Zeitschrift: Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

Band: 64 (2017)

Heft: 2: ó

Artikel: John Wyclif's philosophy and political theology and their influence on Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague

Autor: Boreczky, Elemer

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-825812

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

Download PDF: 25.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

ELEMER BORECZKY

John Wyclif's philosophy and political theology and their influence on Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague

Thomas A. Fudges's exiting book[1] will, hopefully, help to bring back the fame of Jerome of Prague to the memory of the English speaking world. In this context, the theme of my talk hardly needs to be explained or justified. In the cathartic silence that fell on me when I finished reading the book, I felt as if Wyclif's ghost had flickered in the flames consuming Jerome's body. John Wyclif, in his short tract on the state of innocence (*de statu innocencie*), distinguished the spiritual and the natural body, and referred to the martyrs as well as Job and Christ, whose spiritual body did not feel the pain of death, for they who do what they must cannot die spiritually.[2] Jerome, too, must have had Wyclif in mind, when he claimed that "without the doctrine of *de universalibus realibus*, it was impossible to defend the Christian faith".[3] Although the term *real universal* has been widely discussed and debated, even the highly sophisticated scholarly debate itself has contributed to obfuscating the issue that lay at its core: the realness of the spiritual man. According to Wyclif, 'that man', i.e. the singular person, who, as Ockham claimed, was only real, "was principally and primarily human nature, *a parte rei*."[4]

In my study, I'm going to focus on the relationship between the spiritual and the natural man in Wyclif's philosophy and theology. Wyclif thought that the spirit, which was made an integral part of the soul at copulation, consisted of two parts: an uncreated (natural) one, which is charity, and a created one, which is the trinity of memory, reason and

[1] FUDGE, Thomas A.: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundation of the Hussite Movement*. Oxford University Press, 2016. This talk was given at the conference organized by the *Institute für Ökumenishe Studien/Institut d'études œcuméniques* of the University of Fribourg on October 20, 2016, to celebrate the launching of the German translation of Thomas A. Fudge's book. By its genre and intent, my contribution is a very general and brief overview of John Wyclif's thought, whose name occurs on almost every page of Thomas A. Fudge's biography of Jerome of Prague; the „Wycliffite philosopher" and the champion of real universals.

[2] WYCLIFFE, Iohannis: *Tractatus de statu innocencie*, in: WYCLIFFE, I.: *Tractatus de mandatis divinis accedit tractatus de statu innocencie*. Ed. by J. Loserth/F.D. Mathew. London: The Wyclif Society 1922, 476, 482.

[3] FUDGE, T.A.: *op.cit.*, 187.

[4] "*Terminus, homo, representat principaliter vel primarie natura humanam, que natura est species universalis omnium hominum, et universal a parte rei.*" WYCLIFFE, Iohannis: *Tractatus de logica*. Ed. by M.H. Dziewiczki. London: 1893, 9.

will.[5] Wyclif did not only place the whole created universe in the soul of the singular natural man, he also saw it manifested in the common soul and the natural body of the nation. With his predilection for etymology, he derived the term from '*natus*', and thought the nation was the community of the natives of *terra nascencia*, who speak a common language through which the spiritual man, the human person, can be really created in their soul. His philosophy and political theology was rooted in this understanding.

What was there in the propositions and conclusions of Wyclif that ignited political actions of such importance that they shook, and heralded the end of, international gothic order? In fact, their impact had been foreseen by Pope Gregory XI, who wrote in his bull of 1377 that "Wycclyff's (*sic*) erroneous, false or heretical propositions and conclusions subverted and threatened the vitality of the whole church and even secular politicians."[6]

The answer to this question is even more difficult to find today, as Wyclif's propositions and conclusions were written in the idiom of scholastic debates as part of a lively discourse that had been going on at the universities of Oxfrod and Paris since their foundation. At Oxford, they were embedded in the intellectual tradition of Robert Grosseteste, possibly the first chancellor of the university, but definitely the founder of its intellectual tradition with his emphasis on Biblical studies and an interest in the study of nature. He sought the "carnal sense of the Scripture". Grosseteste's tradition was carried through the work of Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, William Ockham, or – in Wyclif's own time as a young sophist – Thomas Bradwardine and Richard FitzRalph. Wyclif would refer to these scholars as belonging to "our order" – as opposed to "foreigners'". The starting point was light metaphysics, by means of which God and his creation was understood by reason. Quoting Robert Grosseteste:

> "God is the light, the source of all light, all other beings simply participate in that light. In the scale of created being, a thing is more or less perfect according to its greater or less participation in light. Thus at the summit are the *intelligentiae*, the angles, wholly luminous. Next comes the human soul, whose apex, *acies intellectus*, is akin to the *intelligentiae*. Light is the bond which unites and keeps together the soul, pure spirit, with the human body. Through light, the soul acquires knowledge from the senses, and through an irradiation of divine light the truth of the thing is perceived."[7]

5 WYCLIF, John: *On Universals*. Translated by A. Kenny. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, 107.

6 *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum tritico*, ascribed to Thomas Netter of Walden. Ed. by W. Shirley. London: Waddington 1858. With an introduction by W.W. Shirley: X-LXXXVII, 243.

7 Quoted in ROBSON, J.A.: *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools, the Relation of 'Summa de Ente' to Scolastic Debates at Oxford in the later 14th Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1961, 27–28.

Light metaphysics was based on the Pseudo-Dionysian vision of celestial hierarchies and divine names inspired by Platonic ideas and analogical thinking. They justified an equally hierarchical feudal system of "principalities, authorities, and powers"[8]. In this powerful worldview, everything was created by a complex system of mirrors (*speculations*) through which the universal ideas were translated to the physical world while their real nature was revealed through transfiguration. The Pope communicated the spiritual world to the temporal one; through him, the spiritual world emanated the temporal empire. Grosseteste's emanationist neoplatonic tradition transfused Roger Bacon's optical and especially linguistic studies aimed at searching the intended meaning of Scriptures. *Species in medio*, – virtues, forms, similitudes and phantasms–, were created to explain this transfiguration by logic, reason, optics and experimental experience – and linguistics including primary and secondary intent in revealing the divine will behind the universal structure of grammar. It was by equivocations that the truth of the thing was demonstrated. By Wyclif's time, however, the architectural beauty of the structure of intellectual order was seriously weakened by Aristotelian natural philosophy, as well as Aristotle's straightforward criticism of Plato's interpretation of the soul, together with its mental monstrosities.[9] Aristotle claimed that the soul did not have being beyond the individual person. This dealt a conclusive blow to the fundamental philosophical and theological concept of *persona humana* and the integrity of faith and reason. William Ockham's logical and metaphysical innovation of the singularity of the real compromised attempts at restoring the reality of divine ideas and universals. He thought universals were only signs that helped the mind to find the truth of the thing. As a consequence, he professed that God was all-powerful – he could have created man as an ass, if he wanted so.[10] However, this resulted in accentuating the problems of free will and human governance. "The nature of God's activity to men, our knowledge of him, and his of us, the relation of his will to us, and the capacity of men to act freely and completely both in their own power and in respect of God's will towards them,"[11] became possibly the most intriguing issues in 14th century Oxford. Ockham's singularity of the real questioned the authority of the Pope, based faith on Scripture, and supported conciliar civil government in the temporal world.

When Wyclif contested sign doctors and argued for the realness of universals, or, more exactly what was common in a proposition about man, he

[8] *Cf. Unam sanctam* by Pope Boniface VIII.

[9] ARISTOTLE: *On the Soul.* Book 1, Part 3. New York, 1947, 157–158.

[10] *„Eosque erupit quorundam vesania, dum praepostere acuti videri appetunt, ut quaerent, an natuam asini assumeri potuerit Dei filius." Institutio* II. xii. 5. Quoted by MCGRATH, Alistaire: *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation.* Oxford: Blackwell 1987. (Reprinted in 2004), 99.

[11] ROBSON, J.A.: *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools,* 31–32.

did not restore emanationism and the universal church – as it was concisely summed up in *Unam sanctam* of Pope Boniface VIII in 1302. On the contrary, his realism proved to be a fatal blow to its intellectual foundation. Like Ockham, he refused to accept the authority of the Pope and he placed the Scriptures, the book of free life, at the centre of his teaching. He was called *doctor evangelicus* by his contemporaries and he is remembered even today as the first translator of the Bible into English.[12] But he claimed that universals had real being and mental monstrosities were corrected by the common mind. Curiously, however, his realism has proved to be the biggest problem not only for his contemporaries, but for "modern doctors" of the 20th and 21st century, as well.

Wyclif was a quintessential Oxonian educated in the hundred year old tradition of intellectual debates – its problems, its terms, its solutions. For him, the University was his nest of logic, nature and metaphysics, "the vineyard of God and the gate to heaven", where he was nurtured by the understanding of the Scripture on the food of its truth... He found in the Scriptures his "*sheltering woods* [...] against the tricks of heretics, the spleendid witticisms of sophists and the animalistic wisdom of the citizens of the world."[13] In 1384, two years after he was banished from his sheltering environment and place of predilection, he died. He was silenced by a stroke in the midst of preaching.

He was a great preacher, "of sweet style and sharp logic."[14] He thought

> "preaching (predication) (was) communion and creation. It should not be formal, in signs following analogies and equivocations, less sinners understand that God wills them to indulge in the sin of luxury, idolatry, violence, and moves them to procreate or kill."[15]

In fact, he thought that oral communication was more authentic than written *notes*, as in the spoken word the intent of the speaker is more evident.[16] His Czech followers' insistence on freedom of preaching even by layman may also have been influenced by his example and the example of his spiritual priests. He was also a great debater.

Yet, he was a prolific writer, too. Even though some of his works are not extant, and may read as notes for disputations on various issues, the ones collected from different libraries, especially from Vienna and Prague, fill

[12] It seems to be irrelevant here to discuss how much of the Wycliffite Bible was actually translated by Wyclif.

[13] *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*. 14. Also WYCLIFFE, Iohannis (ed. R. Lane Poole): *De dominio divino, libri tres*. London: Wyclif Society 1890. (*To which are added the first four books of the Treaties De pauperie Salvatoris by Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh*.) 179.

[14] *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, 3.

[15] *De dominio divino*, 119.

[16] See GELLRICH, Jesse M.: *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century; Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995.

twenty some volumes. In spite of all this, we are only beginning to understand his philosophy and theology.[17] In this short talk, therefore, I can only offer a tentative line of thought with a few quotes from his tracts, which I hope will help us to give an answer to the question about his inevitable impact on his audience and readers.[18]

One idea runs through Wyclif's works from his earlier years when, as a philosopher, he started from the study of man and arrived at Christ, to his more mature age, when, as a theologian he started from his belief in Christ and arrived at man: the integrity of the spiritual reality in man and nature. In *De compositione hominis*, he argued that

> "the human person is the foundation of all these three; i.e. soul (anima), body (corpus), and natural integrity (natura integra). *The soul is attached to the body organically, as the verb (i.e. language) is attached to the human person.* Man is not two different substances. His soul is mortal, but the soul has an immortal part, the spirit, which becomes an integral part of the body at copulation, and the spirit moves and gives life to the body. The spirit remains after death. This is how *each man in his natural being is an immortal soul in the community of his being...* But as according to the corporeal nature of man, it is not possible that this created spirit of man copulate hypothetically, there must be a human soul or life before the human person."

But as this proposition was "inevident" and even "incredible" to many, he further argued that

> "... before all other verities about which 'modern doctors' disagree with the scripture and the saintly doctors of antiquity and, as a consequence, with the *way of verity*,...first I suppose from my faith in the scripture that [the human soul] is created by the spirit which is indivisible and incorruptible, and can exist per se as angels can. Second, I suppose that this spirit...can be united with the body to construct the human person (persona humana). And, third, ... as in inanimate bodies... all being (essencia) is in material form and composition, so in the human person body and spirit are connected as natural integrity of the two."[19]

The philosopher Wyclif soon gained a reputation at Oxford in the 1360s with his sharp wit and sweet style and many of his tenets were identified as heretical though he was not condemned for them. His heresies started with his views on time: his tenet, "whatever was, or will be, is," was rooted in his metaphysics and logic – his first nest. For Wyclif "logic was midway between grammar and metaphysics [...] [sharing] the condition of each, treating primarily of realities, since it is the route to metaphysics, and

[17] See e.g. LAHEY, Stephen: *Philosophy and Politics in the Thought of John Wyclif.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003.

[18] For a much fuller reconstruction of Wyclif's ideas on dominion, see BORECZKY, Elemer: *John Wyclif's Discourse on Dominion in Community*. Boston: Brill 2007.

[19] WYCLIFFE, Iohannis: *De composicione hominis*. Ed. by R. Beer. London, 1884. 130–132.

secondary of signs, since it is the terminus of grammar."[20] He blessed "the Lord of time, who enlightens my mind above time, enabling me to break free of these linguistic constraints on spirit!"[21] By his insight into time, he brought the spiritual world into the temporal world in the community of being. Heaven, the divine kingdom was no longer assumed to be a mystical entity 'outside time': it became ever present in the community of living persons. Faith could be understood by reason. His other acts of liberating the spirit from its stranglehold of formal logic, the mist of unknowing, the administration, buying and selling of the sacraments, the signs of the powers of the keys, private orders and man-made laws were to follow soon.

As regards these 'linguistic constraints on the spirit,' Wyclif returns to this point in his tract on divine dominion, too. His conversion from a sophist to a realist was caused by a vision of something bigger and more common behind propositions than the analogies, equivocations and formal conclusions allowed; a reality, which, he claimed, was the condition of their truth – nature (birth, growth and life), man and the divine will in man that makes it possible to turn procreation into creation and to take delight in nature's gifts. "*Our life*", he said,

> "does not rest on the glory of outlandish opinions, but in the discipline of truth, leading us to the worship of God who bestows happiness. Therefore knowledge of the universals will be useful insofar as it puts us in a position to understand in accord with the holy doctors, the holy scripture, and the treatises on the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the order of the work of the creator."[22]

And he went on to say: "If I assert of God what cannot be then I sin, as I did too often when I was more occupied in these matters [of grammar and linguistics] than befitted the state of a sophist."[23]

In *De Universalibus,* a work intended to clarify the compatibility of Wyclif's Aristotelian background as a natural philosopher with Plato and Augustine in respect of the real existence of ideas, Wyclif distinguished three kinds of predications and three kinds of universals. The first predication meant making statements about beliefs, and he thought it was irrelevant as regards the dispute about the divine, spiritual, created nature of man. The second one was predication in the grammatical sense, and he called it the science of sign doctors, which made it possible to predicate absurd and monstrous things, too. He called the third one real predication: i.e. when the existence of a thing is a statement about its fullness of being.[24] As

[20] *On Universals*, 12.

[21] Quoted by KRETZMAN, Norman: *Continua, indivisibles, and change*, in: *Wyclif in His Time.* Oxford: Clarendon 1986, 37.

[22] *On Universals*, 169.

[23] *On Universals* 143.

[24] *On Universals*, 1-9.

quoted above, "The real proposition, that man, is essentially really human nature."

The three kinds of universals were ones that are derived from a common cause; ones that have common form; and ones that represent something in common. The third kind of universals can further be divided into substantial and accidental universals. Wyclif thought that predication, i.e. 'saying' in its three forms,' causative, formative and representative, corresponded with the logic of the scripture: "loyca Christi". He made it absolutely clear that 'since all universal things are substantial dispositions or forms... they truly signify qualitatively and quidditatively, and primary substance signifies this something.' He added, that "It is in this way that the properties of universals are everywhere to be explained in a realist sense." Referring to Roger Bacon, he also insisted that "the illusions of transfigurations are corrected by the common mind." At the end of his discourse on universals, he reiterated his view that

> "An idea is an eternal form in the divine mind, which God uses as a pattern in the production of the creature... (but) the mental being of the creature is not God's power to produce, but the creature's power to be produced... this productibility is essentially nothing other than God."[25]

With the philosopher's work completed, and incepted as a doctor of theology in 1372, the theologian Wyclif used the logical and metaphysical conclusions of his earlier works to discuss divine and human dominion,[26], and as a consequence, creation, service, freedom, possession and government. His aim was to reconcile the views of the two most influential theologians at Oxford in Wyclif's times as a student, Richard FitzRalph, once a chancellor of the university, and Thomas Bradwardine, for a short time Archbishop of Canterbury and the spiritual father of King Edward III, the greatest knight of the 14th century, so that dissent at the highest intellectual level at the university about free will and God's participation in human acts should not let sinners "understand that God wills them to indulge in the sin of luxury, idolatry, violence, and moves them to procreate or kill."'[27]

[25] *On Universals*, 176–177.

[26] WYCLIFFE, Iohannis: *De dominio divino, libri tres*. Edited by R. Lane Poole. London, 1890. (With an appendix of the first four books of *De pauperie Salvatoris* by Richard FitzRalph.)

WYCLIFFE, Iohannis: *Tractatus de civili dominio, liber primus*. Edited by R. Lane Poole. London, 1885.

[27] Richard FitzRalph's *De Pauperie Salvatoris* deals with the subject of evangelical poverty, as well as the questions then agitated concerning dominion, possession, and use, and the relation of these to the state of grace in man. These were exactly the same issues Wyclif discussed in his books on dominion. Reginald Lane Poole, the editor of Wyclif's and FitzRalph's work, thought the latter was an incomparably more excellent Latin author than 'Wycliffe', and the former did not add too much to his thoughts. This is wholly arguable, as Wyclif's logical, metaphysical, theological *realism* seemed to reconcile the two great churchmen's position in respect of the relationship between God's will and what man wills, saying

Wyclif, in the first tract of *De dominio divino*, defines dominion as a relationship, which, as every (reciprocal) force, is perceptible only in its effects, or reflection, on its objects, which, in turn, assume their form or form of movement by revealing their nature as its effect. This was not an original idea in speculative theology, since the creative process of God as light had also been thought of in a similar manner, emanating through analogies to all possible orders of things. However, Wyclif's theory has a radically new element as, in his theory: "Divine dominion is natural order."[28] The object of divine dominion is natural being, which is understood by intellectual nature as the created universe. God's eternal and perpetual will, creative potential, wisdom and love, are unconditionally given to beings in their time. They are created by their genus and species only as much as they are 'productible.' God is the Lord of creation, which is the narration of what was created by creative potential. All nature serves the Lord by *doing what has to be done* according to the reason of the being of the creature. But every created being exists for only its lifetime as they are all of corruptible matter. Only God is ever present in all the three times as being. His dominion, the created order of nature, does not require any service.

God is also the Lord of universals, through which his creation takes place. When God created man in his own image and gave him dominion over sublunar beings, he gave himself, his creative intelligence, reason and will fully and unconditionally. It is through intelligence, which is often interchangeable with memory, that the divine idea becomes part of the soul. So far, this is still nothing new, from Augustine to Bonaventure, creation and emanation was understood in this way. But according to Wyclif, intelligence is not external. Together with charity, it is that part of the soul that does not die with the body but is ever present like language in the community of its speakers. It is not extinguished with the death of the individual speaker but remains common to every man that has ever lived or will live. It is the community of being through which the created world comes alive.

Man is not lord of time or universals; he enjoys dominion by his intellect through his soul (*anima*), which participates in the spirit. He can only rule the physical world, and first of all, his own body by understanding the superior reason of his being which is common to every human being. Nor can he create other beings but ones like himself in *genere*, by replacing procreation with the moral and intellectual action of fathering. This is the assembly point of Wyclif's teaching, which he will further elaborate in his discussion of the law of love. But through knowledge and grace, man can use, enjoy, take delight in, and understand nature, and

"what man wills is the reflection of his corporeal nature in his intellectual nature... contingency and necessity do not contradict each other" (*De dominio divino*. 117).

[28] *De civili dominio*, 16.

thus participate in God's essential being. Created reason in man can make judgments to control his will and align it with God's will, which is for every nature to have what is its own; and thus for man to be one with his *genus*. Only Christ could fulfill this divinity inherent in every man.

Wyclif finds it necessary to emphasize that it does not follow from his doctrine that every creature is God. He draws three conclusions: (1) being coincides with the first essence and with created being; (2) God's dominion is not eternal, as dominion is not founded in pure intelligence but in the objective existence of the creature; and (3) the subject of theology is Christ, distinct from the metaphysics of ethnicity, for four reasons. The metaphysics of ethnicity explains how the image of humanity is constructed and maintained through the famous people of the ethnic community, but Jesus Christ (a) is the unity of essence; (b) unity of the person, as he is created essence both corporeally and incorporeally; (c) general unity, as every corporeal or spiritual nature is Christ; (4) he is the unity of examples, as every rational example, and consequently, every '*ens,*' is the Verb itself. The theologian proceeds from his belief in Christ to the existence of the creature, whereas the philosopher proceeds from the existence of the creature and arrives at his intelligible being. "This is how man and nature can be better understood philosophically".[29]

The third tract of *De dominio divino* narrows down the focus of Wyclif's discourse on how God's will is sustained in the world. What Wyclif seems to have proven in the conventional forms of scholastic disputations is that all being is in material form, but as all (created) being is in time, the accidental being of the created universe always comes to an end, whereas the creative force, the abstract knowledge and the love that create it never cease being. In existence, being, essence and substance are present also as past and future. Divine will is served by natural being, and it cannot be bent or changed by human constructs, services or rites.

However, free will is absolutely necessary, for otherwise we could not know or feel anything. Knowing and feeling are the two domains where the world is created. The rest of the soul participates in the dumb metabolism of inanimate being. Without man's free will, the forces that the metaphor of God represents would act in chaos and not in the created order of the universe.

For Wyclif and his *fideli* God is external in the form of space, pure potential, intelligence and charity, and internal as the reflection of these in the soul: an intelligible circle inside and outside any creature. What he can produce, i.e. generate, externally are 'natures' or 'the community of graces', and these are the things that he produces in humans. Universals are part of things, but they only generate life according to genus and species,

[29] *De dominio divino*, 198.

which are part of the 'productibility' of the creature, if God's creative word, carried by the Holy Spirit and the angelic intellect, touches them.

It may be relevant to remind ourselves of the meaning of the terms 'nature' and 'genus,' as Wyclif obviously used the literal meaning of these words figuratively as well. For the sake of brevity, let us consider 'nature' as something that comes alive, is born, and '*increased*' as a result of generation. 'Genus,' as a universal, therefore, has three distinct meanings: the idea of the species (1) present in the semen (2) and brought to fruition by procreation (3). Divine dominion is present in the first born of nature. This lies behind Wyclif's understanding of the trinity, the trinity of time, the tripartite logic of his predicative universal always present in the logic of scripture: and this is why divine dominion is always in the present but the example of being by 'genus' exists in all the three times. The gifts of grace bring blessing to the blind acts of the beast, by love and understanding.

God does not possess, or even use, anything. When he gives himself to man, he gives man his being, and when he gives man dominion, he does not give man the power of creation, or right of possession, but three laws: the law of nature, the law of scripture, and the law of grace. All his gifts are goods of the soul. These gifts are the translations of the divine will that moves the soul to act in the spirit of justice. Justice is the eternal will that everybody should enjoy what is their own and given to them freely by their creator. God gave no one priority over the other person. Man-made orders and man-made laws cannot create anything and cannot deprive natural beings, their body and their soul, of what is theirs by the reason of their being. If "captains and prelates" still do so, they commit mortal sin and cast away their natural dominion.

Divine dominion is always communicative; though many participate in its goods, everyone has them singularly. Divine goods include the heavenly kingdom and man's natural dominion: the semen and seeds. Words are also communicated in this manner; therefore science and teaching are also communicative. These things cannot be bought and sold. God gives freely and communicatively.

Men cannot possess anything, they can only use and enjoy what is leased to them: goods of fortune, nature and grace. Wyclif, following Augustine, divides goods of grace into uncreated and created grace. Uncreated grace includes divine essence, the Holy Spirit and divine goodwill. Created grace is grace to liberate us from the grip of the material world. It is grace by which the creature becomes dear to God: abstaining from mortal sin, sense of justice and predestination. Politicians and worldly princes cannot give anything to anybody, as they do not possess what they pretend to be theirs. Dominion can only be had in community: it is enjoyed by borrowing and lending: i.e. by exchange.

Wyclif concluded his tract on divine dominion by analysing 'God's free acts of lordship.' In the course of his discussion, he separated '*mutuacio*'

[*usus translacio, servato dominio et potencie*, various modes of appropriation, which have a common value expressed in money] from the other two modes in which God gives to men, *prestacio* and *accomodacio* [guaranteeing and lending the necessary conditions of being], and the acceptance of God's free gifts [the service expected in return for the gifts]. All God's gifts are given to the soul of men, and they are unalienable parts of the human soul, the inner man. The third tract of Wyclif's book on divine dominion ends with the discussion of these modes of giving, and the discussion of grace, since grace is the reflection of the pure divine potential of will, which is justice, in the soul of men.

Wyclif seems to be satisfied by restoring orthodoxy; *acies intellectus*, of the Faith, the "carnal sense of the scripture" as it was required by Grosseteste's illuminationism. Through the logic of the Scripture and the works of Holy Fathers, he had found an answer to his question, which was also Augustine's, of how to live well to avoid the pain of death.

The answer was simple. Live naturally: that's the best service of our Lord, who is Lord of the order of nature. The written law in Scripture, the book of free life, helps men to receive the gifts of grace: most important of which are justice and charity. Religion is understood as the structure of the will. As living naturally is the best service of God, Christian religion is natural religion. "The rule of Christian religion is reciprocal service [...] if this rule is observed there is no need for any other rule."[30]

With his tracts on divine dominion complete, Wyclif set out to explain how this general rule was sustained in the world by the laws of nature, the laws of Scripture and the laws of grace, and how it was related to civil dominion and the life of the beneficed clergy. So far he had been safely rooted at Oxford, but turning from metaphysics to politically sensitive issues of liberty, possession, service, servitude, he soon raised a storm. While in his earlier years he was nurtured by the words: '*neque qui plantat, neque qui rigat est aliquod, sed qui incrementum dat, Deus*' (Cor. III. 7), he had now found the most relevant reference for what he saw was happening to him in Ecclesiaticus. In his own translation of the Bible: 46 Yit Y schal schede out teching as profesie, and Y schal leeue it to hem that seken wisdom; and Y schal not faile in to the generaciouns of hem, til in to the hooli world. 47 Se ye, that Y trauelide not to me aloone, but to alle that seken out treuthe.[31]

In my book on *John Wyclif's Discourse on Dominion in Community* I made an attempt to find the three books on human (civil) dominion on the basis of internal references in the four books that have been known and

[30] *De civili dominion*, vol. I, 77.

[31] [Eccl. 41–42.] *Sirach. XXIV. 42–47* in the Wycliffe Bible.; referred to as *Eccl. XXIV. 31* by Wyclif in the last paragraph of his long tract on dominion, justice, and evangelical law. *CD*, 442.

edited under the title *De civili dominio*. I found that only one of the four volumes may have belonged to Wyclif's original work on divine and human dominion,[32] whereas the three remaining books contained what was identified as his books on religion.[33] *De mandatis divini*, which, judging from the large number of extant copies was widely read in Bohemia, was found to be the first and second book on human dominion with its discussion of justice and law and the Old and the New Sacrament.[34]

In it, Wyclif makes it clear that law is not right. Law is based on justice, which is the real presence of God in the soul of every man, and is based on *the first law of nature*: that everyone should enjoy what belongs to them by the reason of their being. This is their property: their body and soul, their children, their spouse, their house and their flock and land that they cultivate in their *terra nascencia*, the fruits of which they can enjoy and exchange with others as in a "wicker basket of our debts in temporal life".

The example for any created 'justice' is found in the uncreated 'Verity' that "right is the constant and perpetual will which respects in everyone what is his."[35] It can be interpreted as property, though Wyclif prefers to think of it as God's free gift to every individual that can be used for perfection and prosperity – or abused. The three tracts on human dominion discuss the various implications of this proposition, and end by Wyclif saying that people sustain divine dominion through the management of their property.[36] But before this conclusion, his discourse on law and civil dominion unfolds, and make this very comfortable proposition into one of the most difficult moral duty for man to perform.

As said above, God's free gifts to men are the law of nature, the law of scripture and law of grace. These laws regulate our life. Natural law is the law of the nation, which is a natural body, and provides regulations for its growth – also as mandated by God at Creation. At the centre of this growth is man and woman, who, in their love, receive the seed of life which is taken care of by living naturally according to the laws of the land. Their physical life is regulated by *Lex membrorum*. Natural law, as the law of the nation can be represented and sustained by a king, but even he can have dominion only if he is without sin.

If someone has right to what is his, this means he 'owes' himself, just as others owe him what is his by right, so a big 'wicker basket' of "debts"[37] arises, which holds all our goods as in the market place, where *mutuacio*

[32] BORECZKY, Elemer: *John Wyclif's Discourse on Dominion in Community*. 74–83.

[33] DOYLE, Eric: *William Woodford, O.F.M. and John Wyclif's* De Religione, in: Speculum Vol. 52 (Apr. 1977) No 2, 329–336.

[34] WYCLIF, Johannis: *Tractatus de mandatis divinis accedit Tractatus de statu innocencie*, edited by Dr. J. Loserth and F.D. Matthew. London, 1922.

[35] *De mandatis divinis*, 2.

[36] *De mandatis divinis*, 3

[37] *De Mandatis Divini*, 3.

takes place [also by the help of money (*pecunia*) that serves as the expression of all things held in common.] Nothing else is demanded from man but what becomes possible in its own time. Everyone has a right to what is owed to him/her, even if they do not possess, use, or consume it. If a creature does not pay himself or another one his due, he 'detains' unjustly whatever donation he has received, and commits sin. But God cannot leave sin unpunished. Everybody has what is his due, and only what is his due; if he should receive another gift or donation he cannot keep it, as it is not his, but he can pass it on to others. This is all summed up by 'Verity' (as Wyclif calls Christ of the scripture), when he teaches us to pray: "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' (*nostra debita dimittantur*) (Math. vi.)."

We are all in debt, says Wyclif; first of all, to God, who leases to us what we rightfully hold temporarily only while we are in the world, but never possess. There is no uncreated right to rule or to possess; to keep for ourselves or take from others: "the benefit of accepting what is given (*positivus*), and the evil of taking (*privatum*) are the opposites of each other."[38] If we live naturally, we can pay what we owe to God by 'natural ministration,' and be absolved from the heavy burden of debts, i.e. sin. This is why we also have to' 'forgive all those who trespass against us,' according to primary justice to keep our soul light. However, Wyclif claims after Augustine that "the man, in whose soul the phantasms of temporal goods exclude verities, is spiritually dead."[39]

Scriptural law is divided between the old law of Moses and the new law of Christ. It regulates the morals of individuals. The difference between the old and the new law is that whereas the former is based on fear of God, the latter is based on love. The supreme law is love: the law of grace, God's will in every man to be human.

Whatever Wyclif was going to add to his philosophy and theology of the integrity of spirit, man and nature was written by him for the delight of *Christicoli* or *fideli*, who had by now understood his teaching. He discussed in detail how sin, which is – philosophically – false logic, and – morally – taking from others what does not belong to us (*privatio*), infected the body and soul of nature. False logic can lead to the creation of man-made orders (religious and knightly ones) and man-made laws, which claim to justify taking from others the necessities of their life, or ruling over their body, as in the case of women or serfs, whereas, in fact, there is only one order, the order of nature – and it is instituted in Christ.

Wyclif's discussion of 'civil dominion' is, after all, a scholastic elaboration and replenishment of scriptural truth and the way the law of grace operates and rectifies the distorted order of what men love most: the parti-

[38] *De Mandatis Divini, 8.*

[39] *De Mandatis Divini,* 13.

cular instead of the common. It is expressed in a manner that is intended to have immediate effect on his audience, who, apparently, were most interested in the question: who has right to dominion, who can command service, and who can use and enjoy property? Wyclif's answer is given bluntly by his proposition: dominion can only be enjoyed by righteousness: "...whoever is in mortal sin simply has no moral right to the gifts of God; ...whoever exists in grace to be finally given has even less right, but in the things he has all the goods of God."[40] "Crimes against men," he says, "are *really* crimes against God."[41] This was going to be his living legacy.

His doctrine follows from his earlier consideration of dominion, service, property, ownership, liberty, justice, right, law, and sin. The discussion of these categories was based on his logical, philosophical, metaphysical and theological works, and reached its climax in the reinstatement of the law of love. Whatever is inferred from his earlier discussions in respect of civil dominion follows naturally from them, whereas the discussion of the relationship between the law of conscience and civil law, and its relevance for the issues of his age and audience, applies these insights and theological inferences to the discourses of his contemporary audience. He takes count of the different orders of goods (goods of nature, goods of fortune and goods of grace), and the conditions of their use and enjoyment by human beings. As no one can claim to have dominion without *ususfructus,* he discusses the various rights for use of services and goods, and the various modes in which use and enjoyment are unjustly appropriated. The major issues he examines include conquest, accumulation of wealth, buying and selling real estate, as regards rights of property in contrast to '[con] *mutualcio*' (mutual borrowing); the contemplative and active life of prelates, kingship and other forms of government, obedience to tyrants, the role of judges, hereditary lordship and election, service and slavery, hereditary service, human grants and donations, the right of the state regarding church property, excommunication, tithes, civil dominion of the clergy and the relation of the church to temporal property, the supreme authority in the church and the authority of the pope.

Natural dominion, instituted by God, cannot be alienated, as it is founded on the first title of justice; civil dominion can be abdicated, donated, purchased or otherwise exchanged in the service of justice, as it is instituted by men as a result of sin. "Civil or human law," claims Wyclif, "is a law which ordains the custody of temporal goods for the use of the republic to avoid their unjust use and to sagaciously administer them at times of need."[42]

[40] *De civili dominio,* vol. I. 1.

[41] *De civili dominio,* vol. I. 31.

[42] *De civili dominio,* vol. I, 129.

Whoever is dominant, either naturally or civilly, claims property rights to what he possesses. For civil dominion, it can be rightfully said by politicians that 'this is my property,' for collegiate dominion that 'this is our property,' but best of all, those who dominate naturally or evangelically say: "All the goods of the world belong singularly to our order, and so we never have anything either civilly or in common, as the minor orders say."[43] (A few years later though, Wyclif, in his defence, reformulated this proposition by claiming that the only order is the order of nature, and Christ is its institution).

At the end of his tract, or sermon, Wyclif, inserts a note: "The custody of civil goods is not possible without property."[44] This is why civil proprietors can freely exchange their dominion; they can buy, lease, or dispose of it in many ways. The consumption and proper use of property cannot be rationally denied. But all dominion should be received in the name of God and based on natural dominion. Hereditary succession or mutual exchange of territory is not justified if it is not based on natural law.[45] The direct reference to contemporary issues is underlined by the fact that Wyclif reiterates his well-known conclusion about the restoration of order by saying that "if the traditional ways of 'having' by the community are perturbed by human institutions, God's order is restored by pestilence, hostile invasions – or exhortation."[46]

The third book on human dominion ends with the reiteration of the sole authority of scriptural law in these matters as well as in every other aspect of human life: "The only authority is the Holy Scripture" (*Sola [autem] Scriptura sacra est [illius] auctoritatis*).[47] It shows us the rule of free life.

Finally, Wyclif argues in a 'universal epilogue' that no creature can be a lord unless God donates lordship to him; but God can only give in the best way. Quoting Grosseteste, he says that God provides goods in the freest, the most secure, and the most useful way, and no one can take (or confiscate) them. They are wasted (or thrown away) if abused. He gives us his son, who is the incarnation of his creative Word, and Holy Spirit; and we are 'guaranteed' goods for perpetual fruition, which can only be lost by wilful delinquency. He who sins destroys these goods. God gives men virtues *in via* and glory consummated in *patria,* only for fruition, which no one can abuse or waste unless he chooses to. Wyclif thinks it can be demonstrated that the just ones are beautified in soul and in body, and the essence of the human body served by prime material can never be annihi-

43 *De civili dominio,* vol. I, 129.
44 *De civili dominio,* vol. I, 129.
45 *De civili dominio,* vol. I, 131.
46 *De civili dominio,* vol. I, 131.
47 *De civili dominio,* 409.

lated: "Christians have to be certain that by deposing the body for Christ in grace, the inner man is never destroyed, but it is securely conserved.'[48] Even if the body is tortured, there is no pain, and the inner man is glorified in *patria*, where there is order, pure justice, charity, intelligence, power, and glory – or the other way: divine kingdom exists in order, pure justice, charity, intelligence and glory. In *Trialogus*, written at the end of his life, he reiterates his fundamental proposition that the created universe is in *this* world. Heaven and hell are on the earth. We witness one more change of the mode and register of discourse; the words of the logician or the philosopher are suddenly silenced by the preacher-teacher: the sermon is superimposed on the tract. The world, he says, will eventually become what the ones who have children from meritorious copulation, who understand nature, and who take delight in it and enjoy her fruits make them.

> "The just ones have true riches in all temporal goods, they find delight in them and, consequently, they use them as in the state of innocence, and they continue to grow in the way of natural movement in the use of their delightful possessions in the joy of the Lord reigning beautifully over all their goods."[49]

As we are always resurrected as members of the community of mankind: the divine kingdom is *really* in and around us. We are free to choose between accepting God's free gifts with pure heart or casting them away.

Afterword

The distance between Grosseteste's vision and its implementation and Wyclif's propositions and conclusions are formidable – yet Wyclif thought he had found what Grosseteste had set as a goal for the university: the carnal sense of scripture. There is a paradox in this: while his propositions and conclusions subverted the whole church and secular order, as foreseen by Pope Gregory XI, he had accomplished this by tracts written in the idiom of *scolastica* that created the intellectual background to late medieval international gothic order. This is why it is so difficult to reconstruct his thoughts for modern readers. Also, this may have been one of the reasons why his impact on the reformers of the 16th century was almost negligible. Though Beze embraced him as a morning star who "who was the deliverer of us from the cruel bondage of Papism," and hundreds of years later William Turner, the painter, still remembered him as the one who let the light into the darkness of superstitious religious practices, practically none of his tenets were taken over by the reformed churches. His fame survived as the forerunner of Protestantism, the first translator of the Bible to En-

[48] *De civili dominio*, vol. I, 100.

[49] *De civili dominio*, vol. I, 42–43.

glish, and the myth about his religious communism lurked behind the conflict between Puritans, Dissenters and Low Church Anglicans on the one hand, and High Church Anglicans on the other until the end of the 19th century, when liberal English tradition disowned him. His picture, possibly similar to the picture Jerome of Prague kept in his room, was removed from the main reading room of Bodeleian Library in the early 1990s. His metaphysical and theological works were burnt or stacked away in libraries where they remained unread for centuries.

Yet Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague may have died at the stake for him, too. Their fate is proof to the fact that they understood that "Christians have to be certain that by deposing the body for Christ in grace, the inner man is never destroyed, but it is securely conserved." Both of them found solace in their belief that their soul would return to where Wyclif's soul had been: to patria – the divine kingdom in the common memory of mankind.

Abstract

This tract is a brief discussion of the theological and political consequences of John Wyclif's philosophical innovation of real universal. *Its champion, Jerome of Prague, went to the stake for its defence. By claiming that the object of divine dominion is natural being, Wyclif placed the spiritual world in the soul of real persons living as members of a community: receiving spiritual reality from their ancestors at copulation and passing it on to their offspring's. It is sustained by mutual exchange and reciprocal service. The tract is a rational reconstruction of Wyclif's arguments and conclusions found in his tracts on divine and civil dominion and* De mandatis divinis, *copied and spread by Czech scriptors.*