



ABSTRACTS

THE INTERSECTIONS OF THEOLOGY, LANGUAGE AND COGNITION IN MEDIEVAL TRADITION AND BEYOND

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

12–13 MAY 2020

Alma Mater Studiorum-Università di Bologna

Dipartimento di Filosofia e Comunicazione

Claudia Appolloni (Fondazione San Carlo/Université de Genève)

PRAGMATIC APPROACHES IN 13TH CENTURY THEORIES OF SIGNIFICATION AND IMPOSITION OF WORDS.
BETWEEN MASTERS OF ARTS AND THEOLOGIAN

If we attempt to provide a sketch of 13th century accounts of signification of words we can find at least two different approaches: (i) a poietic approach, popular among the Modists of the first generation; and (ii) a pragmatic one, exemplified by Roger Bacon's *De signis*, a text which resulted to be strongly influential for another Franciscan theologian, Peter of John Olivi.

According to the poietic approach (i), the meaning of words is considered the result of a first act of imposition, after which words have the intrinsic property of 'meaning something'. According to the pragmatic or praxis-oriented approach (ii), conversely, meaning is an act performed by the speakers, who aim intentionally to signify something.

In recent years, the scholarly debate has been greatly enriched, and a pragmatic approach has been acknowledged to the Modist tradition as well. This paper aims to develop this debate further, by adding a piece to the puzzle. In particular, I will focus on some commentaries of Aristotle's *De anima* II and explore the definition of 'vox' as a meaningful sound. Such a definition, in fact, provides an occasion for both Theologians and Masters of Arts to wonder about the meaning of words.

Specifically, I will focus on a case study provided by Adam de Whitby's *Quaestiones De Anima*, a text where a 13th century Master of Art outlines an original theory of everyday imposition of words. Adam de Whitby claims that the meaning of words is dependent upon the speaker's *daily* institution of meaning, but, that nevertheless, most speakers replicate the meaning which is the most common in their languages. This account is problematic for it cannot be read within the traditional opposition between the Modists' poietic approach and Bacon's pragmatic one. Where does such an original theory originate from? And what is the background to be supplied? An analysis of 13th centuries commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima* may represent part of the answer.

Irene Binini (University of Parma)

THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF POSSIBILITIES IN 12TH CENTURY LOGIC

Early medieval reflections on modalities are deeply indebted to the modal theories developed by Aristotle in his *De Interpretatione*, to which scholars were acquainted through the mediation of Boethius' translations and commentaries. Although Aristotle's modal system was considerably enriched in the early Middle Ages with a more sophisticated syntax and a more expressive logic, the general framework in which modal language was analyzed remained essentially Aristotelian in spirit. However, Aristotle's modal views were also loaded with metaphysical assumptions that some early medieval authors felt uncomfortable carrying along. This metaphysical background was connected to the

Aristotelian interpretation of possibilities as ontologically funded in the *potencies* or *potentialities* of things, that is in the powers, tendencies or capacities that certain substances have of being otherwise than they actually are (See e.g. Simo Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, London, 1993, New York: Routledge p. 19-31; 46-8). The potency-based account of possibility, further reinforced by Boethius in his commentaries, was questioned by some logicians in the early twelfth century. These authors were driven by a special interest in unactualized possibilities and in the modalities of non-things, an interest that ultimately led them to detect a number of problems related to the Aristotelian modal paradigm. In opposition to it, they developed a modal theory according to which the term “possible” has no ontological correlate, and does not denote any modal property or intrinsic feature possessed by substances.

Luigi Campi (Università degli Studi di Milano)

A ‘POST-DISCIPLINARY’ ACCOUNT OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE.

SOME NOTES IN THE MARGINS OF JOHN WYCLIF'S REJECTION OF THE ETERNITY OF THE WORLD AND ITS LEGACY IN EARLY 15TH CENTURY BOHEMIA

In the first decade of the 15th century, the rejection of Aristotle’s eternalism was one of the hallmarks of the group of Bohemian masters from Charles University influenced by the teachings of John Wyclif, and played a part in the academic controversies related to the reception of his thought. A leitmotif emerging from the texts of the Bohemian Wycliffites is that Aristotle’s doctrine of the eternity of the world is not only heretical, but also philosophically erroneous. Such a conclusion was actually grounded on the teachings of John Wyclif, who revived a unitary approach to scientific knowledge against the methodological pluralism which had gained widespread acceptance in contemporary scholastic debate. Bohemian masters like Jan Hus, Jerome of Prague or Matthias of Knín depended on Wyclif on this. They did not share, however, his peculiar ‘post-disciplinary’ account of scientific knowledge, according to which institutionalised disciplines – the ones taught in the schools, theology included – are to be conceived as the preliminary steps that any *amicus veritatis* has to climb to reach the top of a *scala sapientiae*, from where no mystical vision is enjoyed, but a superior form of scientific knowledge may be attained. This happens thanks to God’s grace, acting from within as a restoring and generative influence, healing fallen weakened rational powers and enabling them to reach new outcomes. In the strictness of their scientific boundaries, institutionalised disciplines are sterile, but divine help ‘fertilises’ them and makes them able to bear fruit – that is, able to grasp the meanings and mysteries concealed in Scripture and reality.

Veronique Decaix (Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne)

THE MEMORY FORMULA. BURIDAN VS AQUINAS

The aim of this talk is to present my recent research focused on the Latin commentaries on *De memoria and reminiscencia* by investigating a new question: To what extent is the psychology developed in these treatises grounded on semantics and logic? With a comparison of Aquinas and Buridan, I would like to submit a hypothesis that the key to explaining the cognitive process of memory is given by “the memory formula”, i.-e. the manner in which the authors analyse the act of memory in term of a proposition.

Giacomo Fornasieri (Università degli Studi di Salerno/KU Leuven)

INTELLECTUAL COGNITION AS CONNOTATION. PETER AURIOL ON THE NATURE OF THE COGNITIVE ACT

Although Auriol’s thought has been receiving a growing attention amidst the contemporary scholarship in medieval philosophy, his use of connotation has gone partially unnoticed. This lack of attention is quite surprising. Traces of ‘connotation’ can be found in rather heterogeneous contexts of his thought, such as theology, metaphysics, epistemology. In this paper, I will focus on how connotation is applied to Auriol’s philosophical psychology. In particular, I will delve into Auriol’s unusual claim, according to which intellectual cognition is *per se* a connotation, that is, the view according to which each and every act of thinking implies or connotes an intentional object as something appearing to the cognizer. In the second place, I will focus on how this view allows him to incorporate into intellectual cognition a phenomenon that proves to be peculiar of our cognitive life, i.e. the fact that we consciously experience what we cognize, while we cognize it. To reach this purpose, the paper will be divided into three parts: (i) in the first part, Auriol’s thesis will be presented; (ii) in the second one, it will be briefly compared with two aspects of Radulphus Brito’s and Hervaeus’s views on intellectual cognition; (iii) finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on Auriol’s doctrine, as well as a brief evaluation of his theory.

Matteo Maserati (Università degli Studi di Salerno)

NEGATIO NON COGNOSCITUR NISI PER AFFIRMATIONEM.

SOME REMARKS ON NEGATION PARASITISM IN DUNS SCOTUS’ WORKS

A most spread position in philosophy, logic and linguistics acknowledges an asymmetry between positive and negative elements or structures of the language, bestowing a priority of the positive side if not an outspoken dependence on it for the negative one.¹ Different developments of this same intuition

¹ Cfr. HORN L. R., *A Natural History of Negation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989.

in the field of philosophy can be tracked back through all the western speculative tradition, leading to Aristotle, Plato and even before.² John Duns Scotus is no exception in that, since the claim for which negative elements are grounded on affirmative ones is endorsed by the *Subtilis* in several writings.³ In addition to its relevance for his general philosophy of language and metaphysics, such a parasitic account of negation gains a preminent function in the field of natural theology, where it leans towards a much radical form. Scotus holds in fact that only a positive kind of knowledge about God is to be accepted as authentic, thus engaging in a research for positive concepts attributable to the divine principle.⁴ To fulfill such an inquiry, the Author develops or resorts to some of his most innovative positions, and his strategy to eliminate the cognitive import of negative propositions about God, hinging on the relation of impossibility, can be generalised and extended to a comprehensive theory of negative sentences. Despite some hindrances, such account is noteworthy at any rate and marks interesting aspects of Scotus' metaphysics and epistemology.

Monika Mansfeld (University of Łódź)

HOW TO DESCRIBE COGNITIVE PROCESSES WITHOUT PROPER TERMINOLOGY?

THE CASE OF TWO OXONIAN 13TH CENTURY COMMENTARIES ON *DE SENSU ET SENSATO*

The first Latin translations of Aristotle's *De anima* and four short treatises from a set later known as *Parva naturalia* (*De sensu et sensato*, *De memoria et reminiscencia*, *De somno et vigilia* and *De longitudine et brevitate vitae*) appeared in the beginning of the 13th century. Soon they triggered an intense discussion on human psychology and physiology. The debate, however, encountered unexpected methodological problems. They can be shown on the example of *De sensu et sensato*. The *translatio vetus* of this treatise is difficult to understand, not only because of the obscurity of the original Greek text is often unclear but also because the anonymous translation of some passages is unintelligible.

The first Oxford commentaries on *De sensu et sensato* were primarily meant to make the text intelligible. What they struggled with regularly is an explanatory gap, such as lack of suitable terms (should the Greek ones be used instead?) or their unclear meaning (what does *color medius* mean?). Another problem they encountered is meta-methodological. Almost all 13th century authors commenting

² *Ibidem*, c. 1, pp. 1-96.

³ For instance: «Negatio enim adveniēns termino finito privat formam finitam significatam per terminum et relinquit ens indeterminatum», IOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaestiones in duos libros Perihermeneias* in *B. Iohannis Duns Scoti Opera Philosophica*, eds. R. ANDREWS / G. J. ETZKORN / G. GÁL / R. GREEN / T. NOONE / R. WOOD, I, q. 4, n. 18, p. 161.

⁴ «Negatio non cognoscitur nisi per affirmationem [...] vel non intelligeretur Deus magis quam nihil, vel stabitur in aliqui affirmativo conceptu qui est primus», IOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1-2, n. 10, in *Iohannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia*, eds. P. C. BALIĆ ET ALII, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1954, v. 3, pp. 4-5.

on this work started with the preliminary remarks devoted to the order of Aristotle's works on psychology, clearly believing that there is something like a *natural* order of them. As justification for their own choices in this respect, they used both doctrinal and ...grammatical arguments. If we consider the quality of the texts available for them, it is surprising how they managed to succeed in this task.

My presentation of these problems is based on critical editions of two earliest Latin commentaries on *De sensu*: the anonymous Q312, now held in Erfurt Universitätsbibliothek, and one of three redactions of Adam of Buckfield commentary (it has not been established which of them is earlier yet). Both of them were written in Oxford in the middle of the 13th century in the form of exposition. Their comparison shows how their authors strove to describe and analyse cognitive processes, such as visible cognition.

Monika Michalowska (Medical University of Łódź)

RICHARD KILVINGTON ON THE WILL ACTING AND TIME.

QUESTION: *UTRUM VOLUNTAS ELICIENS ACTUM VOLUNTATIS PRO ALIQUO INSTANTI DEBEAT IPSUM ACTUM PER ALIQUOD TEMPUS NECESSARIO TENERE* FROM HIS *QUESTIONS ON THE SENTENCES*

Richard Kilvington's concept of the will plays a key role in his ethical thought revealing his genuine interest in ethical debates of the 14th century. In his *Questions of the Sentences* he devotes several questions and sub-questions to examine various voluntarist issues, such as the freedom of the will, the structure of the will, the diversity of the wills acts. This presentation will concentrate on the problem of the will's acting and time analyzed in a sub-question 5. 1. It will show how the problem posed in the title of the question, namely whether the will once it chooses its act (a volition) in a certain instant, has to continue holding that volition for a certain time, is developed into several issues. It will focus on three main problems discussed by Kilvington, namely: 1) whether the will's acting is similar to natural processes; 2) whether a change from one act of the will to another requires time or happens in an instant; 3) whether the will can produce and dismiss its act in an instant.

Magali Roques (CNRS, Paris)

OCKHAM'S ONTOLOGY OF SOCIAL OBJECTS (IN HIS ACADEMIC WRITINGS)

This paper deals with the ontology of social realities as found (in draft form) in William of Ockham's academic writings. It focuses on one class of social realities, namely, those that are called "voluntary signs," which include not only linguistic signs, but also price (*pretium*) and the sacraments. The question is how something material can have any social function at all. What is the ground of value? For Ockham and other Franciscan theologians before him, the

question is whether the model of the covenant that grounds economic and other kinds of social exchanges is theological in nature. I will argue that it is, and that Ockham's ontology of value leads us directly to the foundations of his theological voluntarism. The core concept of Ockham's social ontology is that of obligation.

Lukasz Tomanek (University of Silesia in Katowice)

NATURAL REASON AND GOD'S INFINITE POWER.

DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES IN 14TH CENTURY COMMENTARIES ON AVERROES' *DE SUBSTANTIA ORBIS*

Although Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle are commonly regarded as the main pillars of natural philosophy from XIIIth cent. and beyond, they were not the only Averroes' works known for medieval scholars. In fact, in his very large *oeuvre* there is one independent treatise, i.e. *De substantia orbis*, that gained considerable attention of schoolmen long before renaissance translations of Averroes' remaining treatises were about to be published in latin world. In the second part of XIIIth cent. this short set of treatises was already known for philosophers and theologians of every current, which is witnessed by numerous citations and references (to mention only Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus or, obviously, Siger of Brabant).

At the dawn of XIVth cent. it was Jean de Jandun who was first to incorporate this work into his division of natural science and describe it as an appendix to *De caelo et mundo*. In the first place, *De substantia orbis* became a valuable source of the doctrine of *quantitas materiae* and *dimensiones interminatae*. Furthermore, along with discussions on differences between superior (i.e. celestial) and inferior (i.e. falling under generation and corruption) natures, it provided scholars with material suitable for discussing nature of prime mover, God. Thus, commenting Averroes' treatise was considered as an opportunity to raise questions on nature of God's infinite power in a way proper for natural philosophy and natural reason (*naturaliter loquendo*), and the results, as one might suppose, very often varied considerably from conclusions being reached in light of catholic faith.

In my paper, I would like to present some of XIVth cent. approaches to the problem of *infinitas vigoris Dei*, discussed in commentaries on *De substantia orbis*. First, I would like to elucidate the context of these discussions in Averroes' work. Then, I would focus on selected examples, following arguments being developed in commentaries. Lastly, I will address the diversity of these approaches as reflecting different purposes of XIVth cent. scholars commenting directly on Averroes.