General Introduction

Medieval Philosophy in Perspective

In the modern mind, the adjective "medieval" has often been associated with ideas of darkness, dogmatism, oppression, and barbarity. This should not be surprising, if we consider how modernity came to define itself, precisely in opposition to the medieval tradition, as the Renaissance, the re-birth of ancient learning, the Reformation of a corrupt church, the Enlightenment after an age of darkness, an Age of Reason after an age of ignorance and blind faith. Even today, this mentality has its visible effects. To the intellectual reflexes of "the modern mind" referred to above, the very phrase "medieval philosophy" until fairly recently sounded almost like an oxymoron, indeed, so much so that in modern curricula of the history of philosophy the medieval period was barely mentioned, and even nowadays it is skipped by some philosophy departments, boldly leaping from ancient philosophy directly to the study of Descartes (ignoring about two thousand years of Western intellectual history).

To be sure, this situation is happily changing. In the larger scheme of things this is probably due to the fact that we live in a postmodern period, in which the grand, defining ideas of modernity itself have become at least questionable, if not discredited, as a result of modern historical experience (think world wars, industrialized genocides, global exploitation of people and nature, the manipulative uses of "values," ideologies and religions, etc.). This postmodern perspective, by revealing the various limitations of the "grand ideas" of modernity, naturally prompts historical and philosophical reflection on their validity in history, and thus on their emergence from developments in the medieval period.

But, on a smaller scale, recent developments in philosophy as a profession also promoted the growing interest in medieval philosophy. Perhaps the most important of these recent changes is the transformation of mainstream analytic philosophy. Being the descendant of early twentieth-century logical positivism, analytic philosophy used to be strongly anti-metaphysical, secularist, and ahistorical (indeed, sometimes anti-historical: it was not uncommon among analytic philosophers to sneer at the work of their historian colleagues as consisting of book reports, as opposed to serious philosophy). By the 1980s (if not earlier), however, analytic metaphysics emerged as a legitimate philosophical discipline, followed by analytic philosophy of religion and a new interest in analytic historical studies,

which directly connected the study of historical doctrines and figures to contemporary philosophical concerns (no mere book reports any more!). With this change of interest and attitude of contemporary analytic philosophers, and as a result of the good work of a new breed of analytically minded historians and historically minded analytic philosophers, there arrived a renewed interest in and appreciation of the intellectual achievements of medieval philosophers and theologians even among contemporary analytic philosophers. Indeed, with good reason. For, as the work of this new breed of philosophers made clear, the philosophical interests and style of medieval philosophers were in some respects astonishingly close to those of analytic philosophers. Many of the topics discussed by medieval philosophers and theologians (especially in fields that we would classify as metaphysics, philosophy of mind and language, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and philosophical ethics) could easily find their place in the table of contents of any number of contemporary philosophy journals.

Of course, this should not be taken to mean that any medieval philosophical text could simply be transferred into a contemporary journal for professional engagement by contemporary philosophers. The intervening centuries, after all, brought about such profound conceptual changes that sometimes the very formulation of a problem, let alone the conceptual devices and principles applied in its discussion, would be quite different in medieval and in contemporary philosophy, despite all the obvious agreements in basic philosophical concerns and the methods used in their treatment.

The Boundaries of Medieval Philosophy

Indeed, we should immediately add to these considerations that even in such large-scale (and, therefore, inevitably vague) comparisons, medieval philosophy cannot be treated as a homogenous unit. Stretching from about the last century of the Western Roman Empire to about the period of the religious wars of Europe, or approximately from the time of St. Augustine to the time of Descartes, it encompasses the largest and most varied part of Western intellectual heritage.

It is small wonder, therefore, that the borderlines of this heritage are rather fuzzy and somewhat arbitrary both in time and in space. For example, although it can be claimed with good justification that the first medieval philosopher of note in the history of European philosophy was St. Augustine (354–430), one should immediately observe that Augustine was neither medieval, nor a philosopher; indeed, he was not even European. He was a Roman citizen, born and raised in North Africa, trained as an orator to become a professor of rhetoric first in Carthage, and later in Rome, who, after a stint at the imperial court in Milan and his conversion to Christianity, upon returning to Africa became the bishop of Hippo, earning fame for his wisdom as well as for his sometimes bitter theological debates with the heretics of his time, the Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians. At the other end, the borderlines of this heritage are even less clearly defined. For such definitely "non-medieval" philosophers as Francis Bacon (1521–1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), or René Descartes (1596–1650) were near-contemporaries of such arguably "medieval" philosophers and theologians as Pedro da Fonseca (1528–99), Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), or John of St. Thomas (1589–1644), and a number of others, who, by criteria of doctrine, methodology, mentality, and even terminology, should still be regarded as belonging to the medieval tradition. Yet, as even this remark suggests, there are some unifying characteristics, precisely in doctrine, methodology, mentality, and terminology that can provide some criteria for a more or less *principled* demarcation of the medieval philosophical tradition.

Faith and Reason

The most prominent of these criteria would certainly be the recognized need for and prevailing practice of a systematic reflection on the relationship between humanly attainable knowledge (especially as it is handed down in the authorities of ancient philosophy, primarily Aristotle) and the revealed tenets of the great monotheistic religions, namely, Judaism, Islam, and (predominantly in this tradition) Christianity, or more generally, a systematic reflection on the relationship between faith and reason. In fact, one of the reasons why modern philosophers until quite recently may have felt justified in dismissing medieval philosophy as "genuine" philosophy was precisely the practice of this systematic reflection on the relationship between faith and reason, regarded by these modern philosophers as nothing but the systematic *subjection* of "pure philosophy" to religious dogma. In a recent article, the noted medievalist Paul Spade aptly countered this sentiment in the following remark:

> The practice is still alive and thriving among quite respectable philosophers in our own day, even if it no longer sets the tone of philosophy generally. Indeed, one of the enduring legacies of medieval philosophy is the development of what we call "philosophy of religion," which can be pursued both by those with and by those without prior doctrinal commitments. Historians of medieval philosophy have sometimes felt a need to defend, or [are] even embarrassed by, this close connection between philosophy and dogma in the Middle Ages, as though it somehow compromised the integrity of their subject. But such concerns are probably misplaced. The popular notion of the philosopher as someone who follows the dictates of "pure reason" wherever they may go, without regard for prior "givens" that have to be accommodated, is something of a naive idealization; throughout its history, philosophy at large has rarely if ever proceeded in this purely autonomous way. One might in fact argue that in our own day it is scientific theory rather than theological doctrine that provides the standard against which much philosophy is measured. Not long ago, for example, some eminent and highly respected philosophers were arguing that [the] distribution laws of classical logic itself must be abandoned because they could not be reconciled with certain interpretations of quantum mechanics (*note*: not that they could not be reconciled with empirical data, but that they were irreconcilable with certain scientific *theories* to interpret those data). Still, just as today there are many areas where one can philosophize freely without fear of trespassing on scientific ground, so too there were many areas of medieval philosophy where one could speculate freely without worrying about theological doctrine. The situations are altogether parallel, so that historians of medieval philosophy need not feel apologetic or defensive about the theological commitments of the philosophy of their period.[1]

One may add to these observations that philosophical reflection on the obvious *limits* of humanly attainable knowledge naturally prompts further considerations of our awareness of what is *beyond* those limits. If philosophical reflection shows that reason may not be the only or even the highest source of reliable information about reality, then it is not unreasonable to accept the legitimacy of some source that is beyond reason, which therefore is not *irrational*, but which might be termed "hyper-rational." So, theology need not be *without* or *against* reason; rather, it deals with something that is *reasonably* believed to be *beyond reason*.

In any case, this is precisely how most (although, as we shall see, definitely not all) medieval philosophers and theologians, from Augustine to Anselm (1033–1109) to Aquinas (1224–74)

1   P. V. Spade, "Medieval Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2004 edn), ed. Edward N. Zalta, n. 3. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2004/entries/medieval-philosophy>.

and beyond, regarded the relationships between faith and reason, or divine revelation and scientifically attainable truth. In their view, scientific and philosophical reasoning can only take us to a certain point in revealing the nature of reality; but the same reasoning can also show us that there definitely *is* something beyond that point. Furthermore, although reason can also show that the nature of that reality (that is, the nature of God) is beyond our philosophical grasp, given the little that we *can* know about it, it is not unreasonable to hold purely by faith what it reveals about itself. Indeed, given what reason can establish on its own (namely, the existence and certain attributes of God), concerning such revelations faith can safely be *presupposed*. Therefore, in the case of statements of faith based on such revelations the task is not to show *whether* what is believed is true (after all, it is already believed to be true), but rather *how* it *can* be true. That is to say, the question is *how it is possible* for these revealed articles of faith to be true, how they can *reasonably* be held to be true without contradicting the principles of reason. On this conception, therefore, faith is obviously not pitted against reason: faith is neither blind to nor oppressive of principles of reason; rather, it is complementary to and meaningfully interpreted by reason. This is precisely the gist of the program of medieval rational (as opposed to mystical) theology initiated by St. Augustine, most fittingly described by St. Anselm's formula: *fides quaerens intellectum* – faith seeking understanding.

This general demand of conflict resolution in this mentality requires meticulous logical analysis, and careful reflection on the language used, and on the thoughts expressed by the language (which is not to say that the use of logical methods in theology itself was regarded as entirely unproblematic). Such reflections, in turn, naturally lead to further, independent philosophical investigations. In fact, even if it may generally be true that in this mentality the prevailing theoretical (and practical) concern is rational inquiry into the meaning of articles of faith, within the whole enterprise of rational theology this concern naturally brings with it an ever-growing autonomous interest in other fields of rational inquiry, which all provide their peculiar input for gaining a better understanding of everything there is for us to understand. Accordingly, the insatiable intellectual curiosity of the medieval mind naturally led it to all fields of inquiry, in the spirit of Hugh of St. Victor's (1096–1141) advice: *omnia disce, videbis postea nihil esse superfluum* – "learn everything, later on you will see nothing is useless" (*Didascalicon* 6, 3).

A Brief Historical Survey of Medieval Philosophy

The Roman (patristic) period

Medieval philosophy grew out of the popular philosophies of late antiquity, especially Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Aristotelianism. To be sure, with the decline of Greek learning in the Western Roman Empire, these Greek philosophies could only have a somewhat indirect influence through the works of Latin authors such as Cicero (104–43 BC) or Seneca (3 BC–AD 65). Augustine, for example, did learn some Greek, but by his own admission he hated it, and probably never really used it. The last Roman author of note with reliable knowledge of Greek was Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 525). In fact, Boethius himself was quite aware of this situation. In his second commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* ("On Interpretation"), he announced the overly ambitious project of translating the entire body of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy and showing in his commentaries and independent treatises their basic agreement with each other. The project was doomed to remain a torso.

But even so it exerted tremendous influence, not only during the soon ensuing Dark Ages, and the emerging monastic culture of the early Middle Ages, but also in the highly sophisticated philosophical culture of the medieval universities, well into the Renaissance. This is even more remarkable given just how little Boethius eventually managed to carry out of his plan. Apparently, he never translated any of Plato's works, and he only managed to translate and comment on some of Aristotle's logical works. Actually, only two of these were in general circulation, namely, the translations of and commentaries on the *Categoriae* ("Categories") and *De Interpretatione*, dealing with terms and propositions, respectively (which are the integral parts of the various sorts of arguments systematically dealt with in the remaining books of the Aristotelian logical corpus). Besides these works, Boethius also translated and commented on the *Eisagoge* (or *Isagoge* – i.e. introduction) to Aristotle's *Categoriae* by the strongly anti-Christian Neoplatonic philosopher, Porphyry (233–309). Owing to Boethius' translation and commentaries, this otherwise deliberately elementary work was to have a tremendous career during the Middle Ages, serving as the starting point of all medieval debates on the fundamental philosophical problem of universals.

Besides these translations and commentaries, Boethius also wrote some independent treatises in logic (transmitting material from Aristotle's dialectic as well as from Stoic logic), and in theology – in Trinitology (discussing the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity) and Christology (discussing the doctrine of Christ's divinity and humanity). But the philosophical treatise he is most remembered for even today is the famous *De Consolatione Philosophiae* ("Consolation of Philosophy") he wrote in prison, awaiting execution for high treason, pondering the philosophical issues of man's fate, divine providence, and the choices man makes by free will.

The "Dark Ages" and the Carolingian Renaissance

After Boethius' time, there followed a period that by and large deserves the (otherwise often over-used and abused) name of "Dark Ages", although even in the relative (intellectual) darkness of about five centuries there were glimmering lights here and there, mainly in monasteries and in the courts of the occasional enlightened ruler. The most outstanding example of the latter was the court of Charlemagne (742–814), Charles the Great, or in Latin, Carolus Magnus, whose name is duly preserved in the phrase "Carolingian Renaissance." The leading scholar of Charlemagne's court was the English monk Alcuin of York (735–804). Aiding the king's efforts in the revival of learning, he produced a number of didactic works (*didascalia*), mainly on grammar and logic (covering the material he could gather from Boethius), but also on astronomy and theology, for example, a work on the Trinity primarily based on Augustine. Originality was certainly not his greatest virtue, but neither was it his goal, as was typical in the period.

Nevertheless, even this period produced a truly original author in John Scottus Eriugena (ca. 800–ca. 877). Eriugena, an Irishman well versed in the liberal arts and, quite uniquely in this period, with good knowledge of Greek, brought unmatched erudition to the court of Charles the Bald (823–77). At the request of the king he produced translations of the writings of the mysterious (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite, mistakenly thought at the time to have been St. Paul's convert in Athens (Acts 17: 34). In fact, these Neoplatonic Christian writings, showing a strong influence of pagan Neoplatonic philosophers such as Plotinus and, especially, Proclus (411–85), come from an author who was probably a native of Syria, lived around the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries, and assumed in these writings the identity

of Paul's convert, which lent enormous authority to his works. Thus, owing to Eriugena's translation, the Pseudo-Dionysian writings exerted tremendous influence in later medieval theology, especially by their emphasis on *apophatic* or negative theology, in which the incomprehensible divine nature is characterized by denying it all creaturely attributes (God is *not* material, spatial, temporal, finite, thus, He is *not* a body, etc.). But Eriugena's originality consisted especially in his unique combination of the theological doctrines of Greek (e.g., Maximus Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus) as well as Latin (e.g., Ambrose, Jerome, and above all Augustine) Church Fathers with his extensive knowledge of the Roman liberal arts tradition (Martianus Capella) and earlier encyclopedists (late Roman or early medieval authors who produced encyclopedic accounts of ancient learning, such as Cassiodorus or Isidore of Seville). Eriugena did not hesitate to bring his erudition and dialectical skills to bear upon his theological investigation, which was looked upon with a jaundiced eye by his critic Prudentius (d. 861), who at one point snidely remarked: "Your Capella has led you into a labyrinth, because you have tied yourself more to the meditation of his work than to the truth of the Gospel" (*PL* CXV 1294a). In fact, Eriugena's originality, most prominent in his unique, encyclopedic work *De Divisione Naturae* ("On the Division of Nature") may have been too much for his contemporaries. Both because of this work and because of a work on the issue of free will and predestination (God's predetermination of who will be saved or damned) he was subjected to ecclesiastical censure.

The early medieval period

But the trend of applying dialectical methods in theology, already quite tangible in Eriugena's work, only became stronger over time in the monastic educational culture of subsequent generations. This is the context in which the work of St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) emerged, exhibiting such subtlety and sophistication that it has kept theologians and philosophers intrigued to this day. Anselm, an unassuming Benedictine monk of the monastery of Bec in Normandy, who was later to become the archbishop of Canterbury, invented what is perhaps the single most debated piece of reasoning in the history of philosophy, the "ontological argument" for the existence of God (so named only in modern times, according to the classification of all possible proofs for God's existence provided by Immanuel Kant [1724–1804]). Anselm's original argumentation, as well as his ensuing debate with his confrere Gaunilo of Marmoutier, shows dialectical skills and sophistication that can only be the result of serious training in logic, and participation in actual disputations. Indeed, besides his important theological works, Anselm also wrote a piece on a purely logical problem stemming from Aristotle's *Categoriae*, in the form of a dialogue between a master and student, which may very well reflect some of the actual discussions Anselm and his brethren were engaged in. But Anselm never got censured for his use of dialectic in theology. To be sure, his former master, the more "conservative" Lanfranc, taking the side of the "anti-dialecticians" of the contemporary debates on the use of dialectic in theology, strongly cautioned him against relying too much on dialectical argumentation. But Anselm's unquestionable Augustinian orthodoxy, coupled with his genuine personal humility, saved him from any serious trouble.

A generation later, the brilliant Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was to prove his exact opposite in this latter regard. In his characteristically titled autobiography, *Historia Calamitatum* ("The Story of my Adversities"), he describes how he decided to pursue philosophy in the following way:

gladly leaving to my brothers the pomp of glory in arms, the right of heritage and all the honors that should have been mine as the eldest born, I fled utterly from the court of Mars that I might win learning in the bosom of Minerva. And, since I found the armory of logical reasoning more to my liking than the other forms of philosophy, I exchanged all other weapons for these, and to the prizes of victory in war I preferred the battle of minds in disputation.

Abelard may have left the court of Mars, but he did not leave behind his pugnacious character, which, coupled with his unmatched dialectical skills, landed him in trouble after trouble both in his personal and in his professional life. But despite all the animosity it generated, Abelard's work, which is undoubtedly the culmination of early medieval philosophy, simply could not be ignored. Working basically from the same resources as anybody else before him since the time of Boethius, he produced some truly original, insightful work in logic, ethics, and theology. In logic, he worked out a unique, nominalist theory of universals (a theory that denied the existence of universal things common to several particulars), along with an innovative theory of the signification of whole propositions (i.e., declarative sentences expressing truth or falsity), reconstructing from Boethius much of Stoic propositional logic (i.e., a theory of logical validity on based the structure of complex propositions); in ethics, he is still referred to as the main historical authority for emphasizing the importance of the agent's intention in establishing responsibility; and in his theological work *Sic et Non* ("Yes and No"), he established the paradigm of later scholastic disputations, searching for answers through weighing opposing arguments.

As is beautifully testified by the account of his student, John of Salisbury (ca. 1115–76), Abelard's time was a period of intellectual fervor in the Latin West. It was this already explosive brew of ideas that was catalyzed, not even a full generation later, by the influx of new and newly recovered old philosophical and scientific literature, leading to an explosion of intellectual activity in the subsequent two centuries, a period often referred to as High Scholasticism.

High Scholasticism

Institutional developments

In fact, there were two fundamentally important, and certainly not unrelated, developments in the second half of the twelfth century that led to this boom by the thirteenth century. Besides the above-mentioned influx of newly recovered ancient ideas, there was the most important, characteristically medieval institutional development, the rise of the universities. As mentioned earlier, during the previous period, most learning was confined to the court of an enlightened ruler (as Charlemagne's) or to monasteries (such as St. Anselm's in Bec, or the famous monastery of Saint Victor, organized by one of Abelard's many opponents, William of Champeaux [ca. 1070–1121]). By Abelard's time, however, it was not unusual for famous masters to establish their own schools in the growing medieval cities. As Paul Spade insightfully remarks, "perhaps the closest analogue to this arrangement would be the modern 'martial arts' schools one often finds in present-day cities." Another form of education was provided by cathedral schools, where masters and students worked under the auspices of a bishop. William of Champeaux, for example, was the master of the cathedral school of Paris, until his student Abelard drove him out with his criticisms and took over. Another

important school was associated with the cathedral of Chartres, and with such influential figures as Bernard of Chartres (d. ca. 1130), Thierry of Chartres (d. ca. 1150), and Gilbert of Poitiers (ca. 1085–1154).

But the most important institutional development of the period was the emergence of the medieval universities. The medieval universities started out as any other *universitates* of medieval society, that is, as *guilds*, or trade unions. The oldest university, the University of Bologna, which came to be a famous center for legal studies, started out from a student union, as a *universitas studentium*, whereas the universities of Paris and Oxford, famous for their faculties of arts and theology, were started as teachers' unions, *universitates scholarium*. The universities were commonly organized into Faculties, among which the *Facultas Artium*, the rough equivalent of a modern Faculty of Arts and Sciences, took care primarily of "under-graduate" instruction, i.e., the instruction of younger students in grammar, logic, and in various philosophical and scientific disciplines, which prepared most of them for entering the equivalents of modern graduate or professional schools, the Faculties of Law, Medicine and Theology.

Doctrinal developments: the recovery of Aristotle

There would have been no need for this specialization and organization had it not been for the exponential growth in the number of students and teachers as well as in the amount of material to be studied. As mentioned earlier in connection with Abelard, during his lifetime the authoritative philosophical, theological, and scientific texts were about the same as those that had been available since Boethius' time. About a generation later, this situation changed radically. Owing to new contacts with the Muslim world and Byzantium (especially after the First Crusade, started in 1095), new translations of previously unavailable texts started pouring in from the Kingdom of Sicily (where mostly translations of mathematical and scientific works were prepared), from Constantinople (where most importantly James of Venice prepared translations of Aristotle's logical and other works from the Greek in the 1120s), and from Toledo in Spain (then a booming Islamic city, where Muslim and Jewish scholars worked together with Christians preparing the Latin translations of Greek works, sometimes through intermediary Syriac and/or Arabic translations, and of original works of Muslim and Jewish thinkers).

The most important and influential among the newly recovered texts were Aristotle's writings, which provided medieval thinkers with a comprehensive philosophical system, based on a carefully crafted logical methodology that surveyed everything that was humanly knowable about the natural world, its ultimate principles and causes, as well as man's place and destiny in this universe – all this, without the aid of divine revelation! No wonder Aristotle soon achieved the status of "the Philosopher," as he was commonly referred to, among the authorities to be reckoned with. But it was not just the whole system of Aristotelian logic, natural science, metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and politics that started exerting its influence. Aristotle's works arrived with commentaries by Muslim thinkers, along with some very influential Neoplatonic works (such as the *Liber de Causis*, "The Book of Causes", an excerpt of the *Elementatio Theologica* of the pagan Neoplatonic philosopher, Proclus), and original Muslim and Jewish medical, mathematical, scientific, philosophical, and theological literature. The European "Dark Ages" had been the period of flourishing of a highly sophisticated Islamic culture, and now the fruits of that flourishing suddenly became available to the already busy minds of the Latin West.

The assimilation and integration of this enormous amount of new material, coming from a radically different cultural background into the existing philosophical-theological framework of Western Christianity, was a huge enterprise that necessarily led to some deep-seated tensions and conflicts within this framework.

The tension between faith and reason especially had to re-emerge in this context on a new level. For at this point the issue was not merely the conflict between "dialecticians" and "anti-dialecticians," as was fundamentally the case, for instance, in the conflict between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), but rather the multiple conflicts between philosophy and theology, between Aristotelianism and Platonism (especially, as it survived in medieval Augustinianism), and between Christian theological considerations and Muslim and Jewish interpretations of Aristotle, on top of all the new empirical and scientific information to be assimilated, concerning which the Church Fathers could not give much guidance. The task of sorting out and systematically organizing this material required extraordinary minds that were capable of integrating all of these considerations into huge, comprehensive systems of thought, the intellectual equivalent of the gothic cathedrals of the period. In fact, the simile is far from superficial. For just as the cathedrals are built up from finely chiseled blocks that all serve an overarching structure designed to elevate the spirit, so are the finely crafted arguments and distinctions of the huge volumes of medieval philosophical and theological literature designed to fit into an overarching system of thought, to elevate human understanding.

Main figures, literary genres

So who were the architects of these cathedrals of thought, and what sorts of works embody the cathedrals themselves? In theology, the historically most important systematic work was the *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* ("Four Books of Sentences") of Peter Lombard (ca. 1100–60), in which the author, cautiously proceeding in the footsteps of his master, Abelard, collected and collated the main theses and arguments of the Church Fathers, in order to provide a systematic survey of the theological doctrine of the Church. As a teacher at the cathedral school of Notre Dame, Peter soon established his work as a standard textbook for those who came there to study theology. But the work gained real importance in the subsequent three centuries when, with the rise of the universities (especially the universities of Paris and Oxford), the *Sentences* became the set reading for theology students and the text to be commented on by future masters of theology. In fact, it soon became the general practice in the course of acquiring the licentiate in theology to write one's commentary on the *Sentences*. This practice, then, gave rise to an entire literary genre in scholastic theology, the "commentaries on the *Sentences*."

Despite the fact that commentaries are usually supposed to provide mere elucidations, helping students to get a firmer grasp on the doctrine of the author, these commentaries were by no means mere slavish repetitions of some old, trite doctrine. This was well served by Peter's original style, which (following Abelard's *Sic et Non*), collated several apparently opposing authorities, sometimes providing his own resolution, but sometimes leaving a question open for further discussion. The great commentaries of the subsequent centuries formally accepted this invitation for further discussion in their peculiar literary form: the *question-commentary*. A question-commentary is not a mere running commentary offering clarifications of the text (in the form of lectures, *lectiones*); rather, it is a systematic, thoroughgoing discussion of the main problems raised by the text in the form of yes/no questions, to be

decided on the basis of an array of opposing arguments. In these arguments, the text commented on eventually provides a mere opportunity to raise the question and to supply some authoritative quotes, but the discussion itself draws on the whole range of knowledge available to the commentator. This knowledge, by the thirteenth century, especially after the work of Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1170–1253) and St. Albert the Great (1206–80), comprised the entire Aristotelian corpus, as well as the works of the Islamic and Jewish thinkers it inspired.

The first and foremost among these was Alfarabi (Al Farabi, ca. 870–950), known to the Arabs as "the second master" (i.e., second only to Aristotle). He was followed by Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980–1037), who famously claimed that he could not understand Aristotle's *Metaphysics* even after reading it 40 times until he read Alfarabi's commentary on it. But then, among other works concerning logic, psychology and medicine, he wrote his own *Metaphysics*, which had a great impact on the thought of Albert's student, St. Thomas Aquinas. Another important non-Christian source was Avicebron (Ibn Gabirol, 1021–58), the Jewish author of a work known in Latin as *Fons Vitae* ("Fountain of Life"), which combined Aristotle's hylomorphist metaphysics with biblical doctrine. The great Muslim jurist and theologian, Algazel (Al-Ghazali, 1058–1111), used philosophy (criticizing especially Alfarabi and Avicenna) to refute philosophy and to affirm the certainty of faith. In the West, his *occasionalism* (the doctrine that attributes all activity to the first agent, God, and denies all activity to secondary agents) was strongly criticized by Aquinas, but was embraced by late medieval Ockhamist theologians, and had long-lasting (at least indirect) influence in early modern philosophy. But the most influential Muslim author was Al-Ghazali's first and foremost Aristotelian critic, Averroës (Ibn Rushd, 1126–98), who was soon recognized in the Latin West as 'the Commentator' for his penetrating understanding of and illuminating commentaries on Aristotle's works. Finally, one should mention Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), also known to Latin theologians as Rabbi Moyses, whose theological considerations concerning negative theology (according to which our finite concepts only allow us to say truly what the infinite God *is not*, and not what He is) also directly influenced Albert, Aquinas, and the famously subtle Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus (1266–1308).

Given this vast and varied philosophical, theological, and scientific tradition to deal with, the masters of theology of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially at the two great universities of Paris and Oxford, were expected to provide comprehensive systems of thought, not only in their commentaries on the *Sentences*, but throughout their usually long and extremely prolific academic careers. By modern standards, the volume and range of their output are nothing short of staggering. The works of a medieval master of theology besides his commentary on the *Sentences* typically includes two sets of disputed questions, the *ordinary* and *quodlibetal* disputations. The *ordinary* disputations collect records of regular disputations on a related set of questions discussed by a designated opponent and respondent, presided over and determined by the master. Such are, for example, the disputed questions of Aquinas *De Veritate* ("On Truth"), *De Anima* ("On the Soul"), or *De Potentia* ("On Power"). The quodlibetal questions are collections of records of solemn disputations held before Christmas and Easter, when the master determined questions *on any topic* (the literal meaning of the Latin phrase *de quolibet*) raised by the audience and answered any objections to his position. Such questions ranged from issues about whether God can make two bodies occupy the same place or make one body present in two places at the same time to current issues in ecclesiastic policy, such as whether confession has to be made orally or may be provided

in writing. (The importance of the former topic, besides its obvious relation to the issue of what is possible by divine omnipotence, is its not so obvious contribution to the meta-physical problem of individuation. The importance of the latter topic can be appreciated if we recall the role written *indulgences* played in the late Middle Ages in triggering the Protestant Reformation.)

The disputations complemented the ordinary lectures (*lectiones*), which usually resulted in running commentaries on authoritative texts, such as books of the Scriptures or the philosophical works of Aristotle. But in the later Middle Ages it was not uncommon for masters of theology as well as of arts to produce question-commentaries, sometimes with-out a running commentary, resulting in sets of *Quaestiones* on various works of Aristotle.

Besides these commentaries, masters of theology often produced their own systematic treatises, the great *summae*, or "summaries," systematically surveying an entire field. Out-standing examples of this genre are Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, written in question format, and *Summa contra Gentiles*, written in the form of a polemic, apologetic treatise. But some-times even collections of ordinary questions were organized into systematic *summae*, as is the case with the *Summa Quaestionum Ordinariarum* of Henry of Ghent (ca. 1217–93), the great "secular" theologian of the University of Paris (meaning simply that he did not belong to a religious order, as did the Dominican Albert or Aquinas, or the Franciscan Bonaventure or Scotus). However, it is not only in theology that such architectonic works gained promi-nence. In logic, from the time of Abelard's monumental *Dialectica*, the masters of subsequent generations produced their own comprehensive textbooks, some of which gained such importance that they remained in general use for centuries. Perhaps the most important of these was the realist logic of the *Summulae Logicales* of Peter of Spain (questionably identified with the Portuguese pope, John XXI), written sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, and the great nominalist theories of the *Summa Logicae* of William Ockham (ca. 1287–1347), and the *Summulae de Dialectica* of John Buridan (ca. 1300–58/61).

In all fields, ranging from logic to natural philosophy, metaphysics, theology, as well as moral, political, and legal philosophy, the commentary literature and the great systematic works are surrounded by various genres of shorter treatises. In theology, short meditations of the sort exemplified by St. Anselm's *Proslogion* continued to flourish in the thirteenth cen-tury. A beautiful example is provided by the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* ("The Mind's Journey to God") of St. Bonaventure (1221–74). In natural philosophy, in metaphysics, and in ethics, it was usually the short, polemic treatises (which allowed authors to express their original views in a particularly pointed fashion) that generated the most dispute, sometimes followed up by direct responses from other authors (or the occasional ecclesiastical censure), pretty much like contemporary journal articles generate disputes over several issues. This sort of polemical treatise is best exemplified by the controversial works of Latin Averroists, such as Siger of Brabant (fl. 1260–77) or Boethius Dacus (fl. 1240–d. 1280) on the eternity of the world or on the unity of the human intellect, and Aquinas' pointed responses to them in his own similarly titled short treatises (*opuscula*).

But the real proliferation of short treatises occurred in the Arts Faculties, especially in logic, where the practice of writing, teaching, and studying such short treatises, generally referred to as *summulae*, earned the name *summulistae* for those involved in this activity. The *summulae*-literature in logic in the High Scholastic (roughly, thirteenth century) and the Late Scholastic (roughly, after 1320) periods is particularly important. These little treatises embody the specifically medieval contribution to Aristotelian logic. Abelard still worked with just the so-called *Logica Vetus*, the Old Logic, which comprised the Boethian translations of

and commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categoriae* and *De Interpretatione*, and Boethius' short logical treatises (on division, categorical and hypothetical syllogisms, and topics). This was completed by the arrival of the remaining books of the Aristotelian *Organon*, collectively referred to as the *Logica Nova*, the New Logic: the two *Analytics* (containing Aristotle's theories of syllogistic and demonstration), the *Topics* (dealing with probable reasoning), and *Sophistic Refutations* (dealing with logical fallacies). This body of writings together, i.e., the *Logica Vetus* and the *Logica Nova*, was known as the *Logica Antiqua*, or Ancient Logic. It is to this core of Aristotelian (and in some parts Stoic) logical doctrine that the work of the *summulistae* from around the second half of the twelfth century through the mid-fifteenth century added their own original contribution (generally referred to as the *logica modernorum*, "the logic of the moderns"), providing the conceptual tools that yielded the unprecedented (and after the decline of scholasticism until the twentieth century unparalleled) analytic precision of scholastic argumentation. Among these treatises, the treatises on the (semantic) properties of terms and treatises on the signification of propositions were especially significant, for they articulated the basic principles for understanding the relationships between language, thought, and reality, which, as it were, laid down the basic rules of the "language games" (to use Wittgenstein's fitting metaphor) to be played in all sorts of argumentation in any particular field. In fact, what provided much of the unity of scholastic thought (besides the obvious unity of a common stock of authorities and shared ideas) despite all the disputes, disagreements, and diversity of opinions in particular fields was precisely this fundamental agreement concerning the most general principles that govern the rationality of any disagreement in any rational disputation, along with a shared image of the basic relations between language, thought, and reality.

Major issues

The basic ideas of this shared image were laid down for the medievals by Augustine's Neoplatonic Christianity together with its Aristotelian refinements provided by Boethius, especially in his logical works. The most fundamental idea of this image is that the *words* of our language are meaningful by virtue of expressing significant units of our thoughts, our *concepts*, which are applicable to the reality we conceive by them in virtue of their *conformity* to the *objects* of this reality. So, the words expressing our concepts are true of the things we conceive on account of those things' being informed by the *same forms* that inform our minds.

To be sure, this *sameness of form* cannot be understood as strict numerical identity. When we say that two billiard balls have the *same* shape or form, we do not mean that the shape of this ball is numerically *one* and the same thing as the shape of that ball. If there are two balls, then they are informed by *two*, numerically distinct, round shapes, for the shape of *this* ball, informing it *here*, cannot be the same thing as the shape of *that* ball, informing it *there*.

Yet, it makes good sense to say that these distinct round shapes are just numerically distinct *instances of the same shape*, as opposed to another, say, cubical or tetrahedral shape. But then what is this "same shape" that is supposed to exist in two distinct instances? And how can this "same shape" inform the mind of someone thinking of round things? Just because I am thinking of round things, this should not mean that my mind thereby becomes round!

This is one way to introduce the notorious *problem of universals*. The medieval problem of universals originated in ancient philosophy, with Plato's answer to the question of the possibility of universal knowledge. How is it possible for us to know *universally*, concerning

all things of a certain kind that they have some property? For example, how can we know that *all* triangles inscribed in a semicircle are right-angled? It is certain that we do not know this from experience, for the claim concerns a potential infinity of individuals, of which we obviously have not seen (and will not see) *all*. To be sure, we know this universal theorem on account of a geometrical proof, using a simple diagram. But that diagram contains only a single triangle inscribed in a semicircle, whereas the theorem concerns all such triangles. Indeed, if we take a closer look at the diagram itself, we can soon realize that what is drawn there is not really what the proof is about. For in the proof we are talking about a perfect circle, all of whose points are perfectly equidistant from a given point, and about a triangle with perfectly straight one-dimensional edges meeting in unextended points on the circumference of the circle, but the diagram consists of visibly extended chalk or ink marks, roughly overlapping on the circumference of what is only more or less a circle, but is certainly not the perfect geometrical shape we have in mind as we construct the proof. In fact, the proof is about that ideal object we have in mind, and it is precisely on account of the fact that we have that object in our mind that we know exactly what the shortcomings of our diagram are. The diagram merely serves as a *visible reminder* for us to keep track of what we are supposed to have in mind in constructing the proof. But what we have in mind is the common Form or Idea of *all* triangles inscribed in a semicircle, and thus we know concerning *all* visible figures that resemble this Form that they will have the properties of this Form insofar as and to the extent that they resemble this Form. So, what we mentally grasp in this diagram and in any other resembling it is this common Form, which serves as their common exemplar, a model for the construction of all.

It is easy to appreciate the appeal of this answer if we consider the fundamental role Forms played in Plato's philosophy in all major fields of inquiry. Forms as the universal exemplars of all kinds of particular things are the principles that determine for all sorts of things *what they are* insofar as they *imitate* or *participate in* their Form. So, Forms in their role of being the universal exemplars of particulars are the primary constituents of Plato's *ontology*, the study of *being* as such (from the Greek words *on* for "being" and *logos* for "reason, account, reasoning, method, study"). But the same Forms, insofar as they account for our universal knowledge of all particulars of the same kind (because they all imitate the same Form), are also the primary items in Plato's *epistemology*, his theory of *knowledge* (from the Greek word *episteme* for "knowledge"). Finally, insofar as the Ideas or Forms set the *ideal* standards of perfection, determining for us what we ought to do to realize these standards in our lives, they are the basis of Plato's *ethics* and *theory of value* in general.

Despite all its appeal, however, the theory could not be maintained in its original form, as it turned out to be inconsistent. The inconsistency of the "naive" theory of Forms (the theory as stated in Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedo*, for example) was realized already by Plato himself in his *Parmenides*. (This late dialogue contains the first formulation of the famous "Third Man" argument, conclusively showing the inconsistency of the theory, at 132a1–b2.) But it was even more relentlessly criticized by Plato's brilliant student, Aristotle, who even provided an alternative solution to the question of the possibility of universal knowledge, in his theory of *abstraction*. This theory could dispense with Plato's Forms as the principles of universal knowledge by claiming that the human mind has the natural ability to form universal concepts from singular experiences by abstracting from the peculiarities of these experiences. Thus the human mind does not have to have some direct (according to Plato, pre-natal) access to universal entities in order to have universal knowledge. But the appeal of Plato's theory was still hard to resist, so later generations of his followers, the Neoplatonic

philosophers, first in Hellenistic, then in Roman, and later in medieval times, kept coming up with ever more refined versions of Plato's ideas, trying to reconcile his teachings first with those of Aristotle, and later with Christian religious doctrine.

The common framework of the ever more refined solutions to the resulting problem of universals in medieval philosophy from Augustine through Boethius to Duns Scotus (and beyond) can be intuitively described in the following manner. Individuals of the same kind are informed by numerically distinct instances of the same common form, in the way in which several copies of the same book carry numerically distinct copies of the same information. In physical reality, there are only these individual copies. There is no numerically one, common, "universal book" over and above, and yet somehow existing in, the numerically distinct individual copies of the same book. As Boethius' careful argument in his commentary on the *Isagoge* showed, it is absurd to suppose the existence of some numerically one thing that is common to many numerically distinct things, informing them at the same time, for then this one thing itself would also have to be many distinct things, which is impossible. So, there is no such thing as "the book" over and above the individual copies. Still these copies are copies of the *same book*, for they are all copies of the same original exemplar, first conceived and written by the author. And readers of these copies who understand the author's intention will gain the *same information* informing their own minds, which they can then creatively use to form their own ideas to produce further works of art that may again be published in several copies, indeed, in various different media. In the same way, Augustine would say, natural (as opposed to artificial) things of the same kind belong to the same kind because they are all modeled after the same original Idea conceived by the Author of Nature, i.e., after an Idea of the Divine Mind. On the other hand, the human mind learning about the things of nature will be informed by the *same information*, which it can again creatively use to produce things with forms it invented, namely, the forms of human artifacts.

Using this analogy, then, we may quite plausibly understand the perhaps mysterious-sounding notion of "the sameness of form in several instances and in the mind" as being no more mysterious than having the same information encoded in several copies, possibly in several different media, whether in several physical manifestations or in informing the mind of a thinking subject, where, in turn, they can even serve as the exemplars of further physical manifestations, if the thinking subject uses them as the guiding principles of its productive activity.

So, in this framework, Plato's Forms are preserved in a way, namely, in their role as universal exemplars of particulars of the same kind; however, they are not preserved as independently existing "abstract entities," but as the creative Ideas of God. Indeed, for Augustine, Plato's Forms are preserved not only in their ontological role, as the exemplars of individuals of the same kind, but also in their epistemological role, as the principles of cognition of individuals of the same kind, and in their ethical (value-theoretical) role, as the standards of perfection for these individuals (in particular, standards for perfection in human action, virtue, and character, and so, as the objective standards for judging the *lack* or *privation* of some requisite perfection, i.e., for judging the presence of some evil). Thus, for Augustine, Divine Ideas are the principles of Being, Truth, and Goodness of all creation.

This general framework, which clearly avoids the inconsistencies of a "naive" theory of Platonic Forms, nevertheless yields its own problems. These were precisely the problems that prompted the ever more sophisticated refinements of this framework in scholastic philosophy and theology.

An obviously emerging ontological problem was the conflict between the plurality of divine ideas and the unity and simplicity of divine essence. Of course, the problem presupposes the thesis of divine simplicity as stemming from God's absolute perfection. A simple piece of reasoning establishing this conclusion, which would be commonly endorsed in this tradition, may be formulated as follows. Anybody who properly understands the name "God" has to understand by that name an absolutely perfect being. And an absolutely perfect being has to be absolutely simple, indivisible into a multitude of parts. For a thing that is composed of several parts has to have those parts either essentially or accidentally. If it has those parts accidentally, i.e., not necessarily, so that it may or may not have them without its own corruption, then it is changeable with respect to those parts. But a thing that is changeable cannot be absolutely perfect, for an absolutely perfect thing cannot become more or less perfect; whereas anything that changes becomes more or less perfect by its change. So, God cannot have any accidental parts. But God cannot have any essential parts either, i.e., parts without which He cannot exist. For anything that has several essential parts is dependent for its being on those parts. But an absolutely perfect being cannot be dependent for its existence on anything, for dependency is an imperfection and an absolutely perfect being cannot have any imperfection whatsoever. So God has to be absolutely simple. But then the question arises as to how He can have a plurality of ideas. The ideas, being the archetypes of creation, cannot themselves be creatures. Therefore, since anything is either a creature or their creator, the ideas cannot be entities other than God. But how can a plurality of ideas be the same as the one, simple, indivisible God? (The gist of the solution provided in ever more refined forms by thirteenth-century theologians was that the multiplicity of ideas is just the infinite multiplicity of the ways in which God conceives of the infinite perfection of His own essence as imitable by the limited perfection of any finite, created essence. But the multiplicity of the ways of conceiving of something does not have to imply any multiplicity of the things conceived: conceiving of Plato now as the student of Socrates, now as the teacher of Aristotle does not have to imply conceiving of several things.)

Another commonly discussed problem concerned divine ideas as the potential sources of universal knowledge, a Platonic theme preserved in Augustine in the form of his doctrine of *divine illumination*. The Platonic solution to the problem of how universal knowledge of a potential infinity of individuals of a given kind is possible was to assume that the human mind has direct access to the common exemplar of all these individuals. Therefore, knowing what all these individuals are modeled after, the mind obviously knows all these individuals, insofar as they resemble this common exemplar. In Augustine's Christian version of the same conception, it is God who provides this access to His creative ideas, especially for those souls that are "holy and pure." The problem generated by this conception is that it turns what one would normally assume to be a *natural* ability of the human mind, namely, attaining universal knowledge and understanding, into a *supernatural* gift, which would leave the existence of wise pagans or evil geniuses quite inexplicable, and the specific, natural ability of humans as such apparently useless and futile. Indeed, in the face of the competing Aristotelian conception (explaining universal knowledge and understanding in terms of the natural abilities and activities of perception, memory, experience, abstraction, induction, and deduction), illumination is apparently not needed for the explanation. Many Aristotelians, such as Aquinas and Duns Scotus, therefore, opted for keeping divine illumination only "nominally" as it were, attributing its function to the natural faculty of the active or agent intellect (*intellectus agens*, *nous poietikos*, the faculty of the human mind forming universal concepts from sensory experiences by abstraction) posited by Aristotle. Their

Augustinian opponents, however, such as Bonaventure, or Henry of Ghent, insisted on the necessity of genuinely *supernatural* illumination for true wisdom, i.e., some intellectual light directly coming from God, complementing, as it were, the *natural* functioning of the agent intellect. In this way, the epistemological controversy naturally paralleled the controversy in moral theology concerning the role of *supernatural* grace and the *natural* acts of human free will (weighed down as it is by *original sin*) in determining morally relevant human action. For in both cases the issue was to find out about the actual mechanisms of, and the balance between, supernatural and natural determinations of some specifically human activity, the theoretical activity of the intellect or the practical activity of the will.

But the conflict between Augustinian and Aristotelian theologians over the epistemological issue of the mechanisms of intellectual cognition was even further complicated by the ostensible ontological implications of the Aristotelian conception as it was conceived by the radical Aristotelian philosophers of the Arts Faculty of the period, the Latin Averroists, such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius Dacus. Having argued on the basis of Aristotle's remarks (in the third book of his *De Anima*, 429a10–b5) that since the intellect is capable of receiving all material forms, it cannot have a material form of its own, just as the pupil of the eye, being capable of receiving all colors, cannot have any color of its own, they adopted Averroës' position that this immaterial intellect cannot be an inherent form of the material body, so it has to be a separate substance, existing separately from matter. And since the immaterial intellect exists separately from matter, it cannot be multiplied in several material bodies in the way material forms, such as shapes or colors, are multiplied with the multiplicity of bodies. The inevitable conclusion seems to be that all human beings share one common intellect. This is the famous Averroistic doctrine of *the unity of the intellect*, which can perhaps best be understood by the modern analogy of conceiving of the separate intellect as a mainframe computer to which individual humans are related as the terminals of the mainframe, providing it with input and accessing it for data, but where the processing of all the input provided by the terminals takes place in the same mainframe only.

This conception generated several problems, both philosophical and theological. For, as Aquinas argued against Siger, if all thinking takes place in the allegedly separate intellect, then it seems impossible to hold that the intellect is that by which a human being thinks, despite the fact that this is supposed to be the definitive character of the human intellect. Furthermore, if there is one separately existing intellect for all humans, and it is only this intellect that survives the death of each, then belief in a *personal* afterlife, and personal reward and punishment in that afterlife becomes pointless.

But these were not the only problems caused by the teachings of the Latin Averroists. Relying strictly on Aristotelian metaphysical principles, they argued for such claims as the eternity of the world or the impossibility of the existence of accidents without their subject, as inevitable philosophical conclusions. But the first of these obviously contradicts the article of faith that the world had a beginning in time with its creation, while the second contradicted the theological doctrine of the Eucharist, according to which in the transubstantiation of the bread (i.e., the substance of the bread turning into the substance of the body of Christ), its sensible qualities and dimensions cease to inhere in a substance, for its substance is miraculously replaced by the substance of the body of Christ, which is not informed by these qualities and dimensions.

To be sure, the Latin Averroists insisted that their conclusions are not *absolute truths*, but rather they are merely inevitable conclusions of philosophical principles; so, they are truths

of philosophy that are only to be regarded as truths *with the assumption of philosophical principles*. However, as Aquinas argued, this defense would have to lead to conceding the absolute falsity of those philosophical principles from which these conclusions followed. For if the conclusions are merely true with the assumption of those principles, but they are to be taken to be false on account of their conflict with the absolute truth of the faith, then, inevitably, the principles that entail them also have to be taken to be absolutely false. So, not wanting to give up the absolute truth of philosophical principles (and, of course, granting the absolute truth of articles of faith revealed by the First Truth, i.e., God), Aquinas rather argued for the claim that whenever there is a perceived conflict between philosophical and theological conclusions, then this has to be the result of some *rationally corrigible error*. For true principles can validly entail only true conclusions, and truths cannot contradict truths, so the valid conclusions of two sets of true principles (i.e., the principles of philosophy and articles of faith) can never contradict each other. Therefore, their perceived conflict is merely the result of some (logical) error, whether in the interpretation of the conclusions (judging them to be contradictory when they are not), or in the reasoning leading to these conclusions (using some fallacious argument), or in the interpretation of the principles themselves. So, in this way, Aquinas' defense of the necessary harmony between faith and reason was actually a defense of the absolute truths of philosophy and the philosophical enterprise in general, charging philosophers as well as theologians with the *philosophical* task of elaborating their respective doctrines whenever a perceived conflict between them emerges.

But Aquinas' conciliatory reaction to the challenge posed by Latin Averroism was not the official response. The official administrative reaction to the problem of Latin Averroism came in the form of the famous condemnation of 1277 issued by the bishop of Paris, Etienne (Stephen) Tempier, advised by a group of theologians, the most influential among them being the formidable Augustinian opponent of Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent. The sweeping condemnation, therefore, generally asserted not only the authority of theology over philosophy, but in fact a strongly Augustinian theological position over Aristotelian tendencies in theology as well. To be sure, the main target of the condemnation was definitely the "radical Aristotelianism" of the Averroists, which is shown by the fact that condemned theses involved their positions in all major fields, not only in epistemology, metaphysics, and natural science (including the philosophy of the mind), but also in moral philosophy. But the theses certainly touched on several Aristotelian positions held by theologians, in particular, some positions explicitly held by Aquinas. For example, besides condemning such characteristic theses of the Averroists as the eternity of the world, or the unity of the intellect, or the thesis that happiness consists in living a philosophical life (all of them heavily criticized by Aquinas himself), it also condemned typical theses of Aquinas, such as the thesis of the impossibility of the multiplication of immaterial substances in the same species (Aristotle's separate forms, identified with Judeo-Christian angels), based on the Aristotelian conception of individuation Aquinas shared with the Averroists, according to which the multiplication of a specific form is only possible through its several numerically distinct instances being imprinted on distinct parcels of matter.

To be sure, some of the theses themselves represented rather unfairly the positions they condemned. Thus, the Averroistic distinction between the absolute truths of faith and the relative truths of philosophy (assuming the ordinary course of nature, when it is not overruled by divine omnipotence), in the condemnation becomes the contrived "theory of double truth" (*veritas duplex*), as if the philosophers of the Arts Faculty ever subscribed to

the absurd claim that two contradictory propositions can equally be true, one according to philosophy and the other according to faith.

But it also has to be kept in mind that the sweeping condemnations were rather far removed from the much more sophisticated discussions of the same issues, both before and after the condemnation itself. Thus, Henry of Ghent's own position on the problem of the multiplication of immaterial substances was based on his decidedly non-Aristotelian conception of individuation in terms of the existence of creatures, whether material or immaterial, which then opened up the field for the even more influential alternative conception of John Duns Scotus, in terms of an ultimate *individual substantial difference*, his famous "haecceity" (*haecceitas*, "this-ness," which distinguishes individuals within the same lowest species, just as a *specific difference* distinguishes several species of the same genus).

In general, the March 7, 1277 Paris condemnation of 219 propositions, and the near-simultaneous (March 18, 1277) Oxford condemnation of 30 related propositions issued by Robert Kilwardby (ca. 1215–79), archbishop of Canterbury, just as well as previous condemnations meant to restrict the influence of Aristotelianism (in 1210, 1215, 1231, and 1270), did not result in the suppression of the study of Aristotle or the use of logic and philosophy in theology, let alone in natural science or other disciplines. Rather, these condemnations had the impact of influencing the general character of further, ever more sophisticated, discussions. In particular, the Paris and Oxford condemnations of 1277, placing their emphasis on divine omnipotence (and thus on the limited validity of the principles of Aristotelian philosophy based on natural necessity), started a new and growing trend in metaphysics and natural philosophy, considering hypothetical scenarios that would have been regarded as impossible by Aristotelian natural necessity, but possible by *God's absolute power*, freely choosing among possible plans for creation, not constrained by the natural necessities of the actual creation. Thus, creating several worlds, moving the world along a straight line, sustaining quantity without a substance, creating a vacuum, or two bodies occupying the same place, which were all thought to be impossible by the lights of Aristotelian metaphysics and natural philosophy, now were seriously considered as genuinely realizable at least by the absolute power of God, which opened up new conceptual possibilities, such as the possibility of an empty, absolute space, paving the way for modern, mechanistic conceptions of physics. Furthermore, the rejection of the Aristotelian conception of individuation through matter (implicit in the condemnation of the thesis about the impossibility of the plurification of immaterial substances in the same species) opened the way for radically different ways of thinking about individuation, as illustrated by the alternative theories of Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus.

The discussions exploring such and similar conceptual possibilities were couched in an ever more refined, increasingly technical language, as the disputants made ever more sophisticated distinctions to express their precise positions. Indeed, with these refinements, even the distinctions themselves had to be distinguished. For besides the obvious numerical distinction that there is between two distinct things, these conceptual developments demanded the distinction of other sorts of distinctions as well. Earlier we touched on the distinction of different ways of conceiving of the same thing in connection with the solution to the problem of the apparent conflict between the multiplicity of divine ideas and the simplicity of divine essence. But the same type of solution applied to the apparent conflict between the multiplicity of true divine attributes and the simplicity of divine essence. Aquinas' way of formulating his solution involved the distinction between a merely conceptual distinction or distinction of reason (*distinctio rationis*) and the real distinction between two things

(*distinctio realis*). But Aquinas also used this distinction in explaining his famous theory of the *unity of substantial forms*. The point of the theory, with far-reaching consequences in philosophical anthropology and the philosophy of mind, is that a substance can only have one substantial form to account for all its essential characteristics. Thus, all essential predicates of the same substance, such as "human," "rational," "animal," "sensitive," "living," "body," that are true of this particular human being, signify in her the same, unique substantial form that accounts for her being a human, being able to reason, etc., as well as being extended in three dimensions in space. Therefore, if Aquinas' theory is right, then we must say that what these predicates signify in this human being, say, her humanity, rationality, animality, corporeity, etc. are distinct merely *conceptually*, on account of the different concepts that we formed of the same thing, but not *really*, in the thing in itself.

On the other hand, Aquinas also argued that in many cases we have to recognize a real distinction between the *significata* of our predicates that apply to the same things. Most importantly, he argued that what the predicate "exists" signifies in a creature, namely, the creature's act of existence, cannot really be the same as what its essential predicates signify in it, namely, its essence. It is only God whose absolute simplicity excludes the composition of His essence with a distinct existence, so it is only God whose essence is His existence, whereas all creatures have an act of existence distinct from their essence. This is Aquinas' famous and famously controversial *thesis of the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures*, which for him is the foundation of the radical contingency of all creaturely existence. Indeed, it is this radical contingency of creaturely existence that provides the ultimate evidence for God's existence: for if creaturely existence is radically contingent, then it is not self-explanatory; but then the fact that creatures exist calls for a sufficient explanation, which can only be provided ultimately in terms of the existence of a cause the existence of which calls for no further explanation.

No matter how appealing this position may be, Henry of Ghent and others raised several serious objections to it. (One obvious objection is that if creaturely essence and existence are really distinct items, then one could be created without the other, which is clearly absurd, for how could there *exist* a thing of a certain kind, i.e., of a certain *essence*, without having *existence*?) So, Henry argued for the real identity of essence and existence in all things, while at the same time admitting between them a new type of distinction, a so-called intentional distinction (*distinctio intentionis*), which he conceived to be midway between a full-fledged real distinction and a mere distinction of reason, based on God's creative *intention* in producing a creature, realizing in its existence a certain kind of essence.

Clearly inspired by Henry's ideas, Duns Scotus introduced an even further type of distinction, the so-called "formal distinction on the part of the thing" (*distinctio formalis a parte rei*), which he sometimes characterized as a "less-than-numerical distinction." He argued, for example, that this is the kind of distinction that there is between a thing's specific nature (say human nature, as such) and its "haecceity," its principle of individuation.

Such and similar subtleties rendered metaphysical disputations toward the turn of the fourteenth century increasingly difficult to follow; so much so that some critics denounced them as not only needless, but utterly nonsensical. For example, an early defender of Aquinas' views against Henry's and Scotus' criticism, Thomas Sutton (ca. 1250–1315), a Dominican theologian in Oxford, flatly rejected Henry's and Scotus' distinctions, arguing that only the two kinds of distinctions (real and conceptual) used by Aquinas can make any good sense.

It should also be noted here that besides their substantive philosophical and theological motivations, some personal and institutional rivalries also colored these disputations. For despite

the famous friendship between the Dominican Aquinas and the Franciscan Bonaventure (who became the minister general of his order), there was the equally famous competition between Franciscans and Dominicans in general for university chairs, combined with the further competition from "secular" theologians, such as Henry of Ghent. Thus, when, emboldened by the 1277 condemnation, the Franciscan theologian William de la Mare (d. ca. 1290) published his *Correctorium Fratris Thomae* ("Corrective of Brother Thomas") in 1278, it was soon adopted by the order as the official corrective of Aquinas' teachings to be read together with Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. To be sure, the Dominicans did not wait long with their response: in a couple of years several treatises appeared under the title *Correctorium Corruptorii Fratris Thomae* ("Corrective of the Corruptor of Brother Thomas" – the different treatises were usually distinguished by adding their opening word to the title). One of these was even (spuriously) attributed to a non-Dominican, an Augustinian Hermit, Giles of Rome (ca. 1243–1316), who may have been a student of Aquinas, and certainly endorsed many of his doctrines, but was generally a rather independent mind.

But even apart from such "sociological" factors complicating the situation, by the early fourteenth century philosophy and theology became highly complex, sophisticated, technical subjects, considering arcane questions concerning the distinction or identity (or quasi-distinction and quasi-identity) of all sorts of entities (or quasi-entities) allegedly corresponding to our different ways of conceiving (and therefore signifying by means of our words) the various items considered in these subjects.

Apparently, this situation served as the main motivation for the radical program of the Franciscan theologian William Ockham, intending to "wipe the slate clean" of all these obscure entities and quasi-entities.

Late Scholasticism and the emergence of Renaissance and early modern philosophy

Ockham's program of eliminating these unwanted entities from his ontology is sometimes characterized as a sweeping metaphysical program to establish a strictly nominalist ontology in which he eliminated universal entities by wielding his famous Razor (the methodological principle that if the existence of certain entities is not required for the best explanation of something, then their existence can safely be denied, often cited in the form *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* – "entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity"). But this general characterization is acceptable only with a number of important qualifications.

In the first place, even if Ockham did deploy several arguments against the existence of universal entities (assuming each of these putative entities to be some numerically one substance that is somehow common to many particulars), these and similar arguments were in common stock even before him, and since the time of Boethius nobody held this crude view of universals. (Indeed, some late medieval authors argued that Plato himself may not have held his theory of Forms in this crude form.) So, Ockham's genuine contribution to the debate was rather his rejection of the Scotistic notion of formal distinction required for a much subtler view of real universals, arguing for the intrinsic inconsistency of this view, and outlining an alternative view that explains the obvious universality of our common terms and concepts without any need to invoke such universal entities.

Thus, in the second place, Ockham often used his Razor principle only in addition to his direct argumentation against what he took to be Scotus' inherently inconsistent view

of individualized universal natures being merely formally distinct from their principle of individuation, their "haecceity." Therefore, the logical role of his Razor can be fitted into the general structure of his argumentation only as a last step, roughly in the following way: "The assumption of these entities leads to such and such inconsistencies, and, given my alternative theory, they are not even needed for the explanation of universality; therefore, they do not exist, and we are better off without them."

In the third place, Ockham himself did not immediately break with "all sorts of quasi-entities." His first theory of universals, developed in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, characterized universals as mere objects of thought, the so-called *ficta*, which are not really existing entities, but rather the universal thought-contents of our universal acts of thought, whereby we conceive of several individuals at once in a universal manner. It was only later that, convinced by the arguments of his confrere, Walter Chatton (d. 1343), Ockham abandoned his *fictum* theory and embraced the mental act theory, which identifies universals simply with universally representing mental acts. These mental acts are universal only in their mode of representation, but in their being they are just as ordinary singular qualities as is the color of this particular apple or the heat of that particular flame.

Finally, Ockham's "program of ontological reduction" is rather a *logical* program to work out his alternative theory of universality, and in general, his new, alternative theory of how language and thought can be mapped onto a parsimonious, nominalist ontology containing only two distinct categories of entities, namely, singular substances and their singular qualities. It is especially in this logical theory that Ockham valiantly wields his Razor, showing that he can provide a coherent, subtle, logical theory without any need for the complex, obscure ontology required by the "realist" conception: he can account for the semantic properties of terms in the ten distinct Aristotelian categories without having to assume a corresponding tenfold classification of entities in extra-mental reality. Indeed, Ockham claims that the opposite opinion is rooted in the erroneous view of his contemporaries, who would "multiply entities according to the multiplicity of terms," i.e., who would try to establish a one-to-one mapping between linguistic, conceptual, and ontological categories.

Ockham's charge, stated in this form, is rather unjustified. To be sure, the thirteenth-century *modistic grammarians* argued for a strict parallelism between *modi essendi, intelligendi et significandi*, i.e., between the ways things are, are understood, and are signified, in order to establish the theoretical foundation of a universal, *speculative grammar* common to all languages. But generally speaking, even philosophers who endorsed the idea of such overall parallelism did so with all sorts of (quite obviously necessary) provisos. For example, all medieval philosophers rejected universally existing substances, yet none rejected universal concepts or universal words universally representing and signifying singular substances. But, especially in finer details, the idea of a one-to-one mapping between items of language (whether written, spoken, or mental) and reality was definitely not endorsed or demanded. We have seen this already in the case of Aquinas' doctrine of the unity of substantial forms, where different terms, signifying different concepts in the mind, signify the same individualized forms in the same substances conceived differently by these different (more or less universal) concepts. It was also quite commonly allowed that terms in different categories can signify the same items in reality; for example, relying on Aristotle's authority, it was commonly held that a particular action of a given agent is the same motion as the passion caused by the agent in the patient, although action and passion were taken to be distinct genera in the Aristotelian system of categories.

But then, what is Ockham's novelty? It is not so much his "reduced ontology" (since others before him also argued for a reduced number of real categories corresponding to the ten logical categories) as it is the radically revised picture involved in his alternative theory of the relations among items in language, thought, and reality. For, especially in his mature, mental act theory, Ockham radically revised the Aristotelian notion of abstraction accounting for the universality of our concepts. In his view, abstraction is not to be regarded as the intellectual grasp of some common intelligible content informing singulars of the same kind (in the way the common intelligible content of a book informs its singular copies), for distinguishing this common content from the individuals themselves would, in his opinion, just give rise to the problems of formal distinction he criticized in Scotus' (and his followers') view.

So, instead, Ockham claims that the universality of our concepts is simply due to their *indifference* in representation. The concept of cats represents all cats simply because it no more distinctly represents this cat than that one, although, of course while it represents this cat and that cat it does not represent this dog, which is why it is a specific concept representing only cats but not dogs. By contrast, the concept of animals is an indifferent representation of all cats and all dogs and all other animals, but it is not a representation of any non-animals. But this universality of representation is not due to our intellects' being informed by the same common information content that informs or organizes the matter of cats and dogs; rather it is simply the result of the *indifference*, i.e., the non-distinctive character of this representation. Accordingly, our common terms should not be regarded as primarily signifying such a common intelligible content in the individuals grasped by means of our intellectual concepts; rather, they should be regarded as signifying the singulars themselves, indifferently represented by the concepts expressed by these terms.

To be sure, these innovations in themselves may seem to be minor. But they are tremendously significant, particularly for two reasons. In the first place, they radically break with the idea of the pervasive formal unity that was supposed to constitute both metaphysical structures of reality (the kinds of things there are) and conceptual structures of the human mind (the order of concepts reflecting the kinds of things there are), both structures being modeled after the creative ideas of the Divine Mind, the universal archetypes of all creation. Indeed, for Ockham, divine ideas are no longer to be conceived as universal archetypes: God's ideas for Ockham are but God's singular creatures as He intuitively preconceives each in its singularity from eternity. But this is a radical departure from the fundamental idea that provided much of the conceptual cohesion of the entire medieval tradition from Augustine to Scotus and beyond. In the second place, Ockham's innovations gain their significance in particular in the entire system of a consistently nominalist logic that shows how his alternative conception can really "work" without any commitment to the pervasive intelligible structures assumed by the earlier view.

Indeed, Ockham's ideas eventually got serious traction only somewhat later, when they were put to work in the comprehensive nominalist logic and philosophy of the Parisian Master of Arts, John Buridan, especially in his architectonic *Summulae de Dialectica*. To be sure, Ockham himself had already composed a comprehensive system of logic in his *Summa Logicae*, and his ideas immediately provoked vehement reactions from various quarters, in logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics, and in theology. But he was generally regarded with suspicion, especially in theology, as being not only controversial, but potentially heretical. And it certainly did not help his cause that, after an investigation of his works at the papal court in Avignon turned hostile (not over his nominalism, but over his defense of the Franciscan

doctrine of apostolic poverty), in 1328 he fled the court to seek asylum in the imperial court of Louis of Bavaria. After that time until his death in 1347, Ockham lived and worked under imperial protection, and wrote exclusively about politics.

Buridan, on the other hand, never had similar conflicts with authority. He prudently stayed as a professor at the Arts Faculty, instead of following the usual career path of his peers, who would normally move on to the "higher" (and, just as nowadays, higher-salaried) positions at the Faculties of Theology, Law, or Medicine. But in the Arts Faculty he became a highly regarded *magister* (master), who served twice as rector of the university (and one who was exceptionally highly paid for an Arts Master).

Buridan's prudence in his practical dealings is also reflected in his theoretical work. He never picked a fight he could not win; instead, he quietly and effectively worked out the details of a comprehensive and thoroughgoing nominalist system of logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy (including his naturalistic philosophy of the soul), and ethics, earning well-deserved fame as a teacher, churning out scores of students, many of whom would become influential professors at Paris (for example, Nicholas Oresme [1323–82], teacher of the Dauphin, who became Charles V) or at the new universities sprouting up all over the Continent at the time (for example, Albert of Saxony, probably not a student, but a younger colleague of Buridan's, yet clearly influenced by his doctrines, the first rector of the University of Vienna [1365], or Marsilius of Inghen, rector of the University of Heidelberg [1386]).

In this way, Ockham's nominalism in Buridan's hands turned from what was at first regarded as a radical and potentially dangerous innovation into a sound and simple, alternative way of doing logic, philosophy, science, and, eventually, even theology, without all the meta-physical complications and "obscurities" of the old way of dealing with these subjects. Indeed, through the work of his students, Buridan's nominalism by the fifteenth century even institutionally emerged as the "new way" (*via moderna*), as opposed to the "old way" (*via antiqua*), of dealing with these subjects. The separation of the two *viae* was in many ways comparable to the recent separation of "analytic" and "Continental" philosophy at modern American universities: some universities, after some bloody in-fighting among faculty members and their students (which has even earned the distinctive moniker *Wegestreit* – "the battle of the ways" – in the German historical literature of the period), exclusively adopted one or the other approach, whereas other universities opted for peaceful coexistence, acknowledging both ways in their statutes, and requiring students to engage both. But regardless of the outcome of the *Wegestreit* in any particular place, what was symptomatic about this separation everywhere was the emergence of a characteristically *modern phenomenon*, namely, the emergence of *paradigmatically different conceptual schemes*. In such a situation the disagreements no longer concern mere differences of opinion about particular questions (e.g., What is the principle of individuation?), but rather the very legitimacy of the questions raised by the other party (Why should there be a principle of individuation at all?) or the methods, terminology and conceptual apparatus used by the other party in answering it (a formal distinction between the alleged common nature and a presumed principle of individuation makes no good sense).

This was a radically new conceptual development that resulted from the nominalists' rejection of the fundamental intuition of the *via antiqua* concerning the pervasive formal unity of real and conceptual structures. Indeed, this denial, combined with the post-1277 emphasis on God's absolute power, opened up conceptual possibilities that *had not been there before*. One such possibility was that of an extreme form of skepticism allowing a subject's complete cognitive isolation from an extramental, physical reality, at least by divine

omnipotence. (That this is in fact a genuine possibility is by now taken for granted to such an extent that even a movie trilogy, *The Matrix*, was based on this premise.) This possibility was soon realized by Buridan's contemporary, Nicholas of Autrecourt (d. 1369). Although Autrecourt himself may not have been the skeptic he was later made out to be (or even as Buridan may already have believed him to be), his realization of the logical possibility of complete cognitive isolation is one of those thoughts that (paraphrasing Thomas Paine's famous remark in *The Rights of Man*, part 13) once thought, cannot be "unthought." Indeed, it was probably due at least in part to Buridan's reply to the implied skeptical challenge (in terms of a naturalistic reliabilism rediscovered or reinvented in modern philosophy by Thomas Reid) that the idea remained in circulation in various forms until it made its appearance in Descartes' famous "Demon Argument." The particular historical details of these develop-ments are obscure, and are still to be recovered from the immense and largely unstudied late medieval output. But even the little we know about these developments allows us some glimpses into the intrinsic mechanisms of those conceptual tensions between the older realist and the new nominalist *viae* that eventually led to the breakdown of scholastic discourse and to the new, primarily epistemological and methodological, questions of early modern philosophy.

But besides the intrinsic conceptual tensions *within* scholastic philosophy as it was prac-ticed in late medieval academia, there were also several extrinsic factors that accelerated the breakdown of its conceptual unity. Most important among these were the emergence of humanism, the rebirth (*renaissance*) of classical Greek and Latin learning (bringing about the emergence of the corresponding sense of superiority on the part of humanists, who routinely reviled the "barbarities" of the highly technical, austere Latin of "the schoolmen"), and the emergence of Protestantism, challenging the authority of the Catholic Church as well as the validity of scholastic theological doctrine, which according to Protestant theolo-gians had too much immersed itself in the philosophy of Aristotle, or rather in a distorted "medieval" version of his philosophy (as the pre-humanist period, the period between anci-ent learning and its revival, now came to be called).

All these factors eventually led to the near-extinction of scholasticism by the seventeenth century. At any rate, by that time scholastic philosophy certainly ceased to be "mainstream," although it survived in the Catholic Church well into the twentieth century in the form of neo-scholasticism. But, perhaps more importantly from the point of view of the history of ideas, scholastic philosophy was still very much "in the air" in the early modern period, when scholastic categories and distinctions still tended to inform the thought of even those philoso-phers whose starting point was precisely a deliberate break with the scholastic tradition. After all, much of Descartes' philosophy is completely unintelligible without the scholastic distinction between objective and formal reality, or the notion of eminent causation. But these are just the most obvious examples. Further research will certainly bring out even more evidence of the fundamental continuity between late medieval and early modern thought, highlighting the paradoxical fact of intellectual history that the connections rendering these developments continuous in their details are at the same time responsible for those large-scale discontinu-ities that separate one major period from another.

About This Volume

If there is one thing the foregoing survey ought to have made clear, it is the fact that no standard modern anthology can do justice to the wealth, complexity, and breadth of the medieval

philosophical output. Indeed, several of the authors, works, and ideas mentioned in this survey could not make it into the selection, and several selections could not be discussed in this survey. The latter defect will be remedied by the brief introductions preceding the main parts. The former, however, can only be taken care of by further study, especially given the fact that several interesting authors and topics are simply beyond the scope of this volume. To help with this task, this volume also contains a selective bibliography with pointers to further information about the authors and works only mentioned here, but not selected for this volume.

The selections are organized doctrinally (as opposed to, say, around persons or topics), adhering to the medievals' own conception of the division of philosophical disciplines (presented in the first section). Thus, the three main parts of the volume present selections from the three major philosophical disciplines as Augustine (clearly influenced by the Stoic tradition) conceived of them: logic (including what we would call epistemology, in general, the discipline reflective on and regulative of the operations of reason in its search for the knowledge of Truth); physics/metaphysics (in general, the pure theoretical reflection on the first principles of Being); and ethics (or in general, practical philosophy, reflecting on the principles that ought to guide our actions toward what is truly and ultimately Good).

Each part contains several sections, each dealing with some salient problems of its discipline through an array of chronologically arranged selections. The sections generally strive to cover the chronological range between early and late medieval philosophy (as much as this is possible within the confines of the allotted space), giving a taste of the developments in the ever more sophisticated treatments of the same topics. The introductions preceding each part place the selections in their proper theoretical context in relation to the foregoing survey, occasionally providing some pointers to directly relevant secondary literature.