

ROBERTO PINZANI, *THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS FROM BOETHIUS TO JOHN OF SALISBURY* (BRILL'S STUDIES IN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, VOLUME 282, BRILL, 2018).

---

*The Problem of Universals from Boethius to John of Salisbury* follows the evolution of one of the main philosophical debates in Middle Ages, that on the universals, from its origins in Aristotle's *Categories* up to the twelfth century. The author, Ph.D. Roberto Pinzani, is an Associate Professor at the University of Parma, and has previously published a number of monographs and articles pertaining to the history of logic, tackling the works of Boethius and Abelard among others.

The volume is largely aimed at merging the diverging authors' perspectives on the problem of the universals into one cohesive timeline. To achieve this, Pinzani starts by presenting the subject as it appears in Aristotle's *Categories* and points out the philosophical questions it raises. He then goes on to analyze the way in which medieval authors reading Aristotle addressed these questions, thus giving rise to the debate on universals. He presents each of the authors' approaches to the subject, emphasizing which of these questions they choose to address and how they proceed in doing so. In addition, the way in which these authors respond to their predecessors' positions is also shown, both in relation to one another and in relation to the source text.

The volume is structured into ten chapters, preceded by a general introduction. The first and the fourth chapters expose the problem of the universals in what can be seen as two different stages. While the first chapter displays the initial stage of the issue, starting from Aristotle's text, going forward to Porphyry's commentary in the *Isagoge*, with the different problematic points they pose, the fourth chapter reflects a second stage, traceable within the twelfth century and marked by the opposition between realists and nominalists, around which a few original contributions develop. The other eight chapters serve as a drill down into the two main stages, each depicting the position of a philosopher. As representatives of the first stage, chapter two enlists Boethius, marking his importance as a main textual source for his posterity, which no longer had access to Aristotle's text, while chapter three tackles John Scotus Eriugena. The second stage presents William of Champeaux and Walter of Mortagne as realists (chapter six) and Garland the Computist (chapter five) and Joscelyn (chapter seven) as nominalists. However, the different nuances of each philosopher's position are highlighted, together with the fact that, for the most part, they cannot be fully labelled in one side or the other. A particular instance is Pierre Abelard, who appears both as a realist in *Logica Ingredientibus* and *Logica Nostrorum* (chapter eight) and as a nominalist in *De Generibus et Speciebus* (chapter seven). The last two chapters shed light upon Gilbert of Poitiers and John of Salisbury, whose views are so innovative they cannot be categorized as either realist or nominalist. Moreover, the synthesis John of Salisbury makes in his *Metalogicon* regarding his

predecessors' and his contemporaries' positions also serves as a conclusion to the volume's intention.

The present book innovates through its effort of bringing together perspectives considered dispersed until now and connecting them into a cohesive history of the problem of universals. The topic itself is not to be neglected, given its ample history during the Middle Ages and, consequently, the significant amount of philosophical text it generated.

Overall, the volume has a consistent logical flow, facilitating its reading. The limitations of the research are clearly stated right from the beginning, as well as the premise based on which the texts are linked. A wide range of sources is used, whose profound understanding becomes evident from their analysis. The translation of these fragments is very close to the Latin texts, supplemented with notes where additional explanations are necessary. At the same time, the flow of the translation is a natural one, as much as the technical language permits. A debatable point in terms of translation is the rendering of *indiferentia* through non-differents, which might not fully transmit the idea of an existing difference which is not significant. However, the linguistic note comes to aid the correct understanding of the term. Furthermore, charts and tables systemize the concepts which are more difficult to grasp, providing much needed visual guide.

The target audience largely consists of scholars versed in either Philosophy in general or Logic in particular, given the technical language used. Nonetheless, if closely read, the text can be accessible to less specialized readers too, given the abundance of explanations, notes, and graphs.

All in all, Roberto Pinzani's *The Problem of Universals from Boethius to John of Salisbury* offers a unified image of the central philosophical debate in the Middle Ages. The thorough research is visible through the intertwining of sources, the many-folded way in which information is presented, and the high readability of the text.

OANA-CORINA FILIP

oana\_corina13@yahoo.com

doi: 10.26424/philobib.2019.24.2.17