

RADICAL SCOTISM: THE *ERROR WICLEFI* IN THE LONG SCOTIST TRADITION

CLAUS A. ANDERSEN

In a seventeenth-century Scotist debate over the ontological status of possible beings, we find one Scotist charging another Scotist with a special kind of heresy, labelled ‘*Error Wiclefi*’, named after one of the favorite metaphysical doctrines of the posthumously condemned heretic John Wyclif († 1384). While Wyclif authored a variety of provocative doctrines, his view of the creaturely eternal intelligible being, co-eternal with God’s knowledge of creatures, is the one that keeps recurring in Early Modern Scotist metaphysical discussions. Wyclif’s view challenges the fundamental theological notion of divine creation from *nothingness* and the corresponding notion of annihilation; according to Wyclif, creation is from and annihilation is into *pure intelligible being*:

[O]mnis creacio proprie dicta dicit produccionem rei a puro esse intelligibili ad existenciam actualem. Igitur, per idem, omnis adnichilacio, si est, dicit corrupcionem rei ab actuali existencia ad purum esse intelligibile.¹

In this present contribution, I shall argue that the Early Modern Scotist discussion in fact mirrors Duns Scotus’s († 1308) own reaction to Henry of Ghent’s († 1293) doctrine of being of essence (*esse essentiae*) and its peculiar aftermath in the early Scotist tradition that likely, through one radical string of Scotism, inspired Wyclif himself. The charge of

¹ IOANNES WYCLIF, *De ente librorum duorum*, II, tract. 6 (fragm.), cap. 12, ed. M. H. DZIEWICKI, London 1909, 292; cf. also II, tract. 1, cap. 5, 101-102: “[E]sse intelligibile creature [...] est eternum in hoc quod deus eternaliter intendit illam creaturam existere tempore suo”. G. LEFF, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, vol. 2, Manchester 1967, 494-558, emphasized the centrality of this doctrine in Wyclif’s heretical thought. For less metaphysical aspects, see the more recent presentation in K. GHOSH, *The Wycliffite Heresy. Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature), Cambridge 2001.