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## Henry of Ghent on the Use of Denials (A Chapter in the History of Negation)

### Introduction

It has often been said that in order to gain insight in the profound views of Mediaeval philosophers, the most sensible thing to do would be to look at the theological *Commentaries on the Sentences*. For it is when the authors deal with the possibility of human beings to speak correctly about the Divine, that quite often a variety of interesting logico-semantic topics enters the scene. So too in Henry of Ghent's *Summa*. In the section on 'divine predication' this thirteenth-century theologian discusses a number of interesting views concerning the linguistic device of negation.

Throughout the history of logic, semantics and philosophy, the specific position of the negation has been, and continues to be, the subject of great debate. Logically speaking, the relationship between the affirmation and the negation seems absolutely symmetrical, that is to say, whatever the truth-value of an affirmative expression, its negation must have the opposite truth-value. On the other hand, the negation does not appear to have a semantic value of its own, but rather derives its meaning entirely from the affirmative expression it is the counterpart of. This would mean that it can change faces according to the expressions it is combined with.

Despite the seemingly simple way in which we can go about logically analysing negative expressions given the logical properties

of their affirmative counterparts, the existence of this basic linguistic device has managed to give rise to many interesting questions. It is precisely its aptitude to be conjoined with linguistic expressions of so many different types, or, to put it in a modern way, its applicability in a great variety of contexts, that makes it one of the most fascinating elements of human language. It is not surprising then that it has attracted attention from scholars working in such diverse fields of enquiry as logic, linguistics, psychology, and even sociology.

As has been remarked, the negation has received a great deal of attention throughout history.<sup>1</sup> It was Aristotle who first distinguished in his logical system between two different functions of the negation, namely to deny an affirmation, that is, to act as the counterpart of a complete sentence thus taking up the opposite truth-value, or, secondly, to be conjoined with an incomplete expression only, a *nomen* (including adjectival nouns), the result of which was labelled an 'infinite noun'. In the Middle Ages this distinction was retained, but in addition to the infinite noun, certain Mediaeval authors also listed what they called the infinite verb, which, in their view, was to be seen as an expression that had logico-semantic properties different from those of a negative sentence. On the other hand, whereas the existence of the infinite noun was commonly accepted, the introduction of this extra type of negative expression was not applauded by everyone, and moreover, it initiated discussion on a number of problems regarding its interpretation.

Besides playing an important role in works of a logico-semantic nature, the negation was also of great importance in the Middle Ages owing to the inheritance of texts written by theologians. For example, the Mediaevals were familiar with the author pseudo-Dionysius,

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive study of the different analyses of negative expressions throughout the history of (both Western and Eastern) philosophy, see Laurence A. HORN, *A Natural History of Negation*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press), 1989. This book also comprises a number of Ancient and Mediaeval discussions of the negation (especially Aristotle). For a more specific discussion particularly concerned with the number of negation-types distinguished in the different systems of logic that have been developed throughout history, see Rob WICHE, *One or Two Negations in Philosophy and Natural Language* (dissertation: Groningen), 1989.

who was well-known for his so-called 'negative theology'. The basic assumption of this type of theology is the following. Since God is perfect and we human beings have no hope of ever fathoming his essence, and, consequently of saying anything that would even remotely do justice to his greatness, the only way in which we can meaningfully speak about God is by using denials. So instead of saying 'God is good', one should rather utter the statement 'God is not good'. The justification for this rather awkward way of speaking about the Deity was roughly that by employing a negation when speaking about God, thus denying him the qualities we occasionally ascribe to members of creation, one actually underlines the enormous distance between God and his creatures. Hence what the expression 'God is not good' really amounts to is 'God is supergood', or something like 'God is beyond goodness'.

The latter way of dealing with the semantics of the negation seems to transcend the domain of pure logical analysis. Instead what we have now is an account of the negation that does not take the linguistic tool as its starting point, but rather proceeds from the fundamental difficulty that God is beyond our reach, so to speak. From that basic assumption one is led to discover the many uses of the negation, an expression which turns out to involve much more than merely expressing the denial of something.

It is precisely these two diverse approaches to the negation, namely the basically logical analysis on the one hand, and the reflection on the special flavour of this expression when used within the domain of theology on the other, that are exemplified in two different works by Henry of Ghent. In his *Syncategoreumata* the author presents an account of the negation based on the handbooks of logic handed down in the tradition by Peter of Spain, whereas in the *Summa quaestionum ordinariam*<sup>2</sup> the specific properties of the negation are brought up for discussion within the context of determining the way we can

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<sup>2</sup> *Henry of Ghent Summa quaestionum ordinariam theologi recepto preconio Solennis Henrici a Gandavo, cum duplici repertorio, vaenundatur in aedibus Iodoci Badii Ascensii, cum Privilegio Regio ad calcem explicando, Paris, 1520 (reprint The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1953; 2 vols.), Vol II, art. LXXIII-LXXV, ff. 264-313.*

best speak about God. In contradistinction with the discussion as presented in the former treatise, where the focus is on the signification of the negation, what is considered of major importance in the context of theology is the problem what it is that expressions about God reveal. And, odd as it may seem, from that point of view the negation's powers seem to be greater than merely expressing a denial or a privation. In fact, as it happens the negation will turn out to be, in our author's view, the most appropriate to reveal the essence of the Divine.

In order to appreciate all the issues that have to do with the multifunctionality of negative expressions, it is a good idea to first take a look at Henry's treatise on syncategorematic words.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The negation as the basic syncategorematic term: counterpart of composition

Following the tradition as handed down by Peter of Spain, Henry of Ghent considers the negation of paramount importance with regard to the problems connected with the use of syncategorematic terms. In his *Syncategoreumata*, he speaks of two different kinds of syncategorematic words, which he distinguishes from each other in terms of the kind of 'thing' they operate on. Our author starts off with an account of the *signa* (i.e. the quantifiers, or those syncategorematic terms that modify the expressions they are conjoined with on account of the *supposita* they involve) and subsequently deals with the other subspecies of syncategorematic terms, namely the ones that modify the expressions they accompany owing to meaning. According to the author, the latter types of expression should be identified with «the disposition of a subject insofar as it is a subject or of a predicate insofar as it is a predicate» (*dispositio subiecti inquantum subiec-*

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<sup>3</sup> The *Syncategoreumata* has been handed down to us in the ms. Bruges, Stadsbibliotheek, cod. 510, ff. 227ra-237vb. I am very grateful to Professor Braakhuis for allowing me to use his transcription of the manuscript. Quite a number of excerpts from this text have been published in H.A.G. BRAAKHUIS, *De 13de eeuwse Tractaten over Syncategorematische Termen* (2 vols., Vol. I: Inleidende studie; Vol. II: De *Syncategoreumata* van Nicholaas van Parijs), Meppel, 1979.

*-tum vel predicati inquantum predicatum*).<sup>4</sup> Whereas the former owes its syncategorematic function to the circumstance that when it is conjoined with a term, one can pick out any individual that happens to fall under this term, expressions of the latter type signify a disposition of the term they are joined with as regards their signification. For instance, the sentence 'Only a man is running' is not an invitation to pick out individuals, but rather means that the act of running inheres in a man, and not something other than a man.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the *expositio* or analysis of syncategorematic terms is concerned, according to the author, one can always come across the negation in it. It is not altogether surprising then that Henry of Ghent (like Peter of Spain before him) ascribes to the negation the role of trouble-maker when it comes down to the difficulties of interpreting sentences that have syncategorematic terms in them, and therefore this expression should be considered first in an analysis of *syncategoremata*.<sup>6</sup>

Like his predecessor Peter of Spain, Henry of Ghent takes the negation to be derived from affirmation. In point of fact, with reference to Aristotle he says that

in non-being one understands being and in general in negation an affirmation, and a negation only has being and can only be known through an affirmation, just as a privation only has being and can only be known through a possession.

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<sup>4</sup> *Synecat.*, f. 228va: «Dicto de sincathegorematicis dictionibus que principaliter sunt dispositiones termini ratione suppositorum, ut sunt signa distributiva, consequenter dicendum est de illis que terminum disponunt principaliter ratione significationis. Que generaliter dispositionem subiecti inquantum subiectum vel predicati inquantum predicatum significant.»

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: «Dispositio termini ratione suppositorum est quando sub ipso termino potest fieri *sumptio sub* pro individuís; sed ratione significati est quando denotat ipsum pro suo significato, ut cum dicitur 'homo solus currit' non fit *sumptio sub*, sed denotatur scilicet cursus inesse homini et non alij ab homine.»

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: «Sed quia omnes huiusmodi dictiones difficultatem includunt in enuntiationibus principaliter propter naturam negationis que in eis intelligitur, ut patebit per ipsorum expositiones, ideo primo dicendum est de negatione significata per hanc dictionem 'non'.»

(...secundum Aristotilem in non esse intelligitur esse et omnino in negatione affirmatio, et negatio non habet esse neque cognisci nisi per affirmationem, sicut neque privatio nisi per habitum.) (*Synecat.*, f. 228va)<sup>7</sup>

Thus our author follows the tradition in the sense of ascribing to affirmation the function of primary linguistic tool. Particularly in the context of logic, the negation has no other contribution than to remove something, and so this something is more important than its removal. What our author needs to do first, then, is to discuss the ins and outs of affirmation, or affirmative composition, which in turn is divided into different kinds according as the type of composition involved. On the basis of the list of composition, the author concludes, one can distinguish between different kinds of negation.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1. *The composition conveyed in categorematic terms*

Elsewhere I have discussed the metaphysics of being as connected with the notion of composition featuring in Henry of Ghent's *Synkategoremata*.<sup>9</sup> Suffice it to say here that the general type of composition required to explain how the negation works falls under the heading 'mode of understanding' or 'mode of signifying' (as contrasted with on the one hand composition taken as a *res* signified by the verb 'to combine' (*compono*) or the noun 'composition' (*compositio*) and taken as a real union of things (like points of a line with a line, matter with form, of integral parts with their whole) on the other).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Peter of Spain, *Synkategoremata* (ed. DE RIJK, tr. SPRUYT), *Intro.*, cap. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: «Unde ad habendum plenum intellectum negationis primo videndum est de affirmatione. Et quia affirmatio consistit in compositione affirmativa, de compositione considerandum est. Penes enim diversitatem compositionis dinoscitur negatio, que est divisio eius opposita.»

<sup>9</sup> See JOKE SPRUYT, *Peter of Spain on Composition and Negation. Text. Translation. Commentary* (= *Artistarium Supplementa*, Vol. V), Nijmegen, 1989, pp. 229-243.

<sup>10</sup> *Synecat.*, f. 228va-vb: «Unde notandum quod 'compositio' uno modo sumitur ut est res, ut significatur per hoc nomen 'compositio' vel per hoc verbum 'compono';

The sort of composition that is relevant to the function of negation is divided into two kinds, namely first that of a quality with a substance, and second that of an act with a substance. The former kind of composition is conveyed in substantival nouns, which have as their signification a something under an essential quality — such as ‘man’ which signifies a something under the quality of humanity — as well as in adjectival nouns, which signify an accident concretely conjoined to an unspecified substance (*substantia infinita*) — as in ‘white’ which signifies something unspecified under a certain accidental quality (whiteness).<sup>11</sup>

Although Henry initially seemed to insist that the type of composition we are talking about here is a purely mental (*modus intelligendi*) or linguistic (*modus significandi*) type of entity, he is of course a realist, and therefore takes signification as somehow reflecting reality. In the first place, he says, one should realise that in the expression ‘composition of a substance with a quality’, the term ‘composition’ has no referent of its own apart from the substance and the quality. In other words, there is no question of some third entity involved as the link between the substance and the quality. Thus he says that the composition conveyed in all nouns, both adjectival and nominal ones, is in fact more properly called a union to the extent that all forms, whether substantial or accidental, owe their being to the matter they are united in.<sup>12</sup>

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et sic de ipsa non est hic sermo. Alio modo sumitur hec pro unione diversorum ad invicem. Et harum quedam est compositio rerum, ut totius integralis ex suis partibus, et forma cum materia, et partium lineae ad punctum, et huiusmodi. Alia est modorum in-[f. 228vb]-telligendi et significandi (...) Et hoc modo hic de compositione intendimus.»

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 228vb: «Compositionum igitur que sunt modi intelligendi et significandi alia est qualitatis cum substantia, alia est actus cum substantia. Compositio qualitatis cum substantia est vero duplex. Quedam est qualitatis substantialis, sicut in nominibus substantivis, ut in hoc nomine ‘homo’ significatur res sub humanitate: res est substantia cuius humanitas est eius qualitas. Alia est compositio qualitatis accidentalis cum substantia, sicut in nominibus adiectivis, ut in hoc nomine ‘albus’; significat enim accidens in concretionem ad substantiam infinite, que est substantia eius, et accidens eius qualitas, secundum logicum.»

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: «Et notandum quod universaliter in significatione nominum compositio qualitatis cum substantia est sine omni medio, quia qualitas se ipsa cum substantia

Apart from the composition of substance and quality as the mode of signifying proper to nouns, our author also mentioned the composition of substance and act, that is, the mode of signifying pertaining to verbal expressions. In order to show how this part of speech works in a sentence, Henry makes a distinction between two kinds of composition involved here in accordance with the way in which to take the inclination of the act towards the substance, conveyed in verb and participle. First of all there is question of an act towards a substance insofar as the accident (or accidental form) is signified *in concreto*, that is to say, as concretely united with an indefinite substance (*substantia infinita*). For instance, in the sentence '*Sortes currit*', the verb *currit* does not signify the act of running per se or in abstraction, but rather the composition of the act (of running) with some substance (the something that is doing the running). Of course there is always some substance understood in the inflected verb, Henry adds, for if there were not, the sentence *Sortes est cursus*' would be true. The same analysis is applied to the composition conveyed in an adjectival noun, like in the sentence '*Sortes est albus*': here too it is not correct to say that the only thing signified is a quality instead of the composition of a quality with an indefinite substance. What is meant by *albus* is not whiteness per se, but *something* white. Otherwise the sentence '*Sortes est albedo*' would be true.<sup>13</sup>

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componitur propter inclinationem quam habet ad ipsam. Omnis enim forma et omnis qualitas et omne accidens se ipsis uniuntur materie in qua sunt, quia non habent esse sine ipsa (...). Et similiter intelligendum est de esse accidentali cuiuslibet forme. Unde huiusmodi compositio magis proprie dicitur 'unio' quam 'compositio'.»

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: «Cum enim omnis actus sit accidens in concretionem, secundum quod per verbum vel per participium significatur, et non e converso, ipsi actui debetur quedam inclinatio ad substantiam, in quantum accidens est significatum in concretionem. Et hec est substantia cui actus unitur, significata in verbo, sicut substantia in nomine adiectivo, et non est subiecta sed predicata. Cum enim dicitur '*Sortes currit*', non predicatur actus sive cursus absolute et in abstractione dictus, sed substantia infinita sub actu vel sub cursu, sicut cum dicitur '*Sortes est albus*', predicatur substantia infinita sub albedine. Aliter enim hec esset falsa: '*Sortes currit*' (hec enim est falsa '*Sortes est cursus*'), sicut hec '*Sortes est albedo*'). Sed est sensus '*Sortes currit*': *Sortes est aliquid sub cursu*. Et hec appellatur compositio actus ad substantiam cui unitur.»



So much for composition derived from the inclination of the act towards the substance conveyed in the inflected verb or participle by itself. There is yet another way in which to consider composition of act with substance, namely in terms of the act towards the substance insofar as the act has the inclination to be *said of* the substance, in other words, insofar as the act in the verb or participle functions as a predicate. This type of inclination, the Master says, is twofold, corresponding to the division of verbal expressions into participle and verb. The first kind is the composition of an act as united with the substance involved, the kind signified by a participle; thus the participle 'reading' is to be understood as 'he who reads'. The second type of composition is of an act as separated from the substance involved, which is signified by a verb, of which Aristotle says that «the verb is a sign of things as being said of something else.» (*De interpret.* 3, 16b6-8).<sup>14</sup>

The composition of act with substance in this second sense, that is, insofar as the act has the inclination to be *said of* a substance, is primarily conveyed in the substantive verb *est*, Henry explains, and secondarily in all other verbs in which *est* is understood.<sup>15</sup> It is a verb that has the function to conjoin beings and non-beings alike: it is equally right to say 'man is an animal' as it is to say 'a chimaera is a non-being'. In conclusion, the composition conveyed in the verb 'est' has no extramental being as such, but the kind of being it is confined to is decided by the type of being signified by the terms it conjoins.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 228vb-229ra: «Secundaria debetur inclinatio actui ad substantiam in quantum est actus, id est prout habet inclinationem ad substantiam, ut de ipsa dicitur sive enuntiat. Et hec appellatur compositio actus ad substantiam de qua enuntiat. Et hec est duplex: aut enim est compositio ipsius actus ut uniti substantie, et hec significatur in participio; 'legens' enim <idem> est quod *qui legit*; aut est compositio actus ut distantis a substantia; et hec significatur in verbo. Et per eam verbum secundum Aristotelem est nota eorum que de altero [229ra] dicuntur, ut predicatum de subiecto.»

<sup>15</sup> This comment is connected with the grammatical rule that all inflected verbs can be substituted by a combination of *est* plus the participle that signifies the same act the verb does.

<sup>16</sup> *Syncat.*, f. 229ra: «Et significatur per prius in verbo substantivo et per ipsum in aliis verbis in quibus intelligitur, et natum est componere indifferenter entia et non-

Moreover, as the composition in this connection is nothing other than the inclination of the one extreme towards the other, it is nothing without them, and *eo ipso* cannot be understood without them either. Hence Aristotle's saying «the verb 'is' additionally signifies some composition which cannot be thought of without the components». (*De interpret.* 3, 16b24-25).<sup>17</sup>

The author sums up this section of the *Syncategoreumata* with a list of all the kinds of composition to be found, namely 1. of a substantial quality with substance, *viz.* conveyed in substantival nouns, 2. of an accident with substance, *viz.* in adjectival nouns, 3. of an act with an internal substance, *viz.* in the verb, of which the content, or the act it signifies (*i.e.* the *res verbi*) is signified *in concreto*, 4. of an act or being acted upon with the substance of which it is expressed as united, *viz.* in the participle, and, finally, 5. of an act as separated from an external substance, *viz.* in the verb.<sup>18</sup> It is along these lines that he now proceeds to explain what the meaning is of negative expressions, as expressed in phrases and sentences that contain the negative particle 'not'.

### 1.2. *The different kinds of negation*

Before diving into the different roles the particle 'not' can assume in all kinds of expressions, our author first makes the customary distinction between the ways in which to understand 'negation'. Thus in one sense the word 'negation' denotes a certain kind of statement,

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-entia, ut 'homo est animal', 'chimera est non-ens'. Unde non est ens simpliciter sed secundum animam solum et contrahitur ad ens vel ad non-ens secundum exigentiam extremorum.»

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: «Unde cum compositio non habeat esse nisi per inclinationem unius extremi ad alterum, compositio sine extremis nichil est. Sed quia unumquodque intelligitur per illud quod dat ei esse, ideo dicit Aristoteles quod hoc verbum 'est' significat compositionem quam sine extremis non est intelligere.»

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: «Sic igitur patet quod in universo quinque modis est compositio. Prima est qualitatis substantialis cum substantia, ut in nomine substantivo. Secunda est accidentis cum substantia, ut in nomine adiectivo. Tertia est actus cum substantia intra, ut in verbo cui res verbi est unita sive concreta. Quarta est actus vel passionis <cum substantia> de qua enuntiatur et unitur, ut in participio. Quinta est actus cum substantia distante extra, ut in verbo similiter.»

that is to say, a sentence in which something is denied of something. Furthermore negation can be taken as the specific property of the word which has negative force. In the term 'negation' or 'to deny' this property is what is signified by the word, or the semantical content; thus the term 'negation' means negation (it has *negation* as its *res nominis*), and so does the word 'to deny' (which has *negation* as its *res verbi*). Besides being the signification of a word, the specific property of negation is also found in the particle 'not', but this time as a mode of signifying: the word 'not' does not signify negation as a something, but rather has negative force,<sup>19</sup> and is used as a linguistic device to carry out a negation.<sup>20</sup> It is the negation taken in the latter sense that Henry of Ghent intends to deal with.

The word *non* is indeed quite a versatile expression. First it can be conjoined with a single term to make up a new term. The expressions resulting from this operation are called *termini infiniti*,<sup>21</sup> which in turn can be either infinite nominal expressions (that is, nouns or adjectives that on account of the negation added to them can mean any infinite number of things other than what is signified by the expression without the negation, such as 'not-man' or 'not-white') or infinite verbal expressions (infinite in the same way the nominal expressions are when *non* is added to them, but now

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<sup>19</sup> For a historical outline and an analysis of the accounts concerning these two different types of linguistic function, see Gabriel NUCHELMANS, «The Distinction *actus exercitus/actus significatus* in Medieval Semantics», in Norman KRETZMANN ed., *Meaning and Inference in Medieval Philosophy. Studies in Memory of Jan Pinborg* (= Synthese Historical Library, Vol. 29), Dordrecht etc., 1988; pp. 57-90.

<sup>20</sup> *Synecat.*, f. 229ra: «Sciendum primo quod negatio duobus modis sumitur. Uno modo ut est species enuntiationis, secundum quod negatio dicitur oratio negativa alicuius ab aliquo. Alio modo sumitur negatio prout est proprietas dictionis habentis virtutem negandi, et hoc dupliciter: aut enim est in dictione ut res significata, ut in hac dictione 'negatio' vel in hoc verbo 'nego'; aut est in dictione ut modus significandi et intelligendi, et ita ut exercita; et sic importatur per hanc dictionem 'non' tamquam per instrumentum negandi.»

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed account of thirteenth-century discussions concerning the extension of infinite expressions, see L.M. DE RIJK, «The Logic of Indefinite Names in Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus and Radulphus Brito», in *Acts of the Tenth European Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics* (Nijmegen, 22-26 June 1992), forthcoming.

producing an infinite verb or participle, such as ‘not runs’ or ‘not-reading’).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the negation can be added to a term in such a way that not a new term is made up, but rather a negative phrase (whether or not a complete sentence) is produced (such as ‘Sortes is not-running’), or in such a way that the result of adding the negation is not a complete negative phrase, but rather an expression in which a composition conveyed in a participle is denied (like in ‘the not-reading is running’).<sup>23</sup>

Having made the usual remarks about negation in general and the type of expressions the word *non* can be added to, Henry of Ghent proceeds with a discussion of the different kinds, taking them one by one, starting with the indefinite name. Leaving aside his remarks on what types of expression can be made indefinite (*indefinitari*), what is of concern to us is his explanation of what aspects of the signification of a term remain once a negation has been added to it. As regards substantival terms, the first way in which it can be read is as a denial. What this reading amounts to is that the negation understood in it removes the substantial form from its proper matter; obviously this means that, because there is no proper matter without a proper form, when the negation is added to the substantival term, it removes the entire specific signification. Consequently, the resulting expression can be applied to anything in which the form in ques-

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<sup>22</sup> *Synecat.*, f. 229ra: «Et hec [scilicet negatio ut exercita] dividitur, quia quedam est negatio termini, ut illa que facit terminum infinitum et additur termino per compositionem; alia est negatio orationis et additur termino per appositionem. Negatio termini dividitur, quia quedam est que respondet compositioni qualitatis cum substantia removendo qualitatem a substantia, sive fuerit substantialis sive accidentalis; et hec facit nomen infinitum, ut ‘non-homo’, ‘non-albus’. Alia est que respondet compositioni actus ad substantiam intra cui unitur removendo ipsam a substantia; et hec facit verbum infinitum et similiter participium, ut ‘non currit’, ‘non-legens’, sicut infinitatur nomen adiectivum.»

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 229ra-rb: «Negatio [f. 229rb] orationis respondet compositioni actus cum substantia de qua enuntiatur. Et dividitur, quia quedam respondet compositioni actus cum substantia distante ab ea extra; et hec facit orationem negativam, ut ‘Sortes non currit’. Alia est que respondet compositioni actus cum substantia ei unita et de qua enuntiatur, nec facit orationem totalem negativam sed negat compositionem implicatam in participio, ut ‘non-legens currit’.»

tion is not actually preserved.<sup>24</sup> Taken in this sense the indefinite term 'not-man' is to be distinguished from the privative 'dead man', because the negation in the former relates to 'man' as its contradictory opposite. Thus 'not-man' can be used only for those things that in no way participate in the form which is removed (in this case *manhood*), whether they have being or not. The latter, viz. 'dead man', merely conveys a pure privation, and so it can only be truly said of that which is essentially apt to participate in the form removed, but which (now) does not have being. Hence while Caesar can be referred to by both expressions 'not-man' and 'dead man', only the first is applicable to an ass.

Like substantival terms, accidental ones too can be made indefinite, and what such expressions can refer to once again depends on how much of the original meaning is left. Our author exemplifies his theory with *non-album* (note the neutre form), a term, he says, in which the negation can do one of two things. First of all, combined with an accidental term, *non* can be used in the sense of a privation, in which case what is removed is merely the accidental form (whiteness) from its referent (*suppositum*). This is the way in which the preposition 'in' works, like in *iniustus* ('unjust'). Secondly the indefinite term can be applied in the sense of a negation, thus not leaving anything in particular, and consequently applicable to anything at all (whether it has being or not), as long as it does not partake of the form which has been removed.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 229rb: «De termino infinito substantiali notandum quod cum negatio in eo privat formam substantialem a materia propria — materia autem propria non habet esse sine propria forma nec econverso — nichil relinquit omnino de significatione speciali termini. Propter quod huiusmodi terminus infinitus potest indifferenter predicari de eo quod est et de eo quod non est, in quo non salvatur actualiter huiusmodi forma privata.»

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: «Per hoc patet qualiter est de termino infinito accidentali, ut 'non-album'. Cum enim in ipso privetur forma accidentalis de supposito, quod potest manere sine accidente, illa negatio potest ipsum infinitare secundum privationem: et tunc relinquit suppositum, et tunc predicatur solum de illo circa quod natum est fieri accidens privatum — et talis privatio importatur per hanc prepositionem 'in', ut 'iniustus', <idest> 'non-iustus' — vel potest infinitare ipsum secundum negationem: et tunc nichil relinquit, immo privat unum cum alio, et tunc indifferenter potest predicari de illo quod non participat forma privata, sive fuerit ens sive non-ens.»

Besides making terms in the singular indefinite, the negation can also be used in combination with nominal expressions in the plural, as in 'not-men'. What then has to be taken into account is that plural expressions not only bring along their meaning, so to speak, but have an added semantical layer in the form of a plurality. Hence when used in combination with an expression in the plural, the negation can be taken in two ways, namely either as ranging over what is signified in absolutely, thus removing the form involved for every one of the supposita, or as leaving the significate in the absolute sense untouched, but merely removing the plurality. Taken in the former sense the sentence 'these are not men' would be false with reference to Sortes and Brunellus, while in the latter sense it would be true, because in that case the negation merely covers the plurality of men.<sup>26</sup>

Like his predecessor Peter of Spain, Henry of Ghent also pays attention to the indefinite verb, doing so in a very brief section concluding his general discussion of the negation. Like the former, he too believes (contrary to others, who do not acknowledge that a sentence can contain an indefinite verb) that one should distinguish between a negative phrase or sentence on the one hand, and indefinite verbs on the other. The reason for doing so is that one should in principle allow for just a specific act conveyed by the verb to be removed, leaving the composition of an act in general with the substance intact. Thus one can form the indefinite *non-currit* in the sentence *Sortes non-currit* (Socrates is not-running), in the sense that what is denied is not that Socrates is, but merely that he is running. In fact, our author even believes that the negation in this example (that is, if we interpret the indefinite verb as a privation) leaves the composi-

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 229va: «Hiis visis circa infinitationem nominis in singulari notandum est circa eius infinitationem in plurali, ut 'non-homines', 'non-alba'. Cum in huiusmodi omni nomine importatur res significata et eius numeratio, potest prius significate advenire negatio quam numeratio, vel e converso. Si primo modo: tunc est forme privatio pro quolibet supposito in singulari; et sic est falsa 'isti sunt non-homines', demonstratis Sorte et Brunello. Vel potest e converso prius pluralis advenire numeratio: et tunc negatio superveniens non negat significatam absolute sed in quantum est numeratum; et tunc est vera, quia non est sensus quod *utrumque sit non-homo* sed quod *non sunt plures homines sive multi.*»

tion and *eo ipso* the total sentence affirmed.<sup>27</sup> Taken in this way, that is, as a privation, the indefinite verb posits a being, and can therefore be applied to being only.<sup>28</sup>

Besides functioning as a privation, the indefinite verb can also be used in the sense of a negation. Taken in this way it posits nothing, he says,

... rather the entire <significate> [that is, the significate of the verb in question, i.e. the composition of act with substance] is removed, leaving only the pure composition with respect to the external subject, which provides it with a suppositum, a composition which in it-self can combine both beings and non-beings.

(... immo totum privatur remanente pura compositione respectu subiecti extra, quod reddit ei suppositum, que secundum se indifferenter nata est componere entia et non-entia.) (*Synecat.*, f. 229va)

What this statement must amount to, in analogy with Peter of Spain's analysis of the subject, is that some composition is left, namely something opinable or imaginable, as long as it is not the composition conveyed by the verb to which *non* is added. Hence taken in the negative mode, the verb *non-currit* as it appears in the sentence '*Sortes non-currit*' would leave some opinable composition with Sortes as the suppositum, of whom some *rhêma*<sup>29</sup> is expressed, but not that of the substance with the act of running. So what we are left with is something along the lines of '*Sortes is...*', in which one is entitled to fill

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: «Habitio de nomine infinito, notandum circa verbum infinitum quod secundum quosdam non potest poni in oratione, quia tunc fit verbum negativum. Sed hoc simpliciter falsum est, quia moventur eoquod nesciunt distinguere inter negationem infinitantem verbum et facientem orationem negativam, quarum distinctio patet ex predictis. Unde dicendum quod verbum infinitum manet infinitum extra orationem et in oratione, quoniam negatio infinitans non negat compositionem actus cum substantia extra, sed manet affirmativa, propter quod manet et tota oratio affirmativa dicendo '*Sortes non-currit*', secundum quod est verbum infinitum.»

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: «...sciendum quod infinitatio verbi potest esse dupliciter sicut nominis adiectivi; aut secundum privationem, et tunc relinquit subiectum cui fit actus concretus, et sic ponit ens et solum predicatur de ente...»

<sup>29</sup> For this translation see SPRUYT, *op cit.* (1989), pp. 123ff.

in anything on the dotted line excepting of course the composition of substance with the act of running.<sup>30</sup>

The chapter on negation in Henry's *Syncategoreumata* is concluded with a section devoted to specific rules governing the use of the negation in combination with other syncategorematic words and the different ways in which these sentences are to be interpreted (illustrated with sophismata-sentences), after which the author comes to discussing other syncategorematic words that have a negation hidden in them.

### *1.3. The syncategorematic feature of the negation within the context of semantics and logic*

As we may have seen from the account presented above, within his treatise on syncategorematic words the starting point for our author's discussion of the uses of the negation is a semantical one. What Henry has concentrated on in this work is to explain what the different kinds of categorematic terms signify (or in any case in what way they signify): his object was to explain the different ways in which the notion of composition plays a part in the analysis of a term's signification, and consequently to demonstrate how the negation can be used to work on different semantical levels of a term. To put it differently, the basis of his explanation of negative expressions is the way of signifying (*modus significandi*) of the term involved: it is the composition conveyed in a categorematic term that the negation added to it functions upon, and depending on how this composition is affected by the negation, the resulting expression by adding *non* can be applied to different kinds of things.

In order to explain the syncategorematic nature of the negation, and to come to grips with the new expressions the particle may produce, it is of course necessary to go into the meaning of the expressions it is added to first. Hence his exposition of the types of composition involved in different parts of speech. For instance, take the composition involved in a word like *album*: what this word is used for is a something affected by whiteness, a composition of a suppositum

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Peter of Spain, *Synecat.* (ed. DE RIJK, tr. SPRUYT), ch. II, cc. 17ff.



with an accidental form. In this particular case the particle *non* can be employed to either remove the accidental form only, or to get rid of the entire combination altogether, in which case it is actually used in the sense of a negation. Likewise he passed the other kinds of categorematic terms under revue, and for each of them pointed out what elements could be affected by the denial.

An added purpose of this work, besides presenting a semantical analysis of syncategorematic terms, is obviously to account for the logic of these expressions. Thus the preceding discussion was required in order to pave the way for describing rules of logic pertaining to the operator *non*. The work also includes many sophismata-sentences, and in connection with the negation, these puzzling sentences are solved on the basis of the way in which the functor under discussion operates in a given semantical context. As such any discussion of this kind forms a substantial part of the logic of terms, a theoretical enterprise which is mainly concerned with establishing rules for reasoning correctly.

Apart from the logical aspects of terms, the study of our use of language is also extremely important when it comes down to communicating other things than logically justified truths. In modern terms we would say that language is interesting insofar as it enables human beings to perform speech acts. It is not in the *Syncategoreumata*, but in the *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* (hereafter cited as *SQO*) that the Solemn Doctor deals with this 'performative' aspect of the negation.

## 2. The negation used in saying things about God

In the last three articles of this work, which all concern the ways in which we can say things about God, or perhaps more specifically, the types of predication that are appropriate when speaking of the Divinity, Henry of Ghent pays attention to a number of questions that have to do with the use of syncategorematic terms in propositions featuring God as their subject matter. Although the subjects dealt with in these questions do not form a systematic account of the syncategorematic words in general, nor an exhaustive one for that matter, they

are nevertheless very interesting to us in the sense that, by looking at the way in which terms of this type function in a theological context, certain aspects of their logico-grammatical nature come to the fore which in their normal use would remain in the background. The questions referred to in this connection are the following: art. LXXIV, qu. 2, 'whether an affirmative or a negative proposition is more congruous with the Divine' (*utrum eis [sc. <rebus> divinis] magis congrua affirmativa an negativa*), qu. 5, 'whether in them can be a privative predication' (*utrum in eis possit esse praedicatio privativa*), qu. 6, 'whether privatives are more congruous with explaining the Divine than positives' (*utrum privativae magis congruant divinis explicandis quam positivae*). These questions all in some way have to do with the use of the syncategorematic term *non* when speaking God.<sup>31</sup>

The first question Henry confronts us with is whether it is more appropriate (or more congruous with the Divine, as he puts it) to use an affirmative predication or rather a negative one, when speaking about God. As is customary he introduces the matter with a number of arguments in favour of either of the two alternatives. What all the arguments (either for or against positive predication applied to the Divinity) have in common, is that the 'congruity' the question started off with is interpreted as 'fitting'. Again, 'fitting' in this connection is identified with whatever is most becoming of God's dignity.

To begin with those in favour of speaking positively about God: in the arguments to that effect we are told that what is more dignified to say of God is more becoming of him, and it is more dignified to say of God what He is, than to deny of him what He is not. Thus we are confronted with the difference between using affirmations and using denials when speaking of God. For instance, it is not becoming of God's dignity if we were to deny of Him that he were a stone, or an ass, or a liar, or false. On the contrary, it would be much more

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<sup>31</sup> Two other questions in this section of Henry's *Summa* which somehow involve the use of negations, concern the force of exclusive and exceptive words respectively when used with regard to the Divine, viz. art. LXXV, qu. 5, *quae fit dictionis exclusivae in Divinis virtus* and qu. 6, *quae dictionis exceptivae*.

becoming to identify Him with 'superwise', 'supergood', and so on.<sup>32</sup> The second argument in defense of affirmations has to do with God's being. God is identified with what is the most positive being — «in the highest way a positive» (*summe positivum*) — and from that assumption it is argued that something positive is more becoming of him than something privative, considering that the positive is more in agreement with something positive than it would be with something privative. Hence it is better to speak positively, that is, to employ an affirmation, of God, who happens to be the most positive thing there is, than to use a denial, which in its being a removal of something is privative in that respect.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas the arguments just presented derive the harmony of expressions from the extent to which properties (or predications) are in agreement with what they are applied to, the next two arguments our author presents have more to do with the force of the words we use in connection with God. In the first place (with reference to pseudo-Dionysius) it is stated that it is more potent, that is to say, more effective, and more expressive insofar as the truth is concerned to say what is not God, than to say what is. Now whatever is more effective, more proper and more excellent for expressing the truth is more becoming of God.<sup>34</sup> Of the two types of expression, an affirmative pre-

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<sup>32</sup> *SQO*, art LXXIV, qu. 2, f. 282r: «Circa secundum arguitur quod praedicatio affirmativa magis congrua est Deo quam negativa. Primo sic: Illud quod est dignius Deo, magis congruit ei. Propter hoc enim illa quae dignitatis sunt simpliciter in creaturis, potius Deo attribuuntur quam alia, secundum superius determinata. Sed dignius est Deo praedicare de ipso quod est, quod fit praedicatione affirmativa, quam remove ab eo quod non est, quod fit praedicatione negativa. Modicum enim dignitatis est ei dicere quod non sit lapis, aut asinus, aut mendax, aut falsus. Sed magnae dignitatis est ei dicere quod sit supersapiens, superbonus, et caetera huiusmodi».

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: «Secundo sic: Illi qui est in se summe positivum, magis congruit positivum quam privativum, propter maiorem convenientiam positivi cum positivo. Magis enim congruit conveniens convenienti quam disconveniens disconvenienti. Deus in se maxime positivus est. Praedicatio autem affirmativa, positiva est, negativa autem remotiva, et in hoc privativa. Ergo etc.»

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: «Potentius est, idest efficacius est, et magis expressivum et excellentius quantum ad veritatis expressionem dicere quod non est Deus, quam quod est. Sed quod est efficacius, magis proprium et excellentius ad veritatis expressionem, magis congruit Deo.»

dication says of God what He is, whereas a negative predication says of God what He is not. And thus (quite in line with the negative theology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena), it is concluded that it is more valid and more appropriate to allude to the ineffible truth and Divine existence in a negative way than it is to do so in an affirmative way.<sup>35</sup>

So much for the arguments in favour of using either affirmations or negations when it comes to speaking about God. What our author now sets out to do is first to explain the function of predications about God, something he cannot do, of course, without making some reference to a speaker and a hearer within a semiotic field, as we shall see. On the basis of his answer to that question, he will then decide what kind of expression is the more appropriate to use in connection with God.

According to Henry, all predications that are made of God are meant to express the outstanding dignities for which He is praised and loved, and to do so in order to praise and magnify His glory, something, he continues, that can be done in language by means of some predication in an affirmative or negative proposition, in two ways. One way to go about singing the Lord's praises is to signify His praise and glory in the utterance of a predication, and the other way is by making it known, or by implying it (*insinuando*) in such an utterance.<sup>36</sup> There is a difference however between the two methods which has to do with the distinction between *significatio* and *insinuatio*, the author says. Let us examine his explanation in detail:

Properly speaking, by means of a predication is signified that which is in virtue of the words given to understand, and nothing more. However, in addition is implied what the person who is speaking by means of the predication cannot sufficiently signify.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: «Praedicatione autem affirmativa significatur quid est Deus, praedicatione vero negativa significatur quid non est...Validius quippe et propinquius veritas ineffabilis et Divina existentia negative quam affirmative insinuatur.»

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 282r-v: «Dico quod omnes praedicationes que fiunt de Deo, sunt ad exprimendum eius praeeminentes dignitates quibus colitur et amatur, et hoc ad eius laudem et gloriam extollendam. Sed laus et gloria Dei per praedicationem aliquam in propositione affirmativa aut negativa, potest extolli dupliciter: vel significando illa per verba in praedicatione prolata, vel insinuando per eadem.»

(Proprie autem per praedicationem significatur id quod ex significationis verborum virtute datur intelligi, et non amplius. Insinuatur autem etiam id quod ille qui loquitur per praedicationem significare non sufficit.) (*SQO*, art. LXXIV, qu. 2, f.282v)

From this explanation it appears that an utterance has at least two aspects, namely a meaning and an implication, the latter of which is connected with a speaker's use of the expression involved. In his inability to give a complete meaning or signification, he always has the opportunity to imply something.

As such the distinction just presented does not give us any idea as to which of the two kinds of predication we should employ when speaking about the Divinity. Before we can figure that out, we should look at what else Henry has to say on *insinuatio*. He explains that again this linguistic aspect of an utterance can occur in two ways. In the first place it can happen when in a predication of something lacking in signification, one understands what is more, in the way in which a speaker is sometimes said to say less when he means more.<sup>37</sup> This way of saying something is not to be identified with what we might call an understatement. Rather it appears from our author's account in this connection, that he has in mind locutions that are meant to express eternity in the best possible way.<sup>38</sup>

However, this manner of saying less when you mean more is not the type of implication the author is talking about here. There is another mode of *insinuatio*, he continues, which occurs when the speaker, in his inability to signify enough by an affirmative predication, instead implies what he means by saying the opposite negatively. And from the explanation that follows, borrowed from Scottus Eriugena, it appears that this type of *insinuatio* can occur within in a context of communication between speaker and hearer. Thus, Henry has Scot-

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 282v: «Sed hoc dupliciter potest contingere. Uno modo per minus significatum in praedicatione intelligendo quod plus est, secundum quod aliquando de enunciante dicitur quod minus dicit et plus significat.»

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: «Iuxta illud quod Gregorius, exponendo illud Iob 32, numerus annorum eius inaestimabilis, dicit sic. Dicere utcumque aeternitatem voluit, et ipsam aeternitatis longitudinem annos nominavit, quia enim amplum quid dicere voluit. Sed quid diceret latius non invenit. Ideo annos sine aestimatione multiplicavit.»

tus say, I understand more about God from someone saying 'He is not essence', 'He is not goodness', precisely because He is beyond substance and goodness, than I would from someone saying 'He is essence', or 'He is goodness'.<sup>39</sup> In our author's opinion, then, as far as the first type of implication is concerned, it is more appropriate to use an affirmative predication for God, by saying 'God is good', and so on, than it would be to use a negative one. The reason for this preference is that in its signifying, the affirmative expression explains something worthy of God, albeit in the manner of a metaphorical locution, and not properly speaking, or insofar as the meaning of the locution is concerned. On the other hand, a negative expression of this kind only removes that which the corresponding affirmative one asserted.<sup>40</sup>

To return to the second type of *insinuatio* our author has brought up in his theological semiotics, this is the kind we are looking for if we wish to decide whether it is appropriate to use negative expressions to discuss the Lord. Certainly this is the case, but for a specific reason. We have to keep in mind first that if we use affirmative expressions of God, we do not employ them in the same way we do for the things we encounter around us. Hence, the author states, considering the fact that affirmations are useless when it comes to signifying God's essence (signifying, of course, in the sense of constituting an understanding), what man can do is to imply it, by making use of negative and privative expressions. However, we should understand that the fact that negations are more powerful, more proper, more expressive, and more excellent than affirma-

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: «Alio autem modo illud quod loquens per praedicationem affirmativam significare non sufficit, insinuando per negativam illi contrariam. Iuxta illud quod dicens post praedicta Ioannes Scottus ait: plus intelligo Deum cum audio de ipso praedicantem 'essentia non est', 'bonitas non est', quoniam supersubstantialis est et superbonus, quam cum audio de ipso praedicantem 'essentia est', 'bonitas est'.»

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: «Primo modo dico quod praedicatio affirmativa magis congruit Deo, dicendo 'est bonus', quam negativa, dicendo 'Deus non est bonus', quia affirmativa significando aliquid dignum de Deo explicat, et hoc saltem locutione transsumpta, licet non propria quoad id quod significatur in praedicato. Negativa autem significando solum de Deo removet id quod affirmativa asserebat.»

tions when it comes down to speaking truly about God, this is only so by implication.<sup>41</sup>

From the discussion just presented we may conclude, I believe, that far from being the property of signification, rather it is the fact that linguistic expressions can be used to imply something that cannot be given to understand (*i.e.* that cannot be signified properly) that accounts for the advantage of negative utterances over affirmative ones to 'name' the Divine. In the subsequent question of Henry's *Summa* this particular aspect of language is further explained.

### 2.1. *The notion of insinuatō ('implication') refined*

In the third *quaestio* of the article under discussion, the problem is raised whether it is at all possible to signify properly in connection with the Divine, a question that has everything to do with the signification of terms and their applicability to God. The question starts off with a number of arguments against the idea that of God anything can be said properly, arguments that centre around the notion of signification. To begin with, it is argued, words can only be applied to God in a metaphorical (or analogical) way, and this would prevent proper predication of terms when applied to God. Moreover, it is added, all we can ever hope to say about God will not do justice to his greatness.<sup>42</sup>

As we shall see, our author is inclined to agree with the arguments to the effect that, at least insofar as positive predicative expressions

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: «Et propterea quod affirmationibus et positionibus significare non potest, negationibus et privationibus homo insinuat (...) Licet enim dicere quid non est Deus sit potentius, magis proprium et magis expressivum, et excelletius quantum ad veritatis expressionem quam dicere quid est Deus, hoc non est nisi insinuando (...)».

<sup>42</sup> *SQO*, art. LXXIV, qu. 3, f. 283v.: «Circa tertium arguitur quod nihil potest proprie praedicari in Divinis. Primo sic: Quod non significat aliquid proprie, non potest de aliquo proprie praedicari, quia praedicatum non praedicat de subiecto nisi id quod significat. Sed in Divinis nullum est praedicabile quod aliquid proprie significat, quia in Deo nihil est praedicabile nisi translatum a creaturis translatione rei et nominis (...) Secundo sic: (...) indigna esse Divinae maiestati, quae homines cum aliqua dignitate putant dicere (...) Sed quae non sunt digna Divinae maiestati, in Divinis proprie praedicari non possunt.»

are concerned, the expressions used of God do not have a signification in the strict sense of the word. His first words on the matter are meant to avoid any misunderstanding: it is not identity-expressions we are concerned with in the question at issue (so expressions like 'God is God' are not a problem), but only the propositions in which 'something distinct is predicated of something distinct', such as the expressions in which an attribute is said of a subject.<sup>43</sup>

Subsequently the Solemn Doctor sets out to explain what is meant by 'to signify properly (or improperly)', by paying attention to the different aspects involved in predication. According to our author, for predication to turn out properly or improperly we have to look at what is predicated, which, in turn, has two aspects that are involved in two modes of improper predication, namely the name that signifies and the thing *qua* signified respectively. The first mode of improper signification originates from the mode of signification of nouns.<sup>44</sup> Wherever we are dealing with a case of information or a proposition, the subject in its role of matter must signify in the manner of something subsistent, whereas the predicate in its role of form must signify in the manner of what informs. So, Henry continues, in order for an expression to constitute an instance of proper predication, it has to signify in the manner of a form that exists in the suppositum or in a subject, whereas whatever is to properly function as a subject, must signify in the manner of something subsistent.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: «Dico quod quaestio de proprie vel improprie praedicari non habet locum in Divinis nec in aliis praedicationibus quae fiunt per identitatem, in quibus idem praedicatur de se ipso, ut 'Deus est Deus', 'deitas est deitas' — quia talis praedicatio non potest esse nisi propria — sed solum in illis in quibus praedicatur distinctum de distincto, ut attributum de attributo, vel de natura, vel de persona, vel e converso quodcumque illorum de alio (...)».

<sup>44</sup> The expression 'noun' covers adjectival nouns as well.

<sup>45</sup> *SQO*, art. LXXIV, qu. 3, f. 283v: «In qua praedicatione dico quod proprie vel improprie praedicari provenit ex parte illius quod praedicatur, et hoc dupliciter: uno modo ex parte nominis significantis, alio modo ex parte ipsius rei significatae. Primo modo provenit ex modo significandi nominis, quia ubi est informatio aliqua vel propositio [im]proprie, subiectum eoquod se habet in ratione materiae debet significare per modum subsistentis, et praedicatum eoquod se habet in ratione formae debet significare per modum informantis (...) Idcirco dico quod ad hoc quod aliquid



If we look at predication from the mode of signifying of a nominal expression, Henry says, the only way in which a property can be predicated properly, both in the Divinity as well as in anything else, is in the manner of something concrete, whereas a subject can have either mode of signifying, that is, both as an abstract or as something concrete. Thus the sentences 'God is good' as well as 'the Deity is good' are both instances of proper predication. On the other hand, all abstract things are predicated improperly, whether they be predicated of something abstract or of something concrete. Hence all sentences that are predications of something abstract are instances of improper predication, such as 'God or the Deity is goodness'; and thus the proposition 'God is a trinity', containing the word 'trinity', which is a combination of an abstract and a concrete word, is partly an instance of improper predication, and partly one of proper predication.<sup>46</sup>

So much for the first sense of proper and improper signification, which involves the modes of signifying of a linguistic expression. The second source of improper signification was the thing *qua* signified, and again our author differentiates between two modes, according as the thing *qua* signified stands in relation to the word by which it is signified, or to the subject of which this 'thing' is predicated in the noun. In the first way one has proper signification if the noun in question signifies that thing properly. This is contrary to signifying that thing improperly or in a metaphorical sense. And this latter type of improper signification can generally occur owing to the transference (*translatio*) of name and thing, that is, when applying names that are also used to signify creaturely things to the Deity, who transcends all created being, as well as owing to the transference of the

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in Divinis proprie praedicetur de alio ut distinctum de distincto, sive secundum rem sive secundum rationem, debet significari per modum formae existentis in supposito aut in subiecto et e converso. Sed quod proprie debet subici, debet significari per modum subsistentis.»

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: «Et hoc modo proprietatis nihil potest proprie praedicari, neque in Divinis, neque in aliis, nisi modo concreto, licet subiectum utroque modo bene subiciatur, ut dicitur 'Deus est bonus', 'Deitas est bona'. Abstracta autem omnia praedicantur improprie, sive de abstracto, sive de concreto, dicendo 'Deus vel Deitas est bonitas', et secundum hoc illud, 'trinitas', compositum ex duplici nomine, uno concreto, alio abstracto, partim proprie, partim improprie praedicatur.»

thing only, for example the expression 'God', which is used for that which transcends all beings, and for that Being alone.<sup>47</sup> As to this first variety (of the second mode of predication), Henry tells us, there is no way in which we can say things properly of God, neither affirmatively nor negatively, because all the nouns we apply to God signify what we understand of Him in this life, which obviously does not correspond with what He really is.<sup>48</sup>

That leaves us with the second variety (of the second mode) of (im)proper predication, which derives from the part of the thing *qua* signified insofar as it stands in relation to the subject. With regard to this second type, proper signification concerning the Deity requires of what is predicated to expose what the noun signifies in such perfection and such totality as is found in God Himself. Should a predication fail to meet this condition, there would be an instance of improper predication.<sup>49</sup> As far as this mode of predication is concerned, the author then states, indeed there can be no instance of proper

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*: «Secundo modo, scilicet ex parte rei significatae, proprie aut improprie praedicari provenit duobus modis secundum duplicem comparationem rei significatae in praedicato, quia comparatur ad vocem sive ad nomen significans ipsam, et comparatur ad subiectum de quo in nomine enunciatur. Primo modo provenit proprie praedicari in propositione ex hoc quod nomen significat rem proprie, et econtra improprie [improprietas *ed.*] ex hoc quod nomen significat rem translative; et hoc sive translatione rei et nominis simul, ut universaliter contingit quando eodem nomine significatur quod est in Divinis et quod est in creaturis, sive translatione solius rei, ut est in hoc nomine 'Deus', cuius significatum est summa illorum de Deo per supereminentiam quae de creaturis significant aliquid dignitatis simpliciter cui nomen 'deus' primo et principaliter est impositum (...) Cum dicitur 'Deus est bonus', non est quod dicitur rationis aut generis proprietate, sed tantummodo rationis proportione seu proportionali transsumptione scilicet rei supereminentis in Deo, quae simpliciter est in creatura (...)».

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 284r: «Quia igitur quicquid significatum est per nomen quodcumque ab homine viatore ut [aut *ed.*] intellectum de Divinis, sic translative de Deo significamus et cognoscimus, (...) dico quod isto modo primo secundi modi principalis proprietatis nihil omnino proprie praedicari potest in Divinis, neque negative, sicut neque affirmative.»

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: «Secundo modo huius secundi modi principalis, scilicet ex parte rei significatae in praedicato ut ipsa comparat ad subiectum, proprie et improprie praedicari provenit ex eo quod praedicatum rem explicat quam significat nomen tanta perfectione et tanta integritate quanta est in Deo quantum ad seipsum, vel minore.

predication when speaking about God, owing to the fact that as far as the Deity is concerned, we creatures only have access to nouns that signify something insofar as we understand it (which, in God's case, is obviously not enough). This deficiency goes for both affirmatives and negatives, because in either type of expression (providing, of course, that the only difference between the expression consists in their being either an affirmation or a negation) the words mean the same.<sup>50</sup>

Despite our obvious incapacity when it comes down to giving a full understanding of God by way of signification, we do have another option to predicate properly, if we forget about the expression involved having to signify properly, but instead settle for implying not a true, but rather a metaphorical affirmation. And it is better to go about things by using a negation than by using an affirmation. However, to use negations in this connection are a proper way of speaking about God only because in such cases the negative propositions do not signify anything concerning God, either by denying of Him what is evidently in Him, or by denying something which is unworthy of Him.<sup>51</sup> In other words, to employ negations in connection with linguistic utterances about God only works, according to our author, owing to the fact that they are not to be taken in the usual sense.

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Si enim nomen quod praedicatur explicat rem significatam in tanta perfectione et integritate quanta est in Deo secundum se, tunc praedicatur proprie. Sin autem, tunc dicitur praedicari improprie.»

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*: «Quia igitur nullum nomen in creatura est quod de Deo in tanta perfectione et integritate quod est in ipso, exprimit significando in quanta est in eo, quia non explicat rem significando per nomen nisi prout intellectus creatus eam intelligit (...), idcirco dico quod, ut prius, adhuc nihil omnino proprie praedicari potest in Divinis significando, neque in affirmativa, neque in negativa propositione, quia termini idem significant in propositione negativa quod in affirmativa.»

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: «Potest tamen aliquid proprie praedicari in Divinis insinuando affirmationem non veram sed metaphoricam, et hoc multo melius per propositiones negativas quam per affirmativas, eoquod tales propositiones negativae nihil explicant significando de Deo, nec ab ipso removendo quod clare absurdum est ei non inesse (...) aut removendo ab ipso quod clare absurdum est ei inesse secundum aliquem modum.»

As we have seen above, not the notion of 'signification', but rather that of 'implication' is the operative one in this context. As will appear from the remainder of the *quaestio*, the success of this kind of linguistic device more than the former depends upon something along the lines of what Donald Davidson, among others, has called the 'charity' of the hearer.<sup>52</sup> Thus our author claims, in line with pseudo-Dionysius, that if negative expressions are used when speaking about God, the hearer understands perfectly well that someone who is in his right mind is not uttering them with the intention to signify what these propositions present. Again, when hearing the corresponding affirmatives, he also understands that anyone in his right mind intends these to signify what the propositions present to him.<sup>53</sup> From this explanation it is evident that in order for the negatives to work, they should be understood differently from what they normally do, and the fact that they can, depends on the listener ascribing to the speaker the right intentions. In other words, it is both the 'illocutionary force' of the utterance picked up by the hearer and the way in which the hearer understands the intention of the speaker that accounts for the negative's success.

In conclusion our author explains to us in what way these negative expressions are meant to be understood by the hearer:

Therefore upon hearing the negative propositions, a right-minded hearer is forced to divert himself to another understanding, and to notice that the speaker intends something other than the words suggest (...). However, he is not at all thus forced to divert himself to another understanding upon hearing affirmative propositions, or to notice that the speaker intends something other than the words suggest, but rather they advise him to stick to the meaning of the words.

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<sup>52</sup> See e.g. what DAVIDSON has to say on this notion in «On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme», published in the collection of essays *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford (Clarendon), 1984; pp. 183-98.

<sup>53</sup> *SQO*, art. LXXIV, f. 284r: «(...) audiendo dictas propositiones negativas bene percipit intellectus quod nullus sanae mentis proferret illas intendendo significare id quod propositiones praetendunt. Percipit etiam audiendo affirmativas quod quilibet sanae mentis intendit significare id quod propositiones praetendunt.»

(Et idcirco auditis propositionibus negativis, cogitur audiens sanae mentis ad alium intellectum se divertere et advertere quod aliud proferens intendit quam verba praetendant (...). Nequaquam autem sic cogitur ad alium intellectum se divertere aut advertere auditis propositionibus affirmativis, quod scilicet proferens aliud intendat quam verba praetendunt, sed potius suadent stare in sensu verborum.) (SQO, art. LXXIV, qu. 3, f. 284r)

Thus negations can be used to imply the perfection in God, which is why in contradistinction with affirmations, they can function properly. Moreover, our author adds, negatives are also absolutely true in this sense, because they perfectly imply what is really the case.<sup>54</sup>

Our author's message about the advantages of the negation should be quite clear by now: if we truly want to say something about the Deity that makes sense, we should resort to negative expressions. The question that now might come up is what type of negation we should use. As we have seen in our author's *Synkategoremata*, there are at least two different kinds of negation, among which indefinite phrases (or privations) and negative ones in the absolute sense. One may wonder whether these kinds make much difference in the context at issue.

## 2.2. What kind of negation to use for God

As it will turn out, the Solemn Doctor does not really care about the distinction between different kinds of denials when it comes down to using them for God. The classification is touched upon in his sixth question of the article at issue, which discusses whether it is better to use affirmative expressions about God than privative ones. Obviously it will be a problem to associate the Highest Being with any kind of deficiency, which is what the notion of 'privation' is usually associated with. Thus it is stated by one opponent to privative expressions that «a privation does not remove that which is absurd not

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: «Et quia sic per negativas insinuaturs tanta perfectio in Deo quanta in ipso est, non sic autem per affirmativas (...) negativae tales sunt proprie et affirmativae improprie. Sunt etiam negativae verae simpliciter, quia perfectae insinuant id quod in re est et sicut est in re.»

to inhere in God, but rather that which is absurd to inhere in Him» (*privatio non privat quod absurdum est Deo non inesse, sed potius quod absurdum est Deo inesse*).<sup>55</sup>

In answer to the problem raised in this *quaestio*, Henry of Ghent replies that when expressing things about the Divine, it is equally preferable to use negations and privations to affirmative predications, for both kinds of negative predication signify of God only what He is not. That is not to say, however, that there is no difference between the way in which they deny, he continues: negative predications and vile species do so on account of their enormous distance and repugnance or opposition to the Divine, whereas privative predications do so on account of removing the imperfection and defect the incomplex positives give to understand in creatures.<sup>56</sup> The first type of denial works because of the enormous distance the negations themselves and the vile species have to the Lord, and so, Henry explains, anyone in his right mind would therefore resort to assent to the negations involved, and hence turn himself to understand and assert of God precisely what it is more eminent than what is denied of him.<sup>57</sup> (Examples of this type of predication are ‘God is not goodness’ and ‘God is not essence’). Privative expressions, on the other hand, are successful because anyone in his right mind would take refuge to the contrary eminent positive content that is understood to be signified by the privations involved.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, qu. 6, f. 286r.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 286v: «Dico quod re vera tam negativae quam privativae praedicationes communiter praeferebantur affirmativis in expressione Divinorum (...) Nulla enim earum [nullum enim eorum *ed.*] significat de Deo quod est, sed solummodo quod non est. Est autem diversa causa in negativis praedicationibus et vilibus speciebus respectu privativarum praedicationum, in hoc scilicet quod negativae praedicationes et viles species illud faciunt per nimiam distantiam et repugnantiam sive quasi contrarietatem ad Divina. Praedicationes vero privativae per privationem imperfectionis et defectus quos importabant simplicia positiva in creaturis.»

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: «Propter nimiam enim distantiam et contrarietatem dictarum negationum et vilium specierum ad Deum, mens rationalis illas horrescit de Deo, et propterea refugit assentire dictis negationibus, et per hoc convertit ad sentiendum et asserendum de Deo eminentius quiddam quod sit illud negativum de Deo.»

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 287r: «Propter privationem autem defectuum et imperfectionum eo-

From this discussion of the two different kinds of denials, it has become clear that although the way in which they function is not the same, they are equally on the mark when used to reveal God's eminence. Moreover, when comparing them with affirmations in connection with theology, they both come out the winners.

### 3. Concluding remarks

Although there is more to be said about the interesting linguistic topics Henry of Ghent deals with in his *Summa*, there are some important conclusions we can draw from what we have seen so far. By also presenting the discussion on negation as developed in the *Syncategoremata*, I intended to demonstrate the great difference between the way in which our author deals with this linguistic device, depending on the area of linguistic activity he has in mind. If we confine ourselves to the purely logico-semantical analysis he has given in the latter, there would not be much to say about the advantage of negations over affirmations in religious matters. It is the additional, extra-semantical notion of 'implication' (*insinuatio*) that is mainly responsible for the efficacy of denials here. Furthermore, in order for an expression to imply as well as to signify something, it must be directed to a willing ear, a right-minded person, Henry insists, who is moved to understand the eminence of God upon hearing the denial involved. And this way of understanding a denial, as we have seen, does not follow from the meaning of the terms only. We might be able to say that the applicability of such illocutionary acts in general in this context requires the charity of the hearer, as well as the creativity of the speaker to play with the linguistic tools he has been granted.

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rum quae praedicantur de Deo praedicatione privativa, mens refugit ad contrarium eminens positivum quod dictis privationibus significari intelligitur.»