

Essay Review

JORGE J. E. GRACIA, *Introduction to the problem of individuation in the early middle ages*. (Analytica, Investigations in Logic, Ontology and the Philosophy of Language.) München, Wien: Philosophia Verlag, 1984. 303 pp. 118 DM.

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I

Of the so-called 'dark' Middle Ages one generally considers the early period (\pm 500-1300) as the darkest part. One is often inclined to view this period as one in which individuals are not seen as such. Dr. Jorge J. E. Gracia's book deals with various accounts on the problem of individuation given by philosophers and theologians throughout the early Middle Ages.

The problem of individuation in the early Middle Ages (in Gracia's book the period which extends between 500 and 1150) has scarcely been studied by modern scholars. The reason for this might be the fact that separate treatises on this problem are absent throughout this period. It is during the thirteenth and, especially, the fourteenth century that the problem of the principles that constitute individual things as individual things, and of human knowledge of those individual things as such come to the fore. The modern studies by Day¹ and Bérubé² illustrate the attention given to the problem of individuation by e.g. John Duns Scot and William of Ockham.

In this review I shall, first, sketch the main outlines of Gracia's book; secondly, I shall give some criticism on the presentation; thirdly, I shall discuss the quality of the translations; and, finally, I shall deal with some general philosophical problems arising from the book.

II

In his chapter I Gracia presents a framework that is meant to help understand the various doctrines of individuation proposed in the early Middle Ages. The author discusses, primarily from a systematic point of view, a number of aspects related to the problem of individuation:

- (a) The intension of individuality (i.e. what is it to be an individual as opposed to something else?);
- (b) The extension of individuality (i.e. are there any entities that can be said to be individual, granted that this concept is variable?);

1 S.J. Day, *Intuitive cognition. A key to the significance of the later scholastics* (St. Bonaventure N.Y., 1947).

2 C. Bérubé, *La connaissance de l'individu au moyen âge* (Montréal and Paris, 1964).

- (c) The ontological status of individuality (i.e. is there some distinction in reality which corresponds to the distinction in thought between individuality and the individual's nature? and, if so, what is the basis of this distinction?);
- (d) The principle of individuation (i.e. what is this principle? and: is it the same for all entities?);
- (e) The discernibility of individuals (i.e. how do we discern individuals?);
- (f) The functions of proper names and indexicals (the linguistic perspective).

Chapters II-V are primarily historical and form the main part of the book. In chapter II Boethius's views are discussed, in his logical works (viz. in Boethius's commentaries on Porphyry's 'Isagoge' (two editions), and in his commentaries on Aristotle's 'Categories' and 'De interpretatione') and in his theological work the *De Trinitate*. According to Gracia, Boethius's way of discussing individuation suggests two basic approaches that were taken up by later philosophers up to about 1150: one is primarily metaphysical, the other is primarily logical as Gracia expresses it (e.g. p. 110).

Besides considering these two approaches as fundamental Gracia also concludes that what he labels a 'Standard theory of individuation' (STI) was the most common position during the period from Boethius to the middle of the twelfth century. According to Gracia (p. 125), this theory contains four basic tenets: (1) one conceives of 'individuality' as a kind of difference or distinction; (2) the extension of 'individuality' is restricted to substances, in other words: accidents, properties and essential features of substances are not individual; (3) there is a lack of distinction between the problem of individuation and the problem of individual discernibility; and (4) one accepts an accidental and/or bundle view of individuation; the principle of individuation is a set of accidents and/or a collection of features belonging to the substance. Moreover, Gracia continues, most of those who adhered to different versions of this view tended to neglect or omit altogether the consideration of issues related to the function of proper names and indexicals.

In chapter III Gracia discusses philosophers within the tradition based on Boethius's *De Trinitate*: John Scotus Eriugena, Odo of Tournai (not Odo of Tours (*sic*), as Gracia calls him³), Thierry of Chartres and Gilbert of Poitiers. The author considers his choice of discussing the two last-mentioned as evident: they are among the most important thinkers of the twelfth century (p. 124). Thierry and Gilbert depart in some respects from the STI, however. Therefore Dr. Gracia has included Eriugena (the author of the first comprehensive treatise to appear in the early Middle Ages; Eriugena is a representative of the STI) and Odo of Tournai. Odo is also an exponent of the STI according to Gracia, but Odo is noteworthy for two reasons: (a) he introduces some interesting modifications and (b) discusses the problem of individuation not in connection with the problem of the trinity, but in connection with original sin.

In chapter IV the tradition based on Boethius's logical works is exemplified by Peter Abailard and John of Salisbury. These authors cannot be seen as supporters of

3 I would prefer to call this Odo: of Cambrai (= Odo, or Odardus Camariensis). This Odo taught in Tournai (= Doornik) and was a bishop of Cambrai. He died in 1113.

STI, Gracia concludes (p. 195). Their accounts of individuation are primarily logical.

In his chapter V Gracia presents his conclusions and sketches the general background for interpreting the various solutions of the problem of individuation. A useful index of proper names and of subjects and terms concludes the book.

The framework (a-f) developed in chapter I is primarily meant as a philosophical lexicon and analysis of the various issues or the problem of individuation (p. 54). This chapter is very useful and it provides a basis for understanding both medieval and modern discussions of the problem.

This framework presented above recurs when a medieval author, or a part of his work, is discussed. Gracia determines whether an author (at least in a part of his writings) answers to the problem raised in the framework and if so, in what way. After these confrontations some short historical remarks are added.

III

The analyses of the conceptions of the medieval authors are very detailed, even to the extent that the *general* outlines of the development of the problem and the background from which the various positions originate, are not easily to be followed. Gracia is aware of this (p. 225), and in chapter V he adds some general philosophical and historical outlines. (Perhaps it would have been better, from a historian's point of view, to mention more dates of the medieval philosophers than the author actually does.)

It would have been preferable to analyse the general philosophical tenets of *each* medieval author before discussing his conception of individuality, especially because the early medieval authors did not discuss individuality as a separate problem. Only in his discussion of Eriugena and (as far as theological aspects are concerned) of Gilbert of Poitiers does Gracia give the main outlines of the (Neoplatonic) metaphysical framework. This metaphysical position explains why e.g. Eriugena is not primarily interested in the individuality of physical things. According to Eriugena as Neoplatonist universal ideas are the primary reality.

IV

My main objection to Gracia's book is the poor quality of his translations from the Latin (the Latin texts are in the notes). I concede that some of the printed texts used by Gracia are rather defective: not only Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (1841-1864), but also a modern edition like B. Geyer's of Abailard's *Logica Nostrorum petitioni sociorum* and his *Logica Ingredientibus* contain many errors (especially if one, like Gracia, does not consult the *second* and revised edition (1973) of the *Logica Nostrorum petitioni sociorum*). Although Gracia generally grasps the intention of the texts, his offences against the Latin are so frequent that in a next edition of the book almost all translations should be revised.

I can give only a few (i.e. ten) examples in this review:

- (1) P. 75, translation of note 37: *significatione* in line 4 of the Latin text has not been translated.
- (2) P. 136, translation of note 62: 'this phoenix nature' (*sic!*) (line 8 of the

translation) should be: 'this phoenix is a nature'. To understand this correction one should consult the lines of Odo's text omitted by Gracia.

- (3) P. 149, translation of note 85: 'the essence it is' (?) (line 6 of the translation) should be: 'it is an *essentia* (being, or: thing) because it exists'.
- (4) P. 160, translation of note 112: 'like their whole species' (line 6 of the translation) should be: 'like each other by their whole species'.
- (5) P. 165, translation of note 121: The Latin text reads: 'Diverse etenim subsistentie ex quarum alii homines et ex aliis equi sunt animalia, non imitationis vel imaginaria sed substantiali similitudine ipsos qui secundum eas subsistunt faciunt esse conformes'. Gracia's translation runs: 'And so the diverse subsistences by which men and horses are animals are not imitations or imaginations, but substantial similarities which just as they subsist make them conform [to each other]'. The translation should be: 'For the diverse subsistences by some of which men and by others of which horses are animals, do not by similarity of imitation or by imaginative similarity, but by substantial similarity make them who subsist according to those subsistences, to be conform to each other'.
- (6) P. 166, translation of note 121 (line 16 of the Latin text): *videlicet* means: 'viz. (namely)' not: 'it seems that'.
- (7) P. 166, translation of note 122: The Latin text: 'sicut enim ipsa, que sunt similia, sic et illa, secundum que sunt similia, necesse est esse diversa'. Gracia's translation: 'Those [things] which are similar are necessarily diverse by those [things] whereby, they are similar [and vice versa]'. The translation should be: 'Those essences which are similar are diverse; accordingly, those substances according to which they are similar necessarily are diverse'.

If one reads the *whole* section of which the Latin sentence quoted by Gracia is a part, the Latin text becomes clear. There is no ground for his interpretation: '[and vice versa]'.⁴

- (8) P. 166, translation of note 123: *aliquando* (line 1 of the Latin text) means 'sometimes' in medieval Latin, not 'finally'.
- (9) P. 208, translation of note 28: '*quibus esse conferunt*' (line 3 of the Latin text) means 'to which they give being', not 'in which they are present' (line 3 of the translation).
- (10) P. 210, translation of note 35: '*scilicet*' (line 5 of the translation) means: 'viz.', not 'of course'.

From this list of errors, which can easily be enlarged (especially in the section on Abailard), it is clear that Gracia's interpretations can not be correct in all cases. Sometimes his interpretations are saved by his logical insight, not by his knowledge of the Latin, other times the incorrect translation does not play a part in his analysis, finally also the corresponding analysis is false (esp. nos. 2, 3, 4 and 7 of the list above).⁴

4 See also section V, point 3 below.

V

Some further remarks on important philosophical topics may be made:

(1) *Predicari* should not in all cases be translated with 'to be predicated' in the sense that a proposition of the form 'S is P' is intended. Sometimes *predicari* means 'to be named': a name is meant to be applied, e.g. to something seen which thing exists in reality (e.g. in the texts of p. 155, n. 37 no evidence can be found to translate *predicari* with 'to be predicated').

(2) Though Gracia would rather avoid the terms 'nominalist' and 'realist' because of possible misunderstandings in connection with modern uses (p. 197), he nevertheless uses these terms. Gracia says (p. 197): 'One [position] identified universals with words alone and another interpreted them as things as well. Those who held the former view became known as nominalists, a term derived from the Latin term *nomen* (name). Those who held the latter view were called realists, for they believed that the universal was also some kind of *res* (thing or reality)'.

One may ask here: when did they become known as nominalists? Not in the Middle Ages themselves. The term *nominalis* is for the twelfth century used, for example, to characterise Abailard, who ascribed universality to *sermones*, i.e. words with meaning given by human institution.⁵ This should be interpreted as a conceptualist position, as I shall explain in more detail below.⁶ Roscellinus of Compiègne, often called 'nominalist' in modern literature, was never called *nominalis* in the Middle Ages, but a defender of the *sententia vocum*, i.e. as interpreting universals as words (*voces*).

The term *nominalis* was also used for Bernard of Chartres (died between 1124 and 1130) and his school. According to later writers such as John of Salisbury and Bonaventure (Bernard's thought is only indirectly known to us) he 'founded his position on the unity of the *nomen* ("name"), i.e. in *albus, alba, album* (the usual example, as Chenu says⁷) there is a constant nucleus preserved in words with different inflections, viz. 'white', for they have the same principal signification.⁸

The term *nominalis* was also used in the thirteenth century for some logicians who were known in Paris and who—according to Pelster⁹—at least denied any universality in things and, perhaps, also in concepts. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century the term was used for William of Ockham (ca. 1285–1349) and his school. *Nomen* is the *mental* name (i.e. the concept) with which the universal is identified.

5 See J. Vignaux, 'Nominalisme', in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (éd. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, E. Amann: Paris, 1931), col. 718.

6 See section V, point 4 below.

7 M.-D. Chenu, 'Grammaire et théologie aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 10 (1936), 5–28 (p. 14).

8 G. Nuchelmans, *Theories of the proposition. Ancient and medieval conceptions of the bearers of truth and falsity* (Amsterdam and London, 1973), 180–181.

9 F. Pelster, 'Nominales und Reales im 13. Jahrhundert', *Sophia, rivista internazionale di filosofia e storia della filosofia*, 111 (1945), 154–161.

(3) *Essentia* does not always mean 'essence' or 'quiddity' in the twelfth century. E.g. in Abailard's text on p. 196 (translation of note 7), on p. 198 (translation of note 13), and on p. 228 (translation of note 101) *essentia* should be translated with 'thing' or 'being'.¹⁰ In the writings of later scholastics under the influence of Avicenna *essentia* should be translated with 'essence', e.g. as opposed to existence.

(4) For a proper interpretation of an early medieval philosopher's view on individuation it is necessary to understand his interpretation of universals. As Gracia himself acknowledges, the philosophical problem of universals was at the focus of the interests in that time, not the problem of individuality (p. 256). In Abailard's writings there is an opposition between *sermo* and *vox* and a related problem of universals. In Gracia's book these problems are not very clearly dealt with. Our author says that, according to Abailard, a *sermo* has one and only one signification, whereas as *vox* may express many names (p. 216).

The difference between *vox* and *sermo* in Abailard should be conceived in another way. A key text is the *Logica Nostrorum petitioni sociorum* (ed. Geyer, 1973, p. 523, 11.39–42): 'Cum dicimus "hic sermo est genus", tale est ac si dicamus: "sermo huius institutionis est genus". Sed cum dicimus "haec vox est genus", tale est ac si dicamus: "haec essentia vocis est praedicabilis" etc., quod falsum est.' ('This *sermo* is a generic noun', should be interpreted as: "this word in regard to the meaning disposed upon it by human institution, is a generic noun". "This *vox* is a generic noun" should be interpreted as: "this being (*essentia*) [viz. in its physical existence, as it is written or spoken] can be said of something" etc. This is false.' This is one of the key passages in Abailard's works from which I conclude that a *vox* is a word (e.g. "man") as a physical entity, whereas *sermo* however is the same word ("man") taken in its significative function which is imposed upon the word by human institution'.¹¹

Having established the distinction between *sermo* and *vox* we can now discuss the problem of universals. Abailard wants to avoid any kind of realism, as Gracia himself points out (p. 219). It is not clear to me what he means by 'universal names were invented to express their [i.e. of the things outside the human mind] agreement?' (p. 220). Abailard's text quoted on p. 251 (note 78) from his *Tractatus de intellectibus*, II, pp. 123–124 is relevant here: 'Cum itaque dicitur "homo intelligitur", hic est sensus, quod aliquis per intellectum naturam concipit humanam, hoc est animal tale attendit' ('The sense of "Man is understood" is that someone through an act of intellection conceives human nature, that is: attends to such an animal').¹²

10 Cf. M. Tweedale, 'Abailard and the culmination of the old logic', in *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy from the rediscovery of Aristotle to the disintegration of scholasticism 1100–1600* (ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg: Cambridge, 1982), 154 (n. 41).

11 For this interpretation see L.M. de Rijk, 'The semantical impact of Abailard's solution of the problem of universals', in *Petrus Abaelardus (1079–1142). Person, Werk und Wirkung* (ed. Rudolf Thomas; *Trierer Theologische Studien*, vol. 38: Trier, 1980), 139–151, esp. p. 140.

12 See *La psicologia di Abelardo e il "Tractatus de intellectibus"* (ed. L.U. Ulivi: Roma, 1976), 103–127.

13 See also De Rijk (footnote 11).

So, in my view, Abailard takes a conceptualist position according to which a universal is identified with the content of our understanding and the agreement among things only consist in their being understood by a human intellect.¹³ This interpretation avoids any kind of realism.

Gracia certainly would have been benefited by the results of modern scholarship on this problem.¹⁴ We do not find any reference to or discussion of modern literature, however.

One final remark: in the notes there are some printing errors (not only the names of my *magistri* De Rijk ('De Rijjk' in the index, p. 288) and Waszink ('Weszink' pp. 282 and 290) are spelled incorrectly). In the Latin texts given in the notes there are omissions e.g. on p. 182, n. 63 (after *potest dividi*); p. 250, n. 69 (after *intendit*); p. 254, n. 118 (after *nominat*). Most of the few Greek words that occur in the book (pp. 67, 112) are inaccurately written.

To conclude this review, one can say that Gracia's book is stimulating from a systematical point of view: the various aspects of individuation have been discussed in detail and arouse interest. From a historical viewpoint his work is inaccurate and not completely reliable, mainly because of the defective translations of the Latin.

14 E.g. J.G. Sikes, *Peter Abailard* (New York, 1965 (first published 1932)); J. Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard* (Paris, 1969); J.R. Weinberg, *A short history of medieval philosophy* (Princeton, 1969 (first published 1964)); and L.M. de Rijk (footnote 11).