Review of Anastasia Kopylova:  
*W. Ockham’s Conception of Supposition and Signification*  

Statements such as (1) “All swans are white”, (2) “‘White’ is a concept” or (3) “‘White’ has five letters” require specific tools of analysis. The term “white”, for instance, has a different semantics in the in each of these statements. Medieval logicians distinguish between these and other semantic functions by means of supposition theory. This theory counts as one of the major medieval innovations in the history of logic. But as Paul Vincent Spade famously noted, it is largely unclear what exactly supposition theory is a theory of. Anastasia Kopylova addresses this problem in her impressive and thorough dissertation. As becomes clear from summary of her work, the dissertation provides a new interpretation of supposition theory in one of its major proponents, William of Ockham. Convincingly tying together Ockham’s ontological and logical commitments, one of Kopylova’s main and most original theses in view of the research literature is the tenet that supposition theory concerns terms rather than statements. This tenet is embedded in a careful study comprising the larger context in the history of logic, Ockham’s text as well as the main interpretations of Ockham’s work in the scholarly literature.

The dissertation is structured in a way that conveniently reveals the theoretical layers on which Ockham’s supposition theory is founded. After situating supposition theory in the history of medieval logic (ch. 1), Kopylova discusses the theoretical background of supposition theory in Ockham, i.e. his theory of mental language (ch. 2). Then she situates “supposition” in relation to the central concept often used in opposition to it: signification (ch. 3), before zooming in on the status of supposition in Ockham’s works (ch. 4).

The dissertation has a number of strengths some of which I would like to highlight in the following:
1. The author demonstrates a rare *methodological awareness*, situating and setting her own work apart by emphasising the traps of anachronism (p. 11-14). Moreover, she directly addresses the differences between the medieval and contemporary conceptions of logic (p. 11), highlighting that the medieval conception involves metaphysical and epistemological dimensions.

2. Throughout the dissertation, the author’s displays an *enormous grasp* of both the research literature and the primary material. While fair in her assessments, Kopylova clearly demarcates her and the other approaches. She clearly highlights what her own insights owe to the work of Catarina Dutilh Novaes. At the same time, she also makes critically clarifies the shortcomings of Dutilh Novaes’s approach (p. 20).

3. As noted earlier, the author advances an *original interpretation* of Ockham’s supposition theory by invoking his ontological commitment. Much of the contemporary scholarship on Ockham treats Ockham’s account as emphasising the propositional level. This was often invoked as a means of highlighting Ockham’s closeness to the Fregean context principle. However, as Kopylova argues, Ockham’s theory ought to be seen in conjunction with his atomist ontology (p. 22 and 44). If this is correct a terminist reading is much more plausible than the favoured propositional reading.

4. This interpretation gains even more ground by embedding in in the *theoretical context* of mental language (33-35). After all, the medium of logic is mental language. Situating it in this context makes clear how logical constituents are seen as epistemic constituents that are, in turn, founded on the metaphysical building blocks of substances and properties.

While Kopylova’s dissertation is succinctly and convincingly presented, the summary also gives rise to questions, one of which I would like to name: As has been pointed out, Kopylova’s interpretation is partly building on that of Dutilh Novaes that is shown to be a “formal method for the semantic analysis of propositions” (p. 42). If this is correct, one is left to wonder how this method fares with regard to Kopylova’s own interpretation, which is rooted in the metaphysically grounded focus on terms, not propositions. Given Ockham’s ontology, Dutilh Novaes own approach cannot be based on terms. In other words, one might ask where exactly Kopylova departs from Dutilh Novaes.

However, this is a minor quibble about the literature and in no way diminishes Kopylova’s great achievements that culminate in this dissertation.