
Was Wyclif a Philosophical Extremist?

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I.

The importance of Wyclif for religious reform in the West has been recognised from the very beginning of the Protestant Reformation. He is generally recognised as a Proto-Reformer; as – rather poetically – “the Morning Star of the Reformation;” as a principled critic of ecclesiastical orders (or more precisely disorders), as well as of some key religious dogmas; as an advocate of the right of the secular authority to reform the Church; and as an advocate of the vernacular for certain liturgical purposes, such as preaching and Bible reading. His threat – as seen from vantage point of the institutional Church – rested in the fact that he was the first significant and, already during his lifetime recognised, scholar who became a “heretic.” Earlier, heresy was considered an aberration more typical of common people with a low level of theological knowledge.

However, until a relatively recent time, Wyclif was not considered an especially important and original philosopher, that is, a thinker in the narrower technical sense. The conventional view was that he had come out of the strict Augustinianism of the old type and that he was an advocate of ultra-realism or extreme realism at a time when realism – and even more ultra-realism – was condemned (by a historical law of some kind) to a deserved retreat from the stage.¹ In the evaluation of his historical importance a certain perplexity still prevails. It was startling and hard to explain that a man, so “conservative” in philosophy, could be such a progressive Reformer as far as the Church and its dogmas were concerned. This fact was interpreted as something

¹ Three examples may suffice: (1) John A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* (Cambridge, 1961), chapter 6 is titled “Wyclif and Ultrarealism,” and (2) Robert Kalivoda, “Joannes Wyclif’s Metaphysik des extremen Realismus und ihre Bedeutung im Endstadium der mittelalterlichen Philosophie,” In: *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter. Ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung*. [Vorträge des II. Internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie, Köln 1961.] [Miscellanea mediaevalia, 2] (Berlin, 1963) 716–723. (3) Sometimes more moderate expressions appear, for instance, B. L. Manning, in *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, 1932), in chapter 16 “Wyclif,” p. 496, speak about Wyclif’s “intensive realism.”

contradictory, as some inexplicable anomaly, revealing a certain intellectual confusion on his part: a philosophical ultra-conservative and an ultra-radical in church reform, a radical, who was willing to go substantially further than the later Protestant denominations.²

It is my opinion that such an assessment of Wyclif as a philosopher is a gross error. A new phase in the exploration of his philosophy began some quarter of a century ago, and although it has not advanced as fast as one may wish, it is becoming ever clearer that Wyclif is a prominent philosopher not only of an English or Bohemian significance, but belongs to a Pan-European class. For instance, Anthony Kenny does not hesitate to include him within the trinity of the most significant English thinkers of the Late Middle Ages, and places Wyclif next to Duns Scotus and William Ockham, about whose importance for European philosophy there is no doubt.³ The more thoroughly his philosophy becomes known, the clearer becomes the intense intellectual interconnection between his theoretical philosophy and his critique of church dogmas. For instance, his teaching about predestination, free will, and determinism, just as his teaching about the impossibility of annihilation (which determined his eucharistic views), and of course others as well, have their roots in his teaching about the real universals, concretely in his conception of how God has arranged this world, and under what conditions the world as such can exist and can be known by humans.

II.

In my opinion, the insinuation of ultra-realism or extreme realism is unjust, unfair, and nonsensical. It is unjust because it is made from the vantage point of Thomism. Of course, to those who consider Thomism the “correct” or normal (or rather normative) philosophy, (in the conviction that Thomism mirrors *philosophia perennis*), to them it appears that Wyclif is a strict and scholastic Platonist⁴ of the last days, because – as far as universals are concerned – he does not stop at their position, namely that only concepts (and of course, words) are universal. If Thomism, however, is not *a priori* considered the correct normative position, then the situation changes immediately.

² A notable exception is S. H. Thomson, “The Philosophical Basis of Wyclif’s Theology,” *Journal of Religion*, 9 (1931) 93ff. Despite the fact that he sympathises with Wyclif, he also adopts the view of the existence of three philosophical schools in his time, that is, he basically adopts the Thomistic view. According to him, Thomas’s conceptualism is an intermediate position between the extremes of nominalism and realism.

³ Anthony Kenny, *A Brief History of Western Philosophy*, (Oxford, 1998) 166.

⁴ Wyclif surely was not a Platonist in the sense, in which – under the influence of Aristotle’s philosophy – this term was conventionally understood in the Middle Ages, namely, that Platonism postulated the existence of universals separated from particulars. For a discussion of this problem, see Johannes Wyclif, *De universalibus*, ed. Ivan J. Mueller, (Oxford, 1985) 1: 58ff.

Then the playing field is levelled. One philosophical viewpoint stands against another, and their value is measured by their ability to explain reality in the best, fullest, and most profound way.

The unfairness of the insinuation rests in the use of the word “extreme.” For a medieval thinker it was directly an issue of intellectual correctness that his philosophical or theological standpoint was not “extreme.” The attribute of “extremism” – like the term “terrorism” nowadays in politics – represented a negative value judgement, the purpose of which was not to describe, but to discredit a person’s position. It is relevant that Ockham’s terminism – although a position far removed from Thomism – was never called extreme. And a discredited position was not necessary to refute by rational arguments. The result was either to ignore it or to direct the conventional mantras against it.

The insinuation of ultra-realism is nonsensical, because the key point of Wyclif’s philosophy is not that divine Ideas exist (of course they do), but that in this world universals exist in every natural thing created by God. Wyclif’s main emphasis is not on the assertion that Ideas are *ante creationem* or *ante rem*, but that *universalia sunt in rebus*, just as there are *universalia in mente* and *universalia in verbo*. Wyclif differs from Thomas, who maintains that universals are in mind and in words, as well as from Ockham, who maintains that they are only in words. In order to explain that and how things were created and how they become known by humans, Wyclif maintains that universals are not only in words and in concepts, but also in things. Wyclif is thus not exclusive in an extremist way as is his main opponent; he does not maintain that universals are only this and that, or that universals are nothing real. On the contrary, he maintains that universal are – and must be – everywhere, and that they must penetrate the being of everything, and intellectually illuminate everything. The philosopher’s task is to create a rational construct, through which the life-giving inter-penetration of the universal in the particular becomes evident.

Hence, from Wyclif’s vantage point it was Ockham, who adopted an extreme position. Although his position on the issue of the universals was not entirely correct either, Thomas adopted a position, which was less extreme. Despite that – one might say “in the interest of truth itself” – Wyclif is willing to recognise also the opinions which do not agree with his standpoints. He recognises them as opinions, which may become a part of the striving to gain knowledge of what is, even if these positions – as he himself states are – from his viewpoint extreme. Even if I am getting ahead of myself in my narrative, I shall give an example, which can be found in *De universalibus*, 4.⁵ Thomas’s position concerning universals is that *omnis substantia est singularis et, ut universaliter apprehenditur, est universalis*. Against this, Master Walter Burleigh maintains the opinion – substantiated by a citation

⁵ Wyclif, *De universalibus*, 86/40 (page/line) to 87/59 of the Latin version.

from Aristotle – that *universale non est aliquod suorum singularium*. Wyclif starts his disquisition saying that “he treads in the middle reconciling extreme positions” [*ego autem per medium incedo concordando extrema*], that is, Thomas’s extreme position with the extreme position of Burleigh. Even though the two positions are mutually exclusive, Wyclif is willing to recognise their basic validity. What is more, he will attempt to demonstrate that within the framework of his own philosophy that both these views, substantially extreme, are nevertheless correct. It was because of their synergy that an objectively correct viewpoint could be attained.

Paul Vincent Spade, the author of an introduction to the English translation of Wyclif’s *De universalibus*,⁶ questions the tripartite division of positions concerning the universals. Inasmuch as conceptualism and nominalism both cast doubt on the existence of universals *in rebus*, they form together one group, which opposes the view that universals are after all real in some way, that is, realities existing in the particulars. He discards the division into nominalism, conceptualism, and realism, whereby conceptualism was at times called moderate realism, while realism was called extreme realism. Instead, we have a far more probable division into nominalism and realism, even though both of these types are understood differently by different thinkers during the course of history.

III.

The limited extent of this presentation does not permit elucidating the earlier-mentioned relationship between Wyclif’s theory of the universals and his theories concerning predestination, freedom, and annihilation (or the eucharist, as the case may be). What can be done at most is to sketch the reasons why it is unacceptable to designate his philosophy as extremely realistic. For that purpose it is necessary to examine, albeit briefly, his concept of relationship between what is universal and that which is not universal, that is, his concept of the relationship between so-called universals and particulars. However, even positing the question in this way is somewhat misleading. Wyclif simply does not hold that the universals exist somehow besides or outside the particulars (see his rejection of Burleigh), or that they are intermixed like the grains of sand, that is, somehow together, yet still separate. Where then, properly speaking, are the universals, which moreover do really exist?

As I have previously indicated, Wyclif’s designation as an advocate of ultra-realism is due to his upholding the opinion that the so-called universals exist *ante rem*, that is, universals as divine Ideas. Thus he somehow seems to posit universals as beings existing prior to the origin of the things of this

⁶ Paul V. Spade, “Introduction,” to John Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford, 1985) xiii n. 14; xv n.15.

world, and as realities, which exist outside of our sensory world. The answer to this “objection” is a resounding “yes”. Wyclif several times affirms the existence of Ideas in his writings. What is more, he does not hesitate to apply to the deniers of their existence the term of “heretics”, reserved for the advocates of theological deviations. After all, Wyclif even wrote a special treatise about the divine Ideas, which will hopefully soon be published in a modern critical edition.

However, as far as the upholding of the existence of the divine Ideas is concerned, Wyclif does not differ from the majority of mediaeval philosophers. Augustine,⁷ Anselm,⁸ and Thomas⁹ (to name just the most famous thinkers) adopt – albeit with certain serious permutations – the teaching concerning the Ideas as exemplars of Creation. It is only Ockham, Wyclif’s older contemporary († before 1350), who emphasises divine will exclusively at the expense of divine reason, hence he has no use for the Ideas. Wyclif consciously and absolutely rejects a reduction of the divine act of creation to a divine fiat, because thereby the creation would be deprived of an inherent rationality, which is indispensable for its knowability. This argument, however, finds no traction with Ockham.

Contrary to Ockham, Wyclif considers the cosmic order as something so important, as to be willing to admit that this order could have come about, but did not have to. God is not only the producer of this order, but in a way he cannot do otherwise than give the rise to an order, which is his order, his most proper order. Not even in theory can God act otherwise than according to his own most proper “character.” If it was objected that God is thereby deprived of “freedom” to create as “he wishes”, then Wyclif apparently would agree. He would only ask, whether the divine substance would not be vitiated, if God could create otherwise than according to his divine character, in which his reason and will are necessary one and the same.

IV.

In order to adumbrate at least somewhat Wyclif’s viewpoint, which in his mature thought plays a fundamental role – that is, his theory of real universals, existing here in the world – I wish to take three steps.

At first, it is necessary to note his theory of predication, which is his theory of expression.¹⁰ Why is it important? When we try to grasp the world intellectually, we have no other way, but to talk about the world, to formulate statements about it in language. Like contemporary Anglophone

⁷ *Locus classicus* is, of course, Augustine’s *De diversis Quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, PL 40, 30.

⁸ See, for instance, Anselm’s *De veritate*, PL 158, 486A-B, cited by Wyclif, *De universalibus*, 116.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, question 15.

¹⁰ Wyclif, *De universalibus*, 16/24–27/155.

philosophy, Wyclif – methodologically correct – tries first of all to elucidate this problem or, as the case may be, determine what kind of utterance is adequate for this task. Generally speaking, in the first place, the Latin verb *praedicare* means simply “to preach”, but this meaning is philosophically useless. Much more fruitful philosophically is the second signification, to express by one term something about another term. In the third place – and this is the most important signification for Wyclif – “to predicate” means to express something that participates in many or, more precisely, to say something about many. This kind of predication, which states something about the world, that is, about the things around us, is called by Wyclif *praedicatio realis*, true utterance, and he adds that the universal *in actu* makes statements about its *inferioribus*, which are found in reality. Neither a religious sermon, which is essentially an exhortation, nor expressing one term through another, tell us anything at all about the world as such. Only in the case when an actual general term expresses something substantial about individual things of this world (which are covered by this term), a true predication takes place, or – in other words – “the expression” of these things occurs. It is not necessary to be scared of the term “real predication”. Wyclif does not intend to say anything more than what is essentially said by contemporary philosophers, who adhere to the so-called correspondence theory of truth, for instance, Bertrand Russell and, in fact, by the entire school of linguistic analysis.

In my interpretation, Wyclif’s “real predication” means that individual things as such cannot “express themselves” and thus in a way are silent. What expresses them, what reveals them to us verbally, and what fits them into the patterns of our thinking, is the actually uttered universal. Similarly to Hume and Kant, Wyclif undertakes an analysis of the types of predications, and in a certain sense his real predication corresponds to Kant’s synthetic judgements. In these judgements, the utterance is not merely another verbal expression of the proposition’s subject, but the predicate adds something important to the meaning of the subject. For Wyclif, the predication does not merely add some information, which is not evident from the meaning of the subject as such, but something substantially weightier. The universal grasps the particular as already inserted among other particulars of the same kind. In other words, his universal plays essentially the same role as Kant’s categories in the process of gaining our experience and rational understanding of the surrounding world. There is, of course, the difference that the mind does not form the universals – for Kant, reason projects the categories into the elements of experience – but that the universals enter the mind from the very objects of cognition.

Wyclif, however proceeds even further in his analysis. What exactly is the relationship between the subject of the proposition and the predicate, between the referent of the predication and the predication itself?¹¹ After all, it

¹¹ Ibid., 27/155–47/340.

is evident that our predications often differ at this point: there are predications of diverse types or degrees. Some predications, especially in the area of theology, albeit by far not entirely nonsensical, do substantially differ from predications that are strictly scientific. The same is often true about philosophical or speculative predications, and yet these predications do not lack signification, they are not sheer “nonsense”. For instance, if a believer says that God knows this, that he loves that person, that he is loved by the people, that he walks, and so forth, he tries to say something significant about God. At the same time, he knows that God is not engaged in the process of cognition (because he is omniscient from the beginning), that God does not come (because he is omnipresent), that God does not fall in love (because he has always loved man), and so forth. Contrary to the neo-positivists, Wyclif recognises the value also of these utterances, but he knows that in this case the predicate cannot express anything about the subject, because all the predicates relate only to human experience. We are somehow accustomed – of course, for good reason – to talk that way, and Wyclif, therefore, calls this type of predication *praedicatio secundum habitudinem*. We know, however, that strictly speaking what we say is not true, because the act announced in the predicate in no way “touches” the subject of the proposition.

The direct opposite of this manner of predication is the scientific predication, which Aristotle identified as such, and which Wyclif calls formal predication. In it, the form of predicate, that is, what it expresses, contains the form of the subject, that is, what it means. The predicate (the utterance) has a broader scope so that it can be uttered about more subjects – the so-called asymmetrical relationship between the subject and the predicate. Nevertheless, what the predicate expresses is also expressed by the subject, only that the utterance is not as “broad”, for instance, the utterance “Man is an animal.” Not every animal is man, but every man – and what it means to be a man – is contained in the predicate “animal”, although it is not yet properly specified.

Between these two kinds of utterances there is a third one, which has a key importance for Wyclif’s philosophy. Some utterances are such that their subject is not expressed by their predicate (as in the type of previously mentioned predication), nevertheless, the subject and the predicate are parts of the one and same “thing”. The subject and the predicate have – in his terminology – a different form, yet they are somehow parts or aspects of one single thing. “A thing”, so to say, can remain itself (one integral thing), while it can contain “parts”,¹² which are not formally – not even in part – identical.

Wyclif does cite several examples of such a predication, and I shall return to this issue in a moment. Here I would like to note that Wyclif in his analysis of predication attempts to cover the totality of possible ways of expression, even if it should appear – which, of course, will not be the case – that one type

¹² I use the word “parts” quite advisedly. However, it must not be understood in the sense of “components.”

of predication contained no examples. Wyclif finds between (1) the predication, in which there is a partial identity between the subject and the predicate, and (2) a predication, where there is no identity, also (3) a type of predication (*praedicatio secundum essentiam*), where – although there is not an identity between the subject and the predicate – the subject and the predicate share one “being” or one thing, which he calls essence.¹³ This “essence” is not as such stamped out by a single form. It is a site occupied by several forms, or, more precisely, a common dwelling place of a universal form and a particular.

The multiplicity of forms was a widespread theory in the Middle Ages. In the opinion of Etienne Gilson, the greatest achievement of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas was his proof that the theory of the multiplicity of forms was erroneous.¹⁴ According to him, all of mediaeval philosophers advocated one kind or another of this theory, prior to Thomas. I do not intend to deal here with the question, whether Thomas’s theory did not give rise to further difficulties. It appears that his theory of the singleness of form causes a problem, especially in the case of attempts to understand the Christian teaching about the soul’s immortality. Be it as it may, Wyclif is well served by his theory that there also exists an essential predication, that is, a predication, the logical cohesion of which is given by the fact – often even by the empirical fact – that one and the same essence contains the form of the subject as well as of the predicate. Thus, Wyclif gains an instrument which can serve for the attainment of the most important goal, namely, to show that it is possible – indeed, indispensable for the understanding of many truths – that universals exist in things (*in rebus*).

V.

As early as the first chapter of the treatise *De universalibus*, in which Wyclif defines for the first time his essential predication, he cites as one of its examples the proposition: the universal is singular. If Leibniz calls his theory a theory of pre-established harmony, it would be possible – with a bit of exaggeration – to call Wyclif’s metaphysical theory a theory of essential

¹³ We can use the terms of “man” and “animal” from a previous example in order to explain this type of predication. Man and animal are two different forms, which – as far as their meaning is concerned – are entirely distinct: man is *only* a man, and animal is *only* an animal. To maintain that a man *is* an animal is equally unreasonable as to maintain that three *is* five. Hence from this viewpoint it is possible to maintain that any kind of formal predication is nonsensical: just as three do not exist in five, similarly *homo* does not exist in *animal*. One can only maintain that the same x, the same factually existing object, can contain the human form, that is, what is a man, and an animal form, that is, what is an animal. The only “connection,” which exists between the form of man and the form of animal, is their factual co-existence in one factual object. Hence, from this point of view, the essential predication is the only one possible real predication at all.

¹⁴ Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955), 361ff., especially, 376.

predication, because I am convinced that his essential predication lies at the core of his theory of real universals. To understand how it is possible that the universal is a singular, means to reach an understanding of how the universal is a particular and vice versa, that is, how the universal and the particular are dialectically connected, and how they mutually contain each other. I do not know whether Wyclif was aware of the fact that his theory solves the problems with which Abelard once showered William of Champeaux, and which – according to tradition – discredited him completely as a teacher.¹⁵ One obvious reason is Wyclif's adamant rejection of the view that the universals are separated from particulars, that somehow they exist by themselves, whether in this world or – as allegedly with Plato – in a world of their own, which is found outside this world.

Thus, what is universal is manifested in what is particular, and the particular is a manifestation of the universal. The universal does not exist without the particular, or outside of the latter. The particular does not exist without the universal as a certain particular, and if it happened to exist, it could not be grasped as something specific i.e. belonging to a species. The concrete essence “appears” as a particular at one time, and as a universal at another. It depends what question is posed, that is, from what viewpoint the essence is regarded. For instance, a man is a single self-contained being, yet, on the other hand – using a poetical metaphor – a man is a treasure trove and a resting place of the fullness of humanity. An individual, who is a self-contained being, embodies the all-human. Humanity does not exist outside a man; an individual man – without being commensurate with humanity – contains in himself all that is contained in the entirety of humanity. Peter, of course, is not Paul, but – despite Abelard – it is possible to say without a contradiction that Peter is all what Paul is, that is, he is a man. It is because otherwise Peter and Paul would not be men, and it would not be possible to differentiate them (for instance, say that Paul is a tall man, while Peter is not). They would not share what links them: Peter and Paul would be in their being as close or as far from each other as Peter or Paul from a stone or from an earth worm. Identity and distinction in a dialectical relationship are the basic mode of existence of everything that is.

VI.

It has happened not infrequently in the course of intellectual history that structures recognised in this world were applied to theological structures, and thus, a number of heresies arose which the Christian Church then sought

¹⁵ An intellectual line leads from Abelard to the position, which Thomas Aquinas eventually adopts on the question of the universals. Abelard's point of departure is his critique of William of Champeaux's position, which he ridicules in his autobiography *Historia calamitatum*. I interpret Wyclif's position as a – perhaps, unintentional – response to Abelard's criticism.

to suppress. We find in Wyclif an approach which is exactly the reverse. The orthodox teaching about the divine Trinity serves him as a “case”, the analysis of which can decisively help solving the problem of the world’s constitution, namely, the problem of the universals.

The universal and the particular differ from each other just like the three persons of the Trinity, which differ from each other only by their specific attributes (the Father conceived, the Son is conceived, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both of them), while they remain the same divine essence (they are one God). The specific attribute, which differentiates the universal from the particular is communicability or, as the case may be, a lack of it – privation. The universal and the particular are one and the same essence. They, however, differ because the universal is found in several particulars or, as the case may be, it can be uttered about several particulars. This precisely is not valid for the particular, as a particular.

To be more concrete: In chapter 1 of his treatise *De universalibus*, Wyclif defines what he understands by formal predication.¹⁶ It is predication which expresses what formally exists in the subject, and he further defines “what formally exists” as what constitutes the identity of the subject “*secundum rationem qua est*”.

In chapter 4 of the cited treatise, Wyclif analyses what he understands under the term “difference” — *diversitas vel distinctio*.¹⁷ I shall bypass the large system, which he formulates, and limit myself to saying that difference is essential, or real, or *secundum rationem*. The last type is sometimes called formal difference. What I wish to call attention to is the fact that for Wyclif the three persons of the Trinity differ really as well as formally. Hence, in the first place, the persons of the Trinity differ “really” (the Father is not Son, and so forth) and it happens despite the fact that they are the same spirit, the same one essence. Wyclif further divides the last type of diversity, that is, the formal difference. The ultimate, the most subtle degree of division is called by him the division *secundum rationem communioris et minus commune*. In this way, that is, by greater or lesser universality the divine nature (*natura divina*) differs from the divine person (*persona divina*), because divine nature is communicable to several divine persons, while what constitutes the divine person a divine person, is not communicable. In the same manner, that is, by the smallest and most subtle difference, Wyclif distinguishes the universal from the particular: the universal is more communicable (*secundum rationem amplioris communicabilitatis*).

When we sum up our findings from chapters 1 and 4, we realize that while the universal and the particular or, respectively, the superior and the inferior (that is, the higher and the lower entity on the scale of division) are formally identical (the superior is predicated about the lower), at the same time they

¹⁶ Wyclif, *De universalibus*, 28/171 ff.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90/122 ff.

differ from each other *secundum rationem*, or formally. The crux for understanding Wyclif is then to grasp that there is not any contradiction here but, on the contrary, there is a very subtle description of the reality, which surrounds us. This reality, from a certain angle of vision, is composed only out of particulars, but from another viewpoint it is shot through with universal connections, which enable us to speak about this reality – constituted from particular units – and to get to know this reality. On the one hand, the form of the predicate exists in the object and expresses what the object is; on the other hand, the same form transcends the object, it is broader than the object, it communicates more than the “form” of the particular would communicate. Because it enables communicability of this object with other objects, the form expressed by the predicate is not identical with the form of the object. Nevertheless, as the means of communication of the particular with other particulars, it necessarily exists in the object – it is a universal *in re*.

Wyclif’s “realism” originates from the situation thus defined. Particulars and universals are the same thing, the same essence. They only differ as if by aspect, by the manner of being viewed, by intention. A thing understood as alone by itself is the thing of the first intention; the same thing understood as communicating with another thing or with other things is a thing of the second intention. In other words, the thing “alone by itself” is a particular; as against this, the universal is, in fact, the same thing, but this time it is a thing for “other things” (it constitutes a species with other things) and it is a thing “for us”, that is, for the knower. Of course, I am using the Kantian terminology intentionally.

It remains to mention just one more point. If, for Wyclif, the basic predicate of universals is their communicability, where does this fact, properly speaking, locate him on the imaginary palette of standpoints vis-à-vis the universals. Spade reminds us of the well-known fact that during the Middle Ages there emerged two principal answers to this question.¹⁸ The first answer appears in Boethius’s commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and states that universals are “common to many things”; every particular has them whole and perpetually, and the universals somehow enter into the structure of the particular itself. The other answer is associated with Abelard,¹⁹ for whom the universal is what is “predicated about many”. At the end of his disquisition, Spade declares that Abelard himself was a realist à la Boethius (as far as metaphysics was concerned), and a nominalist vis-à-vis the predication (as far as epistemology was concerned).

Where does Wyclif stand? It is certain that he shared the views of Boethius and Abelard that the universal is “common to many”. He would certainly also agree with Abelard that a universal could be predicated about particulars, because he understands it precisely as communicability. He would only ask,

¹⁸ Spade, “Introduction,” xv ff.; see also Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 155ff.

¹⁹ For references to Abelard, see Spade, “Introduction,” n. 18.

where precisely is this predication rooted. Only in the mind? But how then it would be possible for the predication to utter something truthful about a thing which exists outside the mind? Thus, the root of the universal must be sought in the things, *in rebus*, so that our discourse about the world would not be – plainly said – essentially about nothing.

VII.

Because, in my opinion, Wyclif successfully solves one of the greatest dilemmas of classical philosophy, I would not hesitate to place him among the greatest philosophers of Western civilization. If Plato and Aristotle are considered the philosophical founders of our civilization, who had posited the two poles of “perennial philosophy”, thereby establishing a fundamental juxtaposition, I would not hesitate to place John Wyclif alongside Plotinus, John Scott Eriugena, and Hegel, that is, among those, who had truly and positively tried to resolve the problem, emerging from this juxtaposition.

Translated from the Czech by Zdeněk David