt in una persona sic, ut, quod ab humana natura fit, dicatur etiam fieri a divina, et e contra. Sic filius Dei est mortuus et sepultus in arenis ut omnes alii, et filius Mariae ascendit in coelos, sedet ad dextram patris etc. Contenti sumus his formulis.” WA 39/2:98.15–21.
66 Ngien, Suffering of God, 68–74.
concept to give license to predicate of one nature what the person of Christ does by the other nature. Since the person of Christ is the agent of works, and the person has both divine and human natures, any term that signifies the person may rightly be used as the subject of a proposition expressing an action or passion of Christ.

Luther’s definition of Christological names therefore carries great significance. These definitions depend on metaphysical concepts. Luther defines the signification of “Christus homo” as “the divine person sustaining a human nature.” Here Luther’s thought parallels Biel’s definition of the term as signifying the person of Christ who has assumed a human nature. As evident from their definitions of “Christus homo,” both theologians share a common understanding with John Damascene on this ontological point. Luther, Biel, and John all think that the divine person gives existence to the human nature. In Luther’s thought, “homo” defined in this way is a new word in the new theological language, signifying the same thing differently in theology than in philosophy. One aspect of the different way that “human person” is signified in theology is decidedly metaphysical. While in philosophy a human nature is its own supposit, in theology Christ’s human nature depends on an external supposit. Christus homo is “the divine person who has taken on a human nature.” Luther uses the distinction between person and nature to affirm what

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67 “Ego capio hominem dupliciter, uno modo pro substantia corporali per se subsistente, alio modo pro persona divina sustentante humanitatem.” WA 39/2:17A.4–6.

Lombard worked out in regard to the incarnation, that properly speaking a divine person (rather than the divine nature) took on and sustains a human nature (rather than a human person). Terms like "Christus homo" signify the subsisting divine person, the agent of the incarnation who assumes a human nature.\(^6^9\) The metaphysical conviction that a person is the proper agent of actions functions in Luther as it did in Lombard to ascribe the work of the incarnation to the person of Christ.

Hypostatic agency requires a robust theological concept of the unity of Christ’s person. Luther points to the maximal unity of the person as justification for the communication of attributes: “But so great is that unity of the two natures in one person that they are equal in predication, the attributes communicating themselves as if [Christ] were only God or only a human person.”\(^7^0\) Christ’s person is unique, possessing a unity of humanity and divinity closer than the natural unity of any other two things. The maximal unity between Christ’s two natures is the reason that the natures communicate properties to each other as the person acts and is acted upon. The metaphysics of the personal union underlie Luther’s conception of the communication of attributes. More precisely, Luther points to the perpetual unity of the two natures in Christ. The person of Christ does not leave one nature aside while doing things or while suffering things. The things Christ does

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\(^{69}\) "Persona divina suscepit humanam naturam, id est, personam, tunc essent duae personae, quod non concedimus. Non enim sunt duae substantiae etc. Homo autem non significat assumptam, sed existentem personam." WA 39/2:117A.23–35.

include human actions like walking and sleeping, actions that the person of Christ does
without dividing the natures. These human actions are communicated. This means that
they may be predicated of the divine nature which remains united to the human nature as
Christ does these things. Luther concludes that one may make propositions that include an
attribute of one nature in the predicate and a subject signifying the other nature.71 These
types of predication are not permitted in philosophy, where no single person with a divine
and human nature is found or known. But in theology, such a person is known, possessing a
maximal union of divine and human natures in one person. Because of that unity properties
that are not predicatable of God and a human being in philosophy are predicatable of Christ in
the region of theology.72 By appealing to the unity of the person as the agent Luther shows
that he uses hypostatic agency as one approach to the communication of attributes. As in
John Damascene and Gabriel Biel, Luther's thought on hypostatic agency depends upon the
metaphysical distinction between person and nature.

Hypostatic agency occurs more frequently in the Christological disputations than

perichoresis as a basis for the communication of attributes. Luther does make the

71 “XXIV. Argumentum. Paulus dicit: Christus inventus est ut homo habitu. Ergo humanitas in Christo est
accidens, id est, Christus est accidentaliter homo, non substantia. R. In graeco est σχῆμα, id est, figura, forma,
gestus, id est, habitum significat, sicut alius homo ambulabat, iacebat. Paulus probare voluit, quod fuerit verus
homo, qui patiebatur, loquebatur sicut homo. Propositiones de accidentibus hominis et Dei in Christo non
sunt castae, ideo parce loquendum et standum in unitate. Haec tam arcta et conjunctabest, ut in tota rerum
natura nullum possit simile exemplum dari. Propinquissima similitudo est hominis natura. Nam sicut hoc
constat duabus distinctis partibus, anima scilicet et carne, sic Christi persona constat duabus naturis unitis,
sed tamen anima tandem mortuo homine separatur a carne.” WA 39/2:114A.1–19. Luther does urge caution
in making these propositions to avoid error. See the further discussion of caution below, in the section on
Christ as a creature.

72 “XX. Argumentum. Non potest idem praedicari de Deo et homine. Ergo etc. R. Est philosophicum
argumentum. Nulla est proportio creaturae et creatoris, finiti et infiniti. Nos tamen non tantum facimus
proportionem, sed unitatem finiti et infiniti. Aristoteles, si hoc audisset vel legisset, nunquam factus esset
christianus, quia ipse non concessisset illam propositionem, quod eadem proportio sit finiti et infiniti.” WA
occasional reference to something like *perichoresis*, though he does not use the term itself. He says, for instance, that “Here the personal union has been made. Humanity and divinity go inside of one another.” While *perichoresis* refers to the mutual indwelling of the natures, hypostatic agency does not attend to how the natures intermingle. Rather, hypostatic agency looks to how the natures are related to the person who does things. Luther uses John’s illustration of a king and his purple. The king and the purple do not indwell one another, but when the king is clothed in purple, the purple participates in the honor due to him. The illustration is evidence that Luther uses the thought of John Damascene, but it shows in particular that Luther follows him by adopting hypostatic agency as well as *perichoresis*. And Luther follows not only John, but also Lombard and Biel in using hypostatic agency to clarify the communication of attributes. Like his predecessors, Luther’s metaphysical conviction about the proper agent of actions stands behind his concept of the communication of attributes.

### 4.3 Philosophical Tools and the Communication of Attributes: Gabriel Biel

#### 4.3.1 Concrete and Abstract Predications

Luther points to metaphysical distinctions important for the person of Christ:

“‘Human person’ in theology signifies a person, but ‘human nature’ does not. ‘Human nature’ signifies a form, while ‘human person’ signifies a subject with the form. There is a

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great difference between concrete and abstract in predicating both substance and accidents. A human person cannot exist without human nature.”75 The metaphysical concepts of “person,” “nature,” “substance,” and “accident” require careful attention, particularly in determining how they may be predicated. While Luther claims that there is a difference in predication, he does not lay out a detailed set of rules by which the proper predication of concrete and abstract terms may be made. This presents a challenge for interpreting how Luther construes metaphysical entities and their role in the communication of attributes. However, Gabriel Biel laid out a very detailed set of rules for the communication of attributes. I turn to Biel’s system as an analytical tool for understanding the communication of attributes in Luther. By comparing the claims Luther makes using the communication of attributes with Biel’s rules of predication, I aim to determine if Luther’s thought follows Biel’s.

Biel’s system works not only with a sharp contrast between concrete and abstract terms, but also with the theory of suppositional logic. Biel analyzes the supposition of terms to determine what predications are proper to Christ’s person and which predications are proper to Christ’s natures. Biel’s intent is to account for the communication of attributes within the bounds of the properties of terms and of suppositional logic as late medieval nominalists understood them. As I will show, Biel attends carefully to the metaphysical distinction between concrete person and abstract natures to develop rules for the communication of attributes. A number of philosophical tools appear in Biel’s

system: logical, semantic, and metaphysical conceptions are all employed. By showing how Biel uses these tools in his analysis of the communication of attributes, I provide a point of reference to analyze how Luther uses the same tools of language, logic, and metaphysics in his Christology.

4.3.2 Biel’s Rules for Christological Predications

Biel works out rules governing what attributes may be predicated of Christ’s person, what attributes may be predicated of one another, and what attributes may be predicated of Christ’s natures. Taken together, these rules lay out a system for determining the proper use of the communication of attributes. Biel defines the communication of attributes as the mutual predication of concrete terms of each of Christ’s natures of one another or of the person. The definition already makes clear that the distinction between concrete and abstract terms is crucial for sorting out how attributes of Christ may be predicated.

Biel thinks that concrete terms of either nature may be predicated of the person or of one another. However, he denies that abstract terms of the human nature may be predicated of terms of the divine nature, whether the terms of the divine nature are abstract or concrete. By these two rules, Biel grants propositions that predicate a concrete attribute of one nature to a concrete name for the other nature, such as “a human person is God, God is a human person, a human person is eternal, infinite, creator, etc. God is

76 “Quantum ad primum notandum circa istum terminum »communicationem idiomatum«, quod ‘idioma’ graece est ‘proprietas’ latine; et accipitur hic pro concreto importante proprietatem alicuius. Dicitur ergo ‘communicatio idiomatum’ communicatio proprietatum. Est autem communicatio idiomatum in Christo mutua praedicatio concretorum utriusque naturae de seinvicem et de supposito in his subsistente, ut etiam habet Nicolaus Orem in tractatu De communicatione idiomatum.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 1; p. 154, A.8–14.
temporal, corruptible, possible, mortal, etc.” Likewise, Biel grants that concrete attributes may be predicated of the person, resulting in propositions like: “Christ is God, Christ is a human person, etc.” The restriction from predicating abstract terms is Biel’s strategy to avoid confusing the natures. By denying the predication of abstract terms, Biel avoids predications such as “the divine nature is the human nature,” or “the humanity of Christ is the creator, the person of the Son, etc.” This rule applies to abstract terms of the human nature, which is purely created, temporal, and the like.77 Note that in these examples, the adjectives (temporal, corruptible, etc.) are concrete adjectives. According to nominalist thought, as shown in chapter three, these adjectives primarily signify a substance while connoting a quality of that substance. Biel identifies the primary thing signified by these terms as the metaphysical concept of an existing person.

Unlike his approach to the human nature, Biel grants the predication of abstract terms of the divine nature because they supposit for the person. Since the divine nature is the person of Christ, one may predicate terms of this nature whether they are abstract or concrete. “The divine nature—the identical thing, or according to an identical

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predication—is the person, is the Word, is Christ.” Biel equates the divine nature with the person of Christ, and that equation is significant for determining legitimate predications. Biel conceives of abstract terms convening primarily to a nature, such as the terms “humanity” or “divinity” convening to the two natures of Christ. Yet, since the divine nature of Christ is also the person of Christ, Biel grants license to predicate abstracts of the divine nature in the communication of attributes. He permits this predication so long as the abstracts are understood in terms of Christ’s person rather than the divine nature common to all three persons of the Trinity. That is, when an abstract term is understood as signifying the concrete nature it may be predicated as a concrete term. This rule means that one needs to attend carefully to abstract terms signifying the divine nature to determine if the author has the person of Christ or the divine nature in mind.

Biel relies on supposition in his rules for predication in the communication of attributes. He asks not only what terms signify, but what the terms supposit for in a proposition. By accounting for supposition, Biel argues that concrete terms of the human nature may be predicated of the divine nature according to the rigor of language. Technically it is correct to say that “the divine nature is a human being, is mortal, is passible.” This is correct because in this proposition the term “divine nature” supposes for the person. The single person of Christ, since it sustains a human nature, is in fact a human being who is mortal and passible. However, this kind of predication may lead the simple

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78 “Abstracta autem divinae naturae, quia supponunt pro natura divina, quae identificatur personis, ideo etiam praedicantur de quolibet secundum praedicationem identicam, de quo praedicantur concreta naturae divinae, ut: ‘Natura divina est — identice vel secundum praedicationem identicam — persona, est Verbum, est Christus.’” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 1; p. 154, A.33–37.
astray and Biel thinks that it should be avoided. The “simple” would presumably take “divine nature” as it signifies the unity of the Trinity, rather than attending to its supposition in the proposition for the person of Christ. For the educated, supposition is a useful tool for Christology as it allows for the precise analysis of a term in a particular proposition. Biel’s approach is to ask not only what the term calls to mind, but precisely what the term takes the place of in a proposition. In these instances, the term “divinity” may supposit for either the divine nature or the second person of the Trinity.

When the term “divine nature” supposits for the divine person, Biel grants that suffering may be predicated of the divine nature. By following the analysis Biel develops based on the identity of the divine nature and the person, attributing suffering to the divine nature means that suffering is attributed to the person of Christ. In this sense Biel grants the communication of the human attribute of suffering to the divine nature of Christ. This point will be important in considering Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes, and particularly for asking what Luther means when he ascribes suffering to the divine nature.

While in general concrete terms may be predicated of either of Christ’s natures, Biel further defines which terms may be predicated of a nature and a person. Biel divides concrete terms into three categories depending on how they are predicated. He uses these three categories to distinguish what attributes may be predicated of Christ’s person and

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79 “Sed concreta naturae humanae, etsi secundum rigorem verborum possunt praelicari identice de natura divina, ut: ‘Natura divina est homo, est mortalis, est passibilis,’ quia est persona, quae est homo mortalis, passibilis: non tamen illae admittertur propter haereticos et ne detur occasio errandi simplicibus, qui putarent illas accipi secundum praedicationem formallem. — Concordat Occam III q. 9 ante dubia et in solutione ad dub. 2.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 1; p. 155, A.38–43.
one another. He develops the categories with a firm conviction that convention determines the significance of spoken and written language. Biel’s thought on conventional language follows the theory of Ockham that spoken and written terms signify by imposition or convention, as shown in chapter three. Biel finds this account of language useful for sorting out the communication of attributes. He relates the conventional signification of language to the metaphysical concepts he uses to understand the person and natures of Christ.

Biel observes that some concrete terms are predicated only of the thing to which they immediately convene. Within this group are terms that convene immediately to a whole substance, as well as terms that convene immediately only to a part of a thing. Examples include “to be a subject, to be a part.” In these predications “subject” convenes immediately to a substance and is not predicated of a part or an accident; “part” convenes immediately to a part and is not predicated of the substance. Terms of this category in Christology are terms that convene immediately either to Christ’s person or to one of Christ’s natures. Biel focuses on attributes that convene immediately to Christ’s natures. Of these attributes, those concrete terms that are typically predicated only of a human nature may not be predicated of the divine nature or of Christ’s person through the assumed

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80 “Si quae sit causa huius differentiae et diversitatis; respondetur quod vix alia ratio assignari potest nisi modus significandi termini, quem habet ex sua impositione, vel usus communis loquentium.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 2; p. 156, B.41–43.

human nature. An example of this is “to be assumed” or “finite.” These terms typically predicated only of the human nature to which they immediately convene, and may not be predicated of the divine nature or the person of Christ, so that it is incorrect to argue that the person is assumed or finite.

While attributes of this first category that convene immediately to the human nature are restricted, attributes of this category that convene to the divine nature may be predicated of the person. This predication is possible because (as noted above) the divine nature is the person of Christ. These terms may not, however, be predicated of the human nature: one may say that Christ is God, but not that the human nature is God. In the same way, Christ is the creator, but the human nature is not. The human nature remains a pure creature. These predications are granted because the person of God and the person of Christ’s humanity is one and the same person. The human nature exists only in the divine supposit, and that understanding allows mutual predication of concrete attributes.

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82 Biel determines that “creatable” falls into this category, when it is understood in the sense of “capable of being produced from nothing according to itself.” The precise definition Biel gives to “creatable” distinguishes it from a way in which Christ’s person may be called a creature. I return to the point below when I analyze Biel’s treatment of the question of Christ as a creature. “Quarum prima est: Idiomata primi ordinis (quae scilicet tantum immediate praedicantur) dicta de natura assumpta non praedicantur vere de supposito divino (puta de Christo, Deo vel Verbo et similibus personam Filii significantibus) per naturam assumptam. Talia sunt ‘assumi,’ ‘personari’ aut ‘suppositari a persona extrinseca,’ quae etiam de proprio supposito non praedicarentur, si natura in se suppositaretur. Sunt praeterea et ilia: ‘limitatum,’ ‘finitum,’ ‘ens per participationem,’ ‘creabile,’ ‘annihilabile,’ accipiendo ‘creabile’ proprie pro producibili de nihilo secundum se et quodlibet sui et ‘annihilabile’ pro reducibili ad nihil secundum se et quodlibet sui. Et per hoc patet quod illae non sunt verae: ‘Christus est assumptus, est finitus, est limitatus, creabiles,’ etc. Dicitur notanter »per naturam assumptam« propter illa praedicata, quae immediate praedicantur tam de natura assumpta quam assumente, ut sunt ‘vivere,’ ‘esse.’ Illa convenient supposito divino sicut naturae assumptae, sed non per naturam assumptam; quia etiam ei convenirent, si nulla natura fuisse assumpta.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 2, con. 1; p. 158–159, D.5–18. The last part acknowledges that some of these predicates are predicated of Christ’s person, but not through the human nature but by the person itself, such as “to live.”

83 “Secunda conclusio: Idiomata primi ordinis naturae divinae de supposito divino dicta de supposito naturae humanae eiusque concretis praedicantur, non autem de natura humana. Huiusmodi idiomata sunt ‘Deus,’ ‘creator,’ ‘infinitus,’ ‘aeternus,’ ‘impassibilis,’ ‘incorruptibilis,’ ‘immutabilis.’ Illa omnia dicuntur de Christo temporaliter genito ex Virgine, crucifixo, mortuo, passo, resurgente etc. Probatur conclusio: Quia quaecumque
The other two categories of Christ’s attributes may be predicated of Christ’s person or of one another. The second category of attributes includes terms predicated only of those things to which they convene mediately. This group includes terms predicated of a subject because of an inhering accident: terms like “white thing, cold thing, knower.” The terms convene immediately to an accident, and when a subject possesses that accident the terms convene to the subject on account of that accident. This is what Biel means when he says that they convene mediately to the subject. These terms are never predicated of the thing to which they immediately convene, such as an accident: one does not say that whiteness is a white thing.84

Biel’s third category includes terms predicated of both the things to which they convene mediately and the things they convene to immediately, such as the terms “mortal,

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immortal, or to suffer.”85 These convene immediately to a part of a thing and mediately to the thing itself. In these latter examples, the terms convene immediately to one of Christ’s natures and mediately to Christ’s person, that is, they convene to Christ’s person on account of one of his natures being mortal or immortal. Biel allows attributes of the second and third type to be predicated of Christ’s person or mutually of each other. Biel includes Christological terms such as “God, mortal, creator, etc.” in this group. Biel grants this predication because these terms are predicated mediately of the supposit, which is one and the same for each nature.86 The logic of the communication of attributes here depends on the metaphysical definition of the single person of Christ subsisting in two natures. It also depends on an analysis of concrete terms as convening to the one divine person of Christ who has assumed a human nature. This understanding of Christ’s persons and the terms of Christology allows one to make predications such as “God is a human being,” understanding the terms to convene to the single person of Christ who has assumed a human nature. In this way Biel uses metaphysical distinctions to sort out what may be rightly predicated in the communication of attributes.


4.3.3 Biel on Suppositional Logic in the Communication of Attributes

Biel uses suppositional logic as he works out the communication of attributes. According to this logic, categorical affirmative propositions are true when the terms of the proposition supposit for the same thing. Biel identifies the communication of attributes as one way in which terms may supposit for the same thing.87 In Biel’s account, terms used in the communication of attributes supposit in the same way that terms supposit for a substance and its accidents, such as a concrete adjective term that supposits immediately for the substance while calling to mind an accident of the thing.88 Concrete adjective terms in Christology function this way, but also set the pattern for concrete nouns of substance in the communication of attributes. Such concretes of substance have a dual signification: they signify the supposit “substratively” and the substantial nature “formally.” These terms denote the substance and connote the nature by which the substance is called a certain kind of thing. Biel restricts this kind of term to concrete terms convening to a substance. He does not include terms that convene immediately to a nature in this category. This

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87 “Supponendum etiam est quarto principium unum omnibus logicam scientibus manifestum, scilicet quod ad veritatem cuiuslibet propositionis categorice affirmatim requiritur, quod extrema supponunt pro eodem, licet non sufficit. — Patet, quia cuiuslibet propositionis talis copula est actus complexivus aut signum sibi subordinatum, cuius est unire extrema. Uniuntur autem, dum res per ipsa significatae sunt unum sive idem vel fuerunt aut erunt idem etc. secundum exigentiam temporis importati. Quod dum est, extrema supponunt pro eodem. Quare in proposito si alicuius propositionis affirmativae extrema non supponunt pro eodem, nullo modo, nec per communicationem idiomatum nec simpliciter, est concedenda.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 4; pp. 157–158, C.14–23.

88 “Demum supponitur quod haec unio praedicta similior est unioni accidentis cum suo subiecto seclusa inhaesione, ut supra dictum est q. I huius tertii et habet Occam III q. 9 ante dubia. Ideo in proposito non modicum directorium erit attendere ad has propositiones: ‘Socrates est album,’ ‘album est Socrates’ et similes, in quibus concreta accidentium praedicantur de suis subjectis vel eversio. Et per collationem propositionum in proposito ad illas facilis est de earum veritate judicium. Sicut enim Socrates contingenter est albus, ita Verbum contingenter est homo. Et sicut Socrates prius fuit Socrates et post factus est albus, ut suppono, sic Verbum prius et ab aeterno fuit Verbum et factum est homo in tempore, postquam non fuit homo. Et regulariter sicut habet se ‘album’ ad ‘homo’ vel ‘Socrates,’ sic se habet ‘homo’ ad ‘Deus’ vel ‘Verbum’ quantum ad judicium veritatis propositionum, in quibus ponuntur.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 1, not. 5; p. 158, C.25–36.
restriction works with an understanding that abstract terms predicated of a nature are absolute terms while concrete terms predicated of a thing are relative terms. Concrete terms of either one of Christ’s natures function in this way: they signify immediately Christ’s person, while connoting a property the person possesses by virtue of one nature or the other. This way of signifying aligns with and accounts for the kind of supposition these terms have in a proposition. They supposit for the person of Christ, taking the person’s place in the proposition while calling to mind a property the person has by virtue of one nature or the other. An analysis of Christological propositions by suppositional logic begins by analyzing concrete terms as suppositing for the person of Christ.

Since concrete terms of Christ’s natures supposit for one and the same person regardless of the nature to which they convene, propositions with extremes consisting of concrete terms taken from either of Christ’s natures will be true. That is, concrete terms of Christ’s natures may be predicated of one another in a proposition, and when the terms both supposit for the same person of Christ, the proposition is judged to be true.

Suppositional logic finds these propositions true even when they appear, at first glance, to be absurd. For instance, Biel uses supposition to sort out the Christological predication

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“Deus est homo.” He concludes that “homo” here signifies a supposit subsisting in human nature. When the sentence is spoken of Christ, the particular supposition of “homo” is verified because Christ subsists in a human nature. Critically, the term “human being” (“homo”) does not supposit for the human nature. The term supposit for the person who is a human being by virtue of the human nature. In the case of Christ, “human being” supposits for the divine person who subsists in a human nature. The same is true of “God” (“Deus”), which supposits for the person of Christ who is divine on account of the divine nature. Since both terms of the proposition “God is a human being” supposit for the same divine person, the proposition is true.90

Biel judges that the communication of attributes does not undermine logic or language. While Biel acknowledges that the communication of attributes tests the limits of logic, he argues that it does not subvert logic. Instead, when one reduces the propositions to their true form and analyzes them with suppositional logic, the propositions are judged to be true.91 Suppositional logic in Biel’s account is well-suited to Christology and the

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90 This is why Biel defines “homo” as he does: a supposit subsisting in a human nature, or a “rational animal.” By drawing a sharp distinction between a supposit and a nature, Biel is able to distinguish the supposition of terms for concrete persons. “Rational animal” as the definition of “homo” works because it supposit for the supposit subsisting in human nature. “His praemissis, respondetur ad primum dubium, quod propositio ilia: ‘Deus est homo’ et similis de virtute sermonis et secundum terminorum proprietatem vera est et concedenda. Quod probatur: Quia sunt affirmativae, particulares, indefinitae vel singulares, quarum extrema supponunt pro eodem, et per consequens verae. — Consequentia nota ex art. 1. — Antecedens patet, quia ‘homo’ supponit pro supposito subsistente in natura humana, et ita pro supposito Verbi seu divino; et alterum extremum pro eodem supponit, ut manifestum est. Et hoc secundum sermonis proprietatem. Nam ‘homo’ ex sua impositione significat suppositum humanum, id est suppositum subsistens in natura humana, ut dictum est. Ergo etc.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 172, N.1–10.

91 “Et haec dicere non est logicam pervertere, sed eam ad veritatis normam reducere ac eius veritatem declarare. Quam si non cognoverunt Peripatetici infideles, Aristoteles scilicet cum suis sequacibus, quid mirum, si in his sicut in multis aliis erraverunt, in quibus naturalem potentiam, quam experientia docuit, tantum attenderunt, divinam omnipotentiam, quae super naturam est, ignorantes. Nec in hoc sunt imitandi a fidelibus, quoniam fides orthodoxa et certissima multas veritates logicales, naturales et metaphysicales revelavit, ad quas gentiles philosophi minime pervenerunt.” Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 171, M.35-42.
communication of attributes. By precise analysis of the supposition of terms, using connotative terms as a model for this supposition, Biel finds that concrete terms supposit for the person of Christ. Once that analysis of the supposition of the terms of a proposition using the communication of attributes is in place, both concrete terms in a proposition like "Deus est homo" are found to supposit for the single person of Christ in two natures.

Besides staying within the boundaries of suppositional logic, Biel thinks that this approach stays within the boundaries of the properties of language. His analysis of the supposition of terms does not go beyond what is proper to those terms.\(^{92}\) Within this system Biel uses philosophical concepts to resolve Christological difficulties and give a coherent account of the communication of attributes. These concepts include the distinction of concrete and abstract in both semantics and metaphysics, a particular semantic understanding of concrete adjective terms, and suppositional logic.

The coherence of that account depends on granting Biel several points. The first point is metaphysical: that the person of Christ does subsist in two natures, and that the person gives existence to the natures. The second point is semantic: that concrete terms, whether adjectives or nouns of substance, primarily signify the person, while connoting a nature or quality. The third point is logical: one must grant Biel’s analysis of various terms and whether they supposit for a substance or only a part of a thing.\(^{93}\) Biel thinks that his

\(^{92}\) "Et hoc secundum sermonis proprietatem. Nam 'homo' ex sua impositione significat suppositum humanum, id est suppositum subsistens in natura humana, ut dictum est." Coll. III, dist. 7, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 1; p. 172, N.8–10.

\(^{93}\) This distinction seems to be circular in its reasoning. Biel’s argument is that one may predicate of Christ’s natures only those terms that are typically predicated of a nature. That argument does not provide clear direction beyond conventional usage to determine what sorts of terms are typically predicated of a nature. Regardless, what is clear is that Biel appeals to the conventional use of language to make the point, and does
approach is sufficient to give a coherent account of Christology and the communication of attributes using nominalist philosophical tools.

Of interest for analyzing Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes is the particular relation of philosophy and theology in Biel. As shown in chapter two, Biel distinguishes philosophy from theological truth, yet uses philosophical tools within theology. Reason has a role to play in Biel’s account of the communication of attributes, not to judge from evident principles what is true of Christ, but to analyze propositions in such a way that a coherent account is given of truths revealed in theology. Biel’s account of the communication of attributes, given his explicit appeal to philosophical categories, is an ideal point of reference for tracking the use of philosophical tools in Luther’s Christology. To give a concrete example of how the philosophical tools function in Biel, I include here a survey and analysis of Biel’s account of the question of Christ as a creature to see Biel apply philosophical tools to address a particular challenge within the communication of attributes.

### 4.3.4 Biel on Christ as a Creature

Biel’s first move in addressing the question of Christ as a creature is to identify the exact problem. Biel reduces claims about Christ to what he takes as the simplest formula. Regardless of the wording, Biel thinks that propositions about Christ being created properly reduce to the formula “the humanity of Christ is a creature.” While some authors not see a need for a reconceptualization of language as something other than significative terms in light of Christology.
may say this with improper words, those word should be reduced to the proper form so that the real question may be analyzed. Here, as Luther does, Biel appeals to the correct sense to account for improper words and defend authoritative statements. Both Luther and Biel distinguish the sense of the mental language from the words of the written language—and both reach the same conclusion that the true intent of various authors is to say that “the humanity of Christ is a creature.”

Biel uses nominal definitions to reconcile conflicting opinions on the question. One opinion denies that Christ considered simply is a creature, since Christ is the eternal divine Word. Another opinion grants that Christ is a creature, in the same way that Christ is temporal, mortal, eternal, and immortal. While the opinions seem at odds with one another, Biel concludes that the difference lies in their respective nominal definitions of “creature.” All agree that Christ is one person subsisting in two natures, divine and human, and that the name “Christ” supposits for the person subsisting in two natures. Yet the first group thinks of “creature” as a term predicated only to the thing to which it immediately


95 See chapter three for a discussion of Luther appealing to mental language.

96 “Secundo notandum quod sic accipiendo creaturam, d u p l e x videtur esse modus loquendi doctorum. Unus Magistri, qui negat Christum esse creaturam simpliciter, id est sine addito, quia nullum aeternum est creatura; Christus est aeternus, nam ‘Christus’ supponit pro supposito Verbi, quod est aeternum; et per consequens non est creatura, quia omnis creatura est producta de non esse ad esse. Sed nullum aeternum aliquando non fuit, et ita nullum aeternum productum est a non esse ad esse. — Opinionem Magistri imitantur plurimi doctores et paene tota theologorum schola. Alii simpliciter concedunt illam: ‘Christus est creatura,’ sicut illam: ‘Christus est temporalis,’ ‘Christus est mortalis, passibilis, filius Virginis,’ simul concedentes illas: ‘Christus est aeternus, immortalis, impassibilis, Filius Dei Patris.’ Quae non opponuntur prioribus, ut dictum est supra dist. 7.” Coll. III, dist. 11, qu. un., art. 1, not. 2; p. 204, B.1–12.
convenes, in this case the human nature of Christ. This group has a nominal definition of “creature” as “that which is or has been brought forth de novo, before which it did not exist.” By that definition, Christ is not a creature, and the term convenes only to the human nature of Christ. However, the other group defines “creature” as “that which has been brought forth from not being to being or that which subsists in a nature brought forth in this way.” The latter part of this nominal definition convenes to the person of Christ, who subsists in a nature that has been brought forth into existence. Accordingly, theologians holding either opinion differ only in respect to what kind of things the term “creature” ranges over. Biel allows both opinions and makes the answer to the question of Christ as a creature dependent on what nominal definition one uses.97 In other words, Biel allows different nominal definitions of “creature” to stand alongside one another. Since spoken and written terms signify by convention, nominal definitions imposing different significations on a word are permissible, and even useful for clarifying questions and claims.

Biel's appeal to nominal definitions is a move that Luther also makes on the question of Christ as a creature. I have analyzed Luther’s new nominal definition of “creature” in chapter three. When Luther crafts a new nominal definition of creature, he is not rejecting a scholastic theory of language, but following Biel's approach by turning to a nominal definition to resolve the question. Luther’s nominal definition of “creature,” as shown in chapter three, differs from Biel’s definition in terminology, but not in intent or in methodology. Luther crafts a nominal definition of “a thing inseparably conjoined with divinity in the same person by ineffable ways” to avoid saying that Christ is not divine.\(^{98}\) Biel shares the concern to avoid Arianism, and uses nominal definitions to hold that while Christ is a creature, Christ is at the same time eternal; “creature” here means only that Christ now subsists in a created nature. Moreover, in a move that Luther will echo, Biel warns that claims about Christ being a creature should be cautiously asserted so that they do not lead to error.\(^{99}\) Luther’s use of nominal definitions to account for Christological difficulties parallels Biel's consideration of the question of Christ as a creature.

Biel also concludes that Christ, while a creature, is at the same time the creator. All agree on this, Biel notes, so that it is clear that creator and creature do not oppose one

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\(^{99}\) “Unde dicunt consequenter illi quod, sicut conceditur Christum esse genitum temporaliter ex Virgine et temporaliter productum, ita concedendum est Christum esse temporaliter creatum ex Virgine et per consequens esse creaturam. Licet illae locutiones parcius proferenda sunt, ne earum occasione simplices possint seduci in errorem Arii, credentes Christum etiam secundum naturam divinam esse creaturam; quod est erroneum et haeresis condemnata.” Coll. III, dist. 11, qu. un., art. 1, not. 2; p. 206, B.42–47.
another. While Biel does not give the proposition “the creator is a creature,” he cites Richard of St. Victor as an authority saying “the creator became a creature” without critiquing the proposition. Richard’s formula fits within Biel’s rules, as Biel allows “creature” to be predicated mediately of the divine person of Christ, and affirms that this same divine person is the creator by virtue of the divine nature. Through an analysis using suppositional logic, Biel can show that both terms supposit for the same thing and that the proposition is true. Luther’s claim that “the creator is a creature” from this perspective does not break with scholastic logic. Rather, using the tools of nominal definitions and suppositional logic, the proposition is judged true while fitting within a standard nominalist account of language, logic, and metaphysics.

4.4 Philosophical Tools and the Communication of Attributes: Martin Luther

4.4.1 Luther’s Account of the Communication of Attributes in Medieval Perspective

Luther does not lay out the kind of detailed rules that Biel does for what attributes may be predicated of Christ’s person and natures. Luther does not follow the writing style of scholastic theologians that develop careful systems such as Biel’s rules for Christological predications. However, the change in style and approach does not necessarily indicate a change in substance. I now turn to Luther’s examples of the communication of attributes to

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100 “Tertia conclusio: Secundum utrasque opiniones et omnem catholicum Christum esse creatum est simpliciter concedendum. Probatur: Quia Christus est Verbum, per quod omnia facta sunt; ergo creator. — Tenet consequentia, quia factor et creator in proposito pro eodem accipiuntur. Ex quo patet quod non opponuntur creator et creatura, capiendo creaturam secundo modo, licet primo modo opponuntur, sicut et genitus et ingenitus, mortalis et immortalis, de quibus supra dist. 7 patet.” Coll. III, dist. 11, qu. un., art. 2, con. 3; p. 207, D.19–25.

101 “Item Richardus de sancto Victore: »Fit creator creatura.«” Coll. III, dist. 11, qu. un., art. 1, not. 2; p. 205, B.30.
interpret them from a medieval perspective. I ask whether Luther’s formulations and
descriptions of the communication of attributes follow Biel’s rules of predication. I also ask
whether Luther uses the same metaphysical, semantic, and logical tools in the
communication of attributes.

For Luther’s account I use the examples of the communication of attributes found
within the Christological disputations. Space does not permit an analysis of every instance
of the communication of attributes in Luther, but those found within the disputations are
characteristic of Luther’s accounts elsewhere. The nature of a disputation means that
Luther’s discussion of the communication in the Christological disputations offers more
insights about the philosophical tools Luther uses than other accounts. I use three different
Christological questions to analyze Luther’s thought, questions which recur in various
forms throughout the Christological disputations. The first is the problem of whether one
can say that “God is a human being.” The second is the question of Christ as creator and
creature, in its most radical form, “the creator is a creature.” The third is the question of the
suffering of the divine nature. By analyzing Luther’s thought on these questions through
the lenses of Gabriel Biel’s account of the communication of attributes, and with the
concept of hypostatic agency in view, I aim to locate Luther’s account of the communication
of attributes in its medieval context.

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102 For instance, see Luther’s extensive discussion of the communication of attributes in On the Councils and the Church. WA 50:509–653. The examples there are similar to what is found in the disputations.
4.4.2 Concrete and Abstract: “God is a Human Being”

Luther defines the communication of attributes as attributing a property of one of Christ’s natures to the other nature. The communication of properties, Luther says, is a result of the union of Christ’s two natures in one person. Luther also speaks of attributes of the natures predicated of one another in the communication of attributes due to the unity of Christ’s person. While the wording of Luther’s definition differs from Biel’s, the substance of the definition is the same. Luther does not specifically state a communication of attributes to the person, but in practice he grants this communication. Luther does add the communication to each nature, while Biel defines the communication only as terms of the natures predicated of one another. However, in his rules Biel speaks of attributes predicated of a nature as well as terms of that nature, so that Luther’s definition does not differ from Biel’s practice of predicking attributes of a nature. Both Luther and Biel agree on a basic concept of the communication of attributes as predicking terms of either nature to the person of Christ or to the other nature as a result of the personal union of Christ’s natures.

Luther, like Biel, restricts predications in the communication of attributes to concrete terms of either nature. The most basic concrete terms of the natures are “God” and “human being.” By the communication of attributes, Luther grants the proposition of these concrete terms of one another in theology: “God is a human being.” While this

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103 “Nos non dicimus, Christum esse tantum creaturam sed esse Deum et hominem in una persona. Sunt illae naturae coniunctae personaliter in unitate personae. Non sunt duo filii, non duo iudices, non duae personae, non duo Iesus, sed propter unitam coniunctionem et unitatem duarum naturarum fit communicatio idiomatum, ut, quid uni naturae tribuitur, tribuitur et alteri, quia fit una persona.” WA 39/2:98.6–10.
104 “Sed maxima est illa unitas duarum naturarum in una persona, ut pares sint in praedicatione, communicant sibi idiomata, quasi vel solum esset Deus vel solum homo.” WA 39/2:111A.14–16.
proposition cannot be verified of anything in philosophy, in theology it is true because Christ’s person has two natures. Luther explains and defends the proposition using his new theological language, here defining “human being” when predicated of Christ as “a divine person sustaining humanity.” He also argues for the propositions “a human being is God,” “a human being is the Son of God,” and “Christ is God and a human being” in theology. These predications are examples of concrete terms of each nature predicated either of the person Christ or of one another.

Luther’s strategy differs from Biel as Luther categorizes these propositions as instances of a new theological language. Luther sees them as new terms because they are predicated of Christ. While Biel does not describe a new theological language, he also verifies the propositions because of Christ’s person. Luther’s theological definition of “human being,” while differing in the restriction of the term to the region of theology, nevertheless parallels Biel’s account. Like Biel, Luther points to the subsisting person as the primary thing signified by the term. A “human being” is not “humanity” or the abstract nature, but rather the subject that subsists in the form of humanity.


in the same way. In the person of Christ the human being is the divine person who has a human nature. Luther’s definition works with a kind of primary “substrative” signification of the person and a secondary “formative” signification of the assumed human nature. This new nominal definition clarifies the supposition of the term “human being” in the proposition. According to suppositional logic the proposition is true: both “God” and “human being” supposit for one and the same divine person—Christ—in this proposition.

While Luther grants propositions predicating concrete terms of the natures of one another, he restricts the predication of abstract terms. He denies that “humanity is divinity” as well as “divinity is humanity.” Nor does Luther allow the predication “Christ is human nature” or “humanity.” Unlike the concrete “human being,” “humanity” signifies an abstract nature and therefore these predications fail. Not only do the abstract terms of the nature fail in the communication of attributes, but those terms that are predicated only of a nature and not of the substance also fail in the communication of attributes. Luther notes that since it is proper to a nature to inhere, one may not directly predicate a nature of a person. That predication would violate Biel’s rule that terms predicated only of a nature may not be predicated of the person. This rule depends on a particular understanding of natures as abstract entities. Luther’s restriction on predicating abstract terms of the human nature of Christ follows Biel’s rules. Attributes predicated only of a part and not of a

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108 “Si servaveritis autem vos hunc articulum simpliciter, quod in Christo sit divina et humana natura et illas duas naturas in una persona, ita ut nullam aliam rem coniunctas esse, et tamen quod humanitas non sit divinitas, nec divinitas sit humanitas, quod neque illa distinctio quicquam impediat, sed potius confirmet unitatem!” WA 39/2:97.9–14.

substance (in this case attributes predicated only of a nature, such as inherence) may not be predicated of Christ’s person. Nor can these abstract attributes of the natures be predicated of one another, as the concrete terms of the natures are the terms of propositions expressing the communication of attributes.

Luther uses the distinction between concrete and abstract to distinguish terms that signify the person from terms that signify the nature. His careful attention to concrete and abstract throughout the disputations functions to make a clear distinction between Christ’s person and natures. The difference in the terms is a difference in both signification, or what the terms call to mind, and supposition. The supposition identifies the kind of metaphysical entity (person or nature) that the term stands in the place of. Luther even cites Aristotle in defense of the distinction that concrete terms signify the person while abstract terms signify the nature.110 Luther’s distinction again parallels Biel’s rules for predication, and matches his thought on a concrete person and abstract natures as essential analysis for the communication of attributes. When Luther appeals to Aristotle to defend the point, it is clear that Luther is using philosophical tools in his account of Christology.

While maintaining the distinction between concrete person and abstract nature, Luther allows that the divine nature may signify and supposit for either the divine nature or the person of Christ. He argues that “divinity” may signify either the divine nature as a nature or the person of Christ. Luther understands the term to signify the person of Christ.

in the communication of attributes. Luther uses this clarification to argue that only Christ suffers and dies and not the other persons of the Trinity. If one understands “divinity” to mean the person of Christ, then Luther grants that divinity suffers and dies.\footnote{“XV. Argumentum. Moses inquit: Dominus Deus tuus Deus unus est. Ergo Christus non potest esse verus Deus. Responsio: Hoc, quod Moses dicit, unum esse Deum, nihil pugnat nobiscum. Nam et nos dicimus, unum Deum esse et non plures, sed illa unitas substantiae et essentiae habet tres distinctas personas, sicut Christi natura unita est in una persona. Cum ergo dicitur: Divinitas est mortua, tunc includitur, quod etiam pater et Spiritus sanctus sint mortui. Sed hoc non est verum, quia tantum una persona divinitatis, sed filius est natus, mortuos et passus etc. Ideo natura divina, quando capitur pro persona, est nata, passa, mortua etc., hoc est verum. Est ergo distinguendum. Si intelligis divinam naturam pro tota divinitate seu unitate, tunc argumentum est falso, quia solus Christus non est tota trinitas, sed tantum una persona trinitatis. Ergo tantum est unus Deus.” WA 39/2:110A.1–15.} In a similar way, Luther argues that to touch Christ is to touch the divine nature.\footnote{“Ideo dicitur: Qui tangit filium Dei, ipsam divinam naturam tangit.” WA 39/2:106A.19–20.} The proposition means that one touches the second person of the Trinity who subsists in a divine nature. In both cases Luther uses “divinity” or “divine nature” to signify and supposit for the person of Christ. Grasping the different senses of “divinity” is crucial to understanding Luther’s thought on what is communicated to what in the person of Christ, as seen below in the discussion of Luther’s thought on the suffering of the divine nature in Christ. Moreover, the point depends on the metaphysical argument that there is no difference between the divine nature and the person of Christ.

Luther’s basic propositions in the communication of attributes follow Biel’s rules for predication. In Luther’s propositions he predicates concrete terms of the person of Christ and concrete terms from each nature of one another, as in the proposition “God is a human being.” Luther’s comments underscore that he understands the signification of concrete and abstract terms to align with the metaphysical distinction between person and nature. He uses the distinction to maintain the unity of Christ’s person and the distinction of his
natures, utilizing the same tools as Biel to achieve the same distinction of natures in the unity of Christ’s person. Luther defines new terms when words are predicated of Christ, as Ockham and Biel did also. With the new signification of terms, Luther can express the communication of attributes within the bounds of language that calls things to mind, using words to portray what is true because of the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. And, like Biel, Luther explains these propositions as suppositing for the person of Christ so that one using suppositional logic will judge them to be true.

4.4.3 Semantics and Logic: “The Creator is a Creature”

Luther’s development of the communication of attributes extends to questions of Christ as creature and creator. Framing Christological questions in terms of creator and creature is not Luther’s innovation, as above I have shown how those terms function as pivots in the question of the adoration of Christ’s human nature. As shown above, Biel also attends to this question. Here I turn to Luther’s analysis of propositions that name Christ as a creature, a central question running through his disputation on Schwenckfeld’s Christology as well as Luther’s thought on Christ as creator. Luther affirms that Christ is both creator and creature, and grants the proposition “the creator is a creature,” and here I show how those claims can be analyzed in light of medieval thought on language and logic.

Luther uses a new nominal definition of “creature” to grant the claim that Christ is a creature. This type of proposition is another instance of the communication of attributes, this time amounting to the question of whether the attribute “creature” may be predicated of the person Christ. Luther appeals to the new theological language to establish this claim,
putting forth a new definition of creature in theology. Luther turns away from a philosophical definition of creature as “that which the creator creates and separates from the creator.” Instead, in Christ the creator and the creature are one and the same. The term “creature” here signifies unity rather than separation.113 Luther crafts a new relative term to signify a unique metaphysical relation, here between the creator and one particular creature. Since no term exists to signify a creature who remains united to the creator, Luther supplies a new word that signifies this relationship in Christ—a move that Ockham’s thought on conventional signification and relative terms permits.

Luther’s use of a nominal definition of “creature” is especially clear when compared to Biel’s analysis of “creature.” Biel appeals to various nominal definitions of “creature” as he accounts for various opinions on the predication that Christ is a creature. Luther’s definition closely parallels the nominal definitions that Biel offers, providing an alternative way of thinking about the kind of thing that the term “creature” can signify. Luther turns to a nominal definition of “creature” to account for the claim that Christ is a creature without denying the divinity. Luther, like Biel, notes that propositions calling Christ a creature are subject to misunderstanding and should be used cautiously among those who are trained theologically.114 The kind of theological learning needed to account for these kinds of predications is the scholastic education that Luther had, using nominal definitions to

113 “Creatura est in veteri lingua id, quod creator creavit et a se separavit, sed haec significatio non habet locum in creatura Christo. Ibi creator et creatura unus et idem est. Quia autem ambiguitas in vocabulo est et homines audientes hoc statim cogitant de creatura separata a creatore, ideo metuerunt eo uti, sed parce licet eo uti ut novo vocabulo, sicut aliquando Augustinus dicit summa laetitia affectus: Nonne admirabile mysterium? qui creator est, voluit esse creatura.” WA 39/2:105A.4–11.

predicate human properties of Christ without leading to denials of Christ’s divinity.

Moreover, Luther agrees with Biel on the precise claim being made in the assertion that Christ is a creature. Whatever words are used, Luther argues that those who think correctly about Christ intend to say that the humanity of Christ has been created. 115 This is the very analysis that Biel undertakes in his discussion of the question of Christ as a creature. Both Luther and Biel end up with the same result of this analysis, as they appeal to the intended sense to argue that the precise claim is that the human nature of Christ has been created. Both work with conceptions of mental, written, and spoken language to reduce various written and spoken formulae to the intended sense.

Luther appeals to mental language when defending the claim that a human being is the creator. Luther uses the communication of attributes to claim that “a human being created the world.” However, he accepts this proposition only when one properly understands the sense. That is, Luther appeals to the mental language over the written or spoken language, calling for the theologian to identify the precise signification intended. In this instance, the intent is that “human being” signify the concrete divine person who has assumed a human nature. 116 Luther is not doing anything original in making or defending

115 “55. Cum omnibus istis formis dicendi eandem rem significare velit autor, frustra quaeritur in verbis contentio. 56. Ita cum nihil aliud velint istae formae locutionis: Christus secundum quod homo, vel secundum humanitatem, vel humanitate, vel per humanitatem, vel in humanitate est creatura, quam quod habet creaturam vel assumpsit creaturam humanam, vel, quod simplicissimum est, humanitas Christi est creatura; contemnendi sunt pravilogicales, qui diversis formis grammaticis loquendi diversas affingunt in eadem resurrectiones.” WA 39/2:96.14–22.

this claim within the communication of attributes. Ockham also claims that “a human being created the stars.” Ockham accounts for this by appealing to concrete predication of Christological attributes. Luther makes the same claim and accounts for it in the same way, taking “human being” properly understood as a concrete term signifying the divine person who subsists in a human nature.

Luther also turns to supposition to defend the claim that a human being created the world. Luther explains that the human being is one and the same person who existed before the creation of the world, the second divine person of the Trinity. While it is true that before creation Christ’s person was not a human person born of Mary, now Christ is a human person. When analyzing the proposition according to suppositional logic, it does not matter that Christ was not a human being at creation. The term “human being” can stand in for the divine person of Christ because that divine person has now taken on and subsists in a human nature. Luther’s definition of “homo Christus” identifies the supposition of the term in the claim about creation as the divine person, and understands the term’s signification of humanity as a connotation of the form in which the divine person subsists. The predicate term in the proposition, when reduced to a substantive noun, is

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118 “Sed illa persona est Deus et homo, est una persona et eadem, quae est ante mundum creatum, etiamsi non erat homo natus ex Maria virgine ante mundum, tamen filius Dei erat, qui nunc est homo. Sic exempli gratia: Cum video regem purpuratum et coronatum in solio, dico: Hic rex natus est ex muliercula nudus sine corona. Quomodo hoc potest esse, tamen sedet in magno solio coronatus et purpura indutus? At haec induit iam postquam factus est rex, nihilominus tamen est una et eadem persona, sic etiam hic in Christo est una persona Deus et homo coniuncta nec distingui debent. Sed hoc verum est, quod Christus creavit mundum, antequam factus est homo, sed tamen facta est arcta quaedam unitas, quae non permittit, ut diversa loquar. Ergo recte quod dico de homine Christo, dico etiam de Deo, quod sit passus, crucifixus.” WA 39/2:101A.10–23.
“creator.” Since the two terms both supposit in this proposition for the second person of the Trinity, the proposition is true. Like Biel’s analysis of the communication of attributes, Luther’s account of Christ as creator fits within the bounds of suppositional logic.

Luther’s account of Christ as creator also uses the concept of hypostatic agency. Thinking in terms of hypostatic agency, Luther ascribes the work of creation to the divine person rather than the divine nature acting apart from the person. Luther uses the illustration of a king and his purple to portray how the creator is the same person as the incarnate Word. As a king is born without purple but remains the same person when the purple is put on at his coronation, so also the divine person of Christ is the same after assuming a human nature.119 Luther here uses John Damascene’s illustration, but applies the picture to a different question than the adoration of Christ’s human nature. In either case, the illustration is not a picture of *perichoresis*. Instead, the illustration functions to portray hypostatic agency. Luther uses the illustration to portray a single person as the creator of the world while acknowledging that the same person later assumed a human nature. The work of creation was not done by an abstract nature, but by a concrete person.

The predications Luther makes in questions of Christ as creator and creature match the rules that Biel enumerates. The propositions expressing the communication of attributes use concrete terms of the natures, like “God,” “human being,” “Christ,” “Son of God,” “creator,” and “creature.” Since these are concrete terms, they signify primarily the

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divine person while connoting a quality of that person. Luther does not use an abstract
term of the human nature, such as “humanity,” and predicate the act of creating the world
of the human nature. By using concrete terms signifying and suppositing the divine person,
Luther’s formula “the creator is a creature” follows the rules laid out by Biel. Like Biel’s
account, Luther’s fits within the semantics of the medieval nominalists and suppositional
logic.

4.4.4 Metaphysics: Suffering and the Divine Nature

Luther states that crucifixion and suffering are ascribed to the divine nature through
the communication of attributes. For instance, Luther accounts for the scriptural passage
that speaks of crucifying the Lord of glory by appealing to the communication of attributes.
To be crucified is an attribute of the human nature, but in this case it is predicated of a term
(the Lord of glory) signifying the divine nature. Luther says that to be crucified is correctly
attributed to either nature of Christ. At first glance this argument is evidence that
Luther’s understanding of the communication breaks with scholastic limitations by
ascribing suffering to the abstract divine nature. However, Luther’s explanations give an
account that follows Biel’s rules. Attributing crucifixion to the divine nature occurs in the
statement “they crucified the Lord of glory,” so that suffering is ascribed not to the abstract
nature but to a concrete term of the divine nature. Such a concrete term signifies and

120 “Filius hominis crucifigetur. Crucifigi est unum idioma naturae humanae, sed quia duae naturae sunt in
una persona unitae, tribuitur utrique naturae. Item, qui credit in filium habet vitam aeternam. Ibi de divina
supposits for the person while connoting the nature. As shown above, Biel put forward and Luther repeated the idea that “divinity” may be taken as the person of Christ since the divine nature and the second person of the Trinity are the same. Here Luther uses the term “divinity” in this concrete way, indicated by Luther’s equation of “divinity” with “the Lord of glory.” “Divinity” in this instance supposits for the person of Christ who is crucified, rather than the abstract divine nature.

Luther gives the same kind of account in analyzing who cries out on the cross. Luther applies hypostatic agency to the question, thinking that it is a person and not a nature crying out on the cross. By this analysis, the one who cries out from the cross is the person who is God and a human being. Because of the single person, concrete terms of either nature may be the subject of the proposition, so that it is rightly said either that “a human person cries out” or “God cries out.” While Luther attributes crying out to the divinity, because of hypostatic agency this attribution must be to the person of Christ rather than the abstract divine nature. And Luther’s proposition bears this out, as he does not say that “the divine nature cries out,” but only that “God cries out,” and grants that the creator cries out from the cross—another instance of a concrete term of the divine nature in a proposition. The concrete predicates that Luther uses in his formulations signify and supposit for the concrete person rather than the abstract nature.

When Luther’s account of Christ calling out from the cross is analyzed with suppositional logic, propositions ascribing suffering to the divine nature are verified in the person of Christ. Luther lists several potential subject terms for the proposition: “creator,” “God,” “eternal Word,” or “Son of God.” All of these are concrete terms signifying and suppositing for the second person of the Trinity while connoting the divine nature which makes that person God. On the other side of the proposition, “cries out” can be reduced to “crier” or “the one crying out.” “Suffers” is reduced to “suffering one” or “person who is suffering.” As a concrete adjective term, “one crying out” or “suffering one” signifies and supposits for the person, while connoting the act of crying out with a human voice or participating in human suffering. Since the person and not merely the human nature cries out and suffers, the terms “one crying out” or “suffering one” supposit for the second person of the Trinity.

Luther’s careful attention to abstract and concrete terms in the discussion of Christ’s suffering allows him to affirm that the divine nature suffers, but only in the person of Christ. Or rather, that the divine nature that suffers is the person of Christ. Luther distinguishes carefully between the person and the divine nature, since he notes that the term “divinity” or “divine nature” can be used to signify either one. When one takes it to signify the whole unity of the Godhead, it is not true that divinity has suffered or died. When one takes the term “divinity” to signify one person of the divinity, the second person who is born, suffers, and dies, then it is true that divinity suffers and dies.123 Luther uses

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123 “Cum ergo dicitur: Divinitas est mortua, tunc includitur, quod etiam pater et Spiritus sanctus sint mortui. Sed hoc non est verum, quia tantum una persona divinitatis, sed filius est natus, mortuu et passus etc. Ideo natura divina, quando capitur pro persona, est nata, passa, mortua etc., hoc est verum. Est ergo
these formulas to counter the idea that the suffering of Christ divides the two natures, as if the suffering of the human nature set it apart from the divine nature. He uses hypostatic agency to reject the position that the human nature itself suffers: the person of Christ is the patient of the suffering, a person who subsists in both natures while suffering. In this way Luther maintains that it is God who suffers, but not the divine nature in the sense of the entire unity of the Godhead. Luther is careful to identify precisely what it means that divinity suffers: the second person of the Trinity suffers and dies.

Luther’s understanding of the suffering of Christ can be seen in one typical description in the Disputation on the Sentence “The Word Was Made Flesh” (John 1:14). Luther says:

The communication of attributes ought to be heeded closely. By this a property of either nature is attributed in the person of Christ. Even if Christ is one and the same with the Father, nevertheless, because Christ is incarnate, has suffered, and been crucified for us, all things have been subjected to Christ by the Father. For the person is God and a human being. Insofar as the person is God, the person has not suffered because God is not passible. Insofar as the person is a human being, the person suffers. Nevertheless, since in one person God and a human being could not be separated, we ought to say that Christ—true God and a true human being—has suffered for us, and the entire person is said to have died for us. ... These two natures in Christ ought not to be separated, but united as far as possible, that the Son of God, or God has suffered, been crucified, died and rose. Paul likewise says that they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.
While Luther appeals to the communication of attributes in this passage, and attributes suffering to God or the Son of God, Luther stops short of attributing suffering to the divine nature. God remains impassible, as does the divine nature in Christ. When Luther attributes suffering to the divine nature, he attributes it to a concrete term such as “God” or “Son of God.” These concrete terms are the very terms Biel identifies as the proper terms to use in the communication of attributes. Furthermore, Luther is clear that the person suffers and dies, not one nature or the other. Since that person subsists in two natures as Luther indicates by naming the person “true God and a true human being,” Luther can say that God suffers and dies, but only because the one person who dies subsists in a divine nature. By using tools of late medieval nominalist philosophy, Luther’s theology accounts for the death of God while retaining a distinction between Christ’s natures and the impassibility of Christ’s divine nature.

4.5. Conclusion

Interpreting Luther’s thought on the communication of attributes in his medieval context clarifies the Christological claims that Luther makes. Luther resolves the question of the adoration of Christ by making metaphysical distinctions. Christ’s human nature, since it is united to the divine nature in the person of Christ, participates in the adoration given

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to the person of Christ. Luther’s approach using hypostatic agency depends on
metaphysical analysis of the difference between person and nature, and what the proper
agent of actions is. On these points Luther follows the metaphysical thought of John
Damascene, whose thought was influential among scholastic theologians as well. Following
John, particularly on the concept of hypostatic agency, situates Luther with late scholastic
theologians rather than apart from them. Further continuity between Luther and the
nominalists is apparent as Luther uses concrete terms of Christ’s natures in the
communication of attributes, following the rules for predication of attributes that Biel
developed. Luther maintains a careful distinction between the concrete person and
abstract natures, so that, with Ockham and Biel, Luther can affirm that a human being
created the world and God died, yet not erase the distinction between Christ’s natures.
Close attention to metaphysical concepts allows Luther to sort out what is being claimed in
the communication of attributes. Luther can verify propositions expressing the
communication while staying within the bounds of suppositional logic. The most radical
part of Luther’s Christology, his conception of the communication of attributes, functions
with tools of late medieval nominalism. The semantics, logic, and metaphysics Luther uses
to resolve the problem of the communication of attributes are the same tools found in
Ockham and Biel.

Since the communication of attributes functions in parts of Luther’s theology
beyond Christology, understanding the language and logic of the communication in Luther
opens up a window to interpret more of Luther’s theology in light of nominalist thought. As
Johann Steiger shows, the communication of attributes is a hermeneutical key to
interpreting Luther. Luther uses the communication of attributes to account for doctrines such as anthropology, justification, scriptural interpretation, rhetoric, pastoral care, and creation.\textsuperscript{126} Understanding the logic of the communication of attributes in the person of Christ is key to understanding Luther’s approach to these doctrines and to his theology as a whole.\textsuperscript{127} Since Luther uses metaphysics in the communication of attributes, it is worth asking what kind of metaphysics he uses in other doctrines. The language Luther employs to work out the communication of attributes is significative rather than effective. Since Luther’s language varies in different contexts and genre, it is worth asking what semantic theories Luther employs while addressing other doctrines. Luther’s use of the communication of attributes works within suppositional logic. Accordingly, it is also worth asking if Luther works with suppositional logic as he addresses other doctrines such as the simul, the real presence, and similar elements of Luther’s theology. Those doctrines may look different when understood within the bounds of suppositional logic.

\textsuperscript{126} Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers. Der fröhliche Wechsel als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zu Abendmahlslehre, Anthropologie, Seelsorge, Naturtheologie, Rhetorik und Humor,” \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie} 38, no. 1 (1996): 1–28. Steiger thinks that Luther’s thought on the communication goes beyond John Damascene’s, particularly on the death of God and the suffering of the divine nature. While I argue in this chapter that Luther’s thought on the communication follows more traditional accounts that do not ascribe suffering to the abstract divinity in Christ, Steiger is correct in pointing out the centrality of the communication of attributes to Luther’s theology beyond Christology.

\textsuperscript{127} Luy shows that Luther’s soteriology depends on the divine nature not suffering in Christ, making analysis of the communication critical for an understanding of Luther’s broader theology. Luy, \textit{Dominus Mortis}, 163–194.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 The Significance of Luther’s Doctrine of Christ

Luther’s medieval context is vital to understanding Luther. Yet the complexity of the medieval world in which Luther appeared challenges contemporary scholars as they approach Luther. The fifteenth century was an age of religious diversity within Latin Christendom.¹ Luther was born into the complexities of the Western church in the fifteenth century. No single strand of medieval thought, piety, or life is adequate for placing Luther in his medieval context. Rather, Luther the Augustinian friar drew eclectically from the medieval resources available to him. He adopted ideas from mysticism,² from late medieval reform movements,³ and late medieval piety.⁴ While scholars have done fruitful work pursuing these sources of Luther’s thought, less work has been done to show what Luther adopted from scholasticism. I have argued in this study that Luther relies on late medieval nominalists for philosophical tools useful for Christology. With this argument I hope to open up further questions about Luther and his relationship to the nominalists. Since

² For recent examples, see Bernard McGinn, Mysticism in the Reformation (1500–1600) (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company: 2016); see also Ronald K. Rittgers and Vincent Evener, eds., Protestants and Mysticism in Reformation Europe (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019).
³ For a recent example, see Saak, Luther.
⁴ For recent examples see especially Hamm, Early Luther, and Hamm, Reformation of Faith.
Luther was trained as a nominalist, the role of late medieval nominalism in shaping Luther’s thought deserves careful attention.

I have argued that Luther borrows tools of language and logic from the nominalists for his work on the person of Christ. Luther adopts categories from nominalist semantics as useful tools to account for authoritative statements of Christ that are, in a strict sense, incorrect. He uses the conventional character of written and spoken language to craft new nominal definitions for terms expressing the unique relationship between things in the person of Christ. He analyzes concrete terms to align with concrete metaphysical entities, and abstract terms with abstract entities. Luther finds these metaphysical categories helpful for articulating the doctrine of the person of Christ. He uses suppositional logic in Christology, and particularly in the communication of attributes. Underlying these adaptations is Luther’s delineation of philosophy and theology in such a way that he could use philosophical tools in theology to resolve Christological problems. Luther’s use of metaphysical, semantic, and logical theories to address Christological problems shows his interest in doctrine and philosophical theology.

Recognizing the place of nominalist thought in Luther’s Christology can provide resources to contemporary theologians. Here I wish to highlight three problems where attention to Luther’s Christology may be helpful. The first is ecumenical relations. Johannes Zachhuber identifies Luther’s cavalier attitude towards the coherence of Christology to be an ecumenical stumbling block.\textsuperscript{5} Zachhuber’s argument flows out of modern interpretations of Luther’s Christology as an abandonment of speculative metaphysics.

\textsuperscript{5} Zachhuber, \textit{Legacy}, 106–137.
Once these categories are left behind, the argument goes, Luther frames the communication of attributes without restrictions. If instead of metaphysics Luther sees Christology as a linguistic task in which words unite Christ’s natures, the question of coherence easily slips to the background. Furthermore, if reason must be eliminated to make room for faith, then logical coherence is an obstacle to faith that needs to be removed. All of these ideas come out of interpretations of Luther through neo-Kantian lenses. Yet viewing Luther’s Christology through medieval lenses suggests a concern for coherence that is lost in modern readings of Luther’s Christology. Luther, at least, did not set out to achieve less coherence than his scholastic predecessors. His critique of equivocation in Ockham and Biel suggests just the opposite: Luther aims to achieve a greater coherence than the nominalists did, and adapts late medieval distinctions between philosophy and theology to suit his purpose of greater coherence. Ecumenical efforts may recognize the perennial challenges that Chalcedonian Christology presents for coherence, whether that Christology is being done by scholastics, by Luther, or by modern theologians. Following Luther’s footsteps, contemporary theologians may look for the best resources available to address questions about Christ’s person.

The second problem that Luther offers resources to address is the relation of faith and reason. While philosophy and logic have advanced far beyond late medieval nominalism, exploring the relationship between faith and reason in the medievals and in Luther offers an alternative to modern conceptions that divorce faith and reason. Faith and

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6 For one example surveying Christology, see the essays in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, eds., The Incarnation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
reason remains an ongoing question within theology. Paul Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter describe an ongoing crisis of reason and faith in contemporary theology. Reason plays some role in constructing arguments and judging them as true or false. Faith, while having a cognitive aspect, is seen primarily as a matter of trust. Theologians struggle to define how these diverse intellectual and affective processes should be related. For instance, Bruce Marshall wrestles with the question of faith and reason in light of the Trinity, arguing that the Trinity is an invitation to know the world rather than a criteria for judgment. Central themes emerge from these studies as questions and problems: what role do arguments have in theology? How are arguments to be formed and how are they to be judged? How does faith fit into epistemology, and what is its cognitive side?

Scholarship on Luther places him in different locations in this debate. Interpreters of the modern Luther frame him as an important voice dividing faith from reason. Lois Malcolm shows how Luther's theology of the cross is frequently used to destroy any rapprochement between faith and reason. John F. Hoffmeyer argues that Luther abandons the principle of non-contradiction. Once that principle is eliminated, the very essence of reason is also eliminated from theology. Luther's writings on faith, read within a neo-Kantian system of thought, are understood to mean that reason has no place in theology.

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7 Griffiths and Hütter, “Introduction,” 1–23.
Other scholars turn to Luther as a resource for relating philosophy and theology. Greg Peterson sees Luther as an ally of philosophy, albeit an ally from a different philosophical world.\textsuperscript{11} Mary Streufert sees in Luther a model for an extra-rational epistemology that does not reject rationality entirely.\textsuperscript{12} These interpreters of Luther see careful distinction and nuance in Luther’s approach to philosophy. With those distinctions in place, reason does have a role to play in the theological task. One aim of this study is to contribute to this interpretation of Luther by investigating how Luther distinguishes philosophy and theology to permit the use of philosophical tools in theology. Clearly philosophy has changed since the sixteenth century and Luther’s historical context must be kept in mind. Nevertheless, Luther’s work with philosophical tools in Christology is a potential resource for addressing contemporary questions of faith and reason.

Finally, Luther’s Christology may serve as a resource for addressing other theological questions. Studies of Christology remain richly generative efforts, as evident in works like those of Marilyn McCord Adams and Kathryn Tanner.\textsuperscript{13} Their attention to philosophical theology, particularly Christological questions, offers a resource for theologians taking on new questions. Interpreting Luther’s Christology as an exercise in philosophical theology may open up new resources for addressing contemporary


questions. Luther turned to logic, semantics, and metaphysics to pursue Christological questions. By addressing those questions, he addressed broader questions about theological method and engaged with other theologians. Luther’s theological method may serve as a model for theologians to approach other contemporary questions through the person of Christ.
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