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978-0-521-36933-6 - The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism: 1100–1600

Norman Kretzmann and Anthony Kenny Jan Pinborg

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* finds its natural place after *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* in the sequence that begins with Guthrie's *History of Greek Philosophy*. The sequence is not altogether smooth, however. At the beginning of *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* its editor, A. H. Armstrong, observes that although the volume 'was originally planned in connexion with W. K. C. Guthrie's *History of Greek Philosophy*, . . . [it] has developed on rather different lines, and is not exactly a continuation of that work' (p. xii). Similarly, although *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* was conceived of as the sequel to *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, the relationship between the two is not so simple as their titles suggest; in fact, the fit between this volume and the Armstrong volume is less exact than that between the Armstrong volume and Professor Guthrie's plan. Many reviewers noted that the Armstrong volume seems misleadingly titled since it is really a study of only the Platonist tradition in later Greek and early medieval philosophy; but in concentrating in that way it does indeed complement Professor Guthrie's plan, which includes the Stoics and Epicureans as well as Aristotle while leaving out the Neoplatonists. On the other hand, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* cannot be put forward as the full realisation of Professor Armstrong's expressed hope 'that the philosophy of the thirteenth century and the later Middle Ages in the West, with later Jewish, Moslem, and Byzantine developments, will some day be dealt with in another Cambridge volume' (ibid.). We have of course undertaken to deal with the philosophy of the thirteenth century and the later Middle Ages in the West, but we have made no attempt to deal with later Jewish, Moslem, and Byzantine developments.

In deciding to restrict our attention to the Latin Christian West, we were motivated by two considerations. In the first place, we could scarcely hope to do justice to even our chosen material in a single volume of this size; if we had undertaken to deal with Arabic, Jewish, and Byzantine philosophy

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as well, we surely could not have dealt adequately with later medieval philosophy. And, in the second place, scholarship in those areas has not kept pace with research on medieval Christian philosophy. When a scholar with the authority of Richard Walzer acknowledges (on p. 643 of the Armstrong volume) that ‘It appears premature, at the present time, to embark on a history of Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages’ because ‘Too many of the basic facts are still unknown’, no one else is likely to be prepared, even twelve years afterwards, to undertake the task; and the cases of medieval Jewish and Byzantine philosophy seem much the same. Of course, Arabs, Jews, and Byzantine Greeks are among the philosophers mentioned in this volume, but they figure in it only as contributors to the development of Latin philosophy during the Middle Ages.

*The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* is described as covering the period ‘from the fourth century B.C. to the beginning of the twelfth century A.D., from the Old Academy to St Anselm’ (p. xii); but it encompasses those 1,500 years primarily in order to trace the development of Platonism after Plato. The sense in which that description is intended leaves ample room, of course, for Professor Guthrie’s volumes on Plato and Aristotle, on the Stoics and Epicureans. Similarly, the fact that our predecessor volume reaches as far forward as the beginning of the twelfth century is explained by the facts that the philosophy of St Anselm may be thought of as the highwater mark of medieval Platonism and that Anselm died in 1109. Our volume does indeed concentrate on philosophy after Anselm, beginning with Abelard, but because it is part of our aim to present the medieval *Aristotelian* tradition and the scholastic innovations that developed in that tradition, we must reach back to consider many philosophers older than Anselm who were understandably left out of account in the Armstrong volume.

Like several other Cambridge Histories but unlike most histories of philosophy, this volume is the work of many hands; forty-one scholars from ten different countries contributed to it. We subdivided the material and assigned the subdivisions to individual contributors with the intention of providing a more faithful impression of the state of current research than could have been provided by a smaller number of contributors to whom larger areas had been assigned. Even with such a strategy we have naturally had to emphasise some subjects at the expense of others that are equally important, but we tried to make those difficult decisions in such a way that our emphasis would fall on material that had been neglected in the established literature on medieval philosophy and on material regarding

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which recent research had been making most progress. Thus the contributors have devoted relatively little attention to theological issues, even to the philosophically outstanding medieval achievement in rational (or natural) theology, for that side of medieval thought has not been neglected. And because the areas of concentration in contemporary philosophical scholarship on medieval thought naturally reflect the emphases in contemporary philosophy, our editorial strategy has led to a concentration on those parts of later medieval philosophy that are most readily recognisable as philosophical to a student of twentieth-century philosophy.

By combining the highest standards of medieval scholarship with a respect for the insights and interests of contemporary philosophers, particularly those working in the analytic tradition, we hope to have presented medieval philosophy in a way that will help to end the era during which it has been studied in a philosophical ghetto, with many of the major students of medieval philosophy unfamiliar or unsympathetic with twentieth-century philosophical developments, and with most contemporary work in philosophy carried out in total ignorance of the achievements of the medievals on the same topics. It is one of our aims to help make the activity of contemporary philosophy intellectually continuous with medieval philosophy to the extent to which it already is so with ancient philosophy. Such a relationship has clearly benefited both philosophical scholarship on ancient philosophy and contemporary work in philosophy, and we hope to foster a similar mutually beneficial relationship between medieval philosophy and contemporary philosophy.

The standard approach to the history of philosophy is, of course, by way of the chronological study of the doctrines of individual philosophers. That approach is not well-suited to the history of medieval philosophy, in which the identity of individuals is sometimes uncertain, the attribution of doctrines or works to individual philosophers is often disputable and sometimes impossible, and even the chronological succession of men or of works is often conjectural. We have organised our History around philosophical topics or disciplines rather than around philosophers, but not only because the standard approach is not well-suited to our period. Our principal aims in this volume are, we believe, better served by the topical approach than they would be by the standard approach. (We think of the biographical sketches supplied at the end of the volume as an important supplement to our topical approach.) In order to help the reader to discern the plan of this History, which is to a large extent not organised historically, we provide the following synopsis of the contributions.

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The forty-six chapters that make up the text of this volume are arranged in eleven parts. The first and shortest of those parts is the work of two members of the editorial staff and is designed to introduce the reader to some of the distinctively medieval forms of philosophical literature. Such an introduction seems called for not only because most twentieth-century philosophical readers are likely to be unfamiliar with the presentation of philosophy in the form of *quaestiones* or *sophismata*, for instance, but also because the literary forms of scholasticism are more influential on the character of the philosophy presented or developed in those forms than are the literary forms of any other period in the history of philosophy (with the possible exception of Greek philosophy before Aristotle).

In the two chapters of Part II Bernard Dod and Charles Lohr provide accounts of the transmission of Aristotle's works to the Latin Middle Ages and of the changes effected in the form and content of thought as a result of that legacy from antiquity. None of the succeeding chapters of the book can be properly understood except against the historical background delineated in Part II.

The fact that Parts III, IV, and V all contain the word 'logic' in their titles may suggest an imbalance in the organisation of this History, and the fact that three members of the editorial staff have contributed chapters to these Parts might even suggest that editorial predilections account for the imbalance. What medieval philosophers thought of as logic does indeed figure very prominently in this book; several chapters in Parts VI, VII, and XI are also principally concerned with aspects of medieval logic. But any history of medieval philosophy which, like ours, leaves theology out of account is bound to devote more space to logic than to any other branch of philosophy. The imbalance, if there is one, is embedded in the nature of medieval scholasticism, in which the unusual importance of logic is partly a consequence of the fact that during the Middle Ages logic was conceived of more broadly than in any other period of the history of philosophy. A great deal of work that will strike a twentieth-century philosophical reader as belonging to metaphysics, philosophy of language, linguistics, natural philosophy, or philosophy of science was carried on during the Middle Ages by men who thought of themselves as working in logic. Moreover, the achievements of medieval logicians are historically more distinctive and philosophically more valuable than anything else in medieval thought, with the possible exception of rational theology; when Renaissance humanists waged their successful battle against medieval scholasticism, it was, understandably, scholastic logic against which they directed their fiercest

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attacks. After Christianity and Aristotelianism, the most important influence on the character of the philosophy of the Middle Ages is the medieval conception of logic.

The dominance of logic is to some extent the result of an historical accident: the fact that until the middle of the twelfth century the only ancient philosophy directly accessible to the Latin medievals was contained in two of Aristotle's works on logic, the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*. These very short and very difficult books, along with a handful of associated treatises stemming from late antiquity, constituted the secular philosophical library of the early Middle Ages and became known as the Old Logic by contrast with the New Logic – the rest of Aristotle's *Organon* – as it became available during the second half of the twelfth century. To the extent to which the philosophy of the later Middle Ages is a development of earlier medieval philosophy it rests on the accomplishments of men who had been working out the implications and ramifications of the Old Logic, and that essential contribution to later medieval philosophy is presented by Sten Ebbesen, D. P. Henry, and Martin Tweedale in the three chapters of Part III.

The development of medieval logic during and after the advent of the New Logic is explored in Parts IV and V. Several of the twelve chapters of these Parts will help to show how far beyond Aristotelian logic medieval logic eventually developed in various directions, but the non-Aristotelian character of later medieval logic is most striking in its semantic theories, different aspects of which are presented by L. M. de Rijk, Alain de Libera, Paul Vincent Spade, Gabriel Nuchelmans, Norman Kretzmann, and Jan Pinborg in Part IV.

The branches of medieval logic considered in Part V have not yet received as much scholarly attention as has medieval semantic theory, but, as the contributions of Eleonore Stump, Ivan Boh, Paul Vincent Spade, Simo Knuuttila, and Calvin Normore help to show, they are likely to prove at least as rewarding to the further study they deserve. The first three chapters of Part V are devoted to issues associated with logic in its central role as theory of inference; the fourth and fifth chapters present medieval contributions to inquiries that lie on the border between logic and metaphysics.

Metaphysics and epistemology were very highly developed in later medieval philosophy, and there are enormous quantities of relevant textual material. The six chapters of Part VI sort out some of the more rewarding issues and explore a few of them to considerable depth, but no one is more

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keenly aware than the authors of these chapters that they have had to restrict themselves to merely alluding to developments that deserve detailed discussion. Fortunately, the secondary literature in these fields is more extensive than in most of the fields dealt with in this History, although a great deal of it is becoming obsolete as more texts become available and traditional interpretations are revised in the light of new evidence and changing philosophical perspectives. The first two chapters, by John Wippel and Marilyn Adams, are concerned with topics at the core of the subject-matter of metaphysics. Chapters 21 and 22, by Joseph Owens and John Boler, deal with epistemological issues that arise in different guises throughout the history of philosophy even though some of them appear here in distinctively medieval trappings. In Chapters 23 and 24 Christian Knudsen and Eileen Serene deal with epistemological issues adjacent to or included within medieval logic – semantic theory in Chapter 23, theory of inference in Chapter 24.

An important part of medieval natural philosophy, too, can be assimilated to medieval logic, as is clearly shown by Edith Sylla and John Murdoch in Chapters 27 and 28 of Part VII. Aristotle's *Physics* informed the developments in later medieval logic that look to us like speculative physical theory or proto-mathematics, but it served also as an independent source of developments in natural philosophy, especially those to be found in the many commentaries on the *Physics*. In the first chapter of Part VII James Weisheipl surveys these developments and the role of natural philosophy in the medieval university curriculum. The Condemnation of 1277, often referred to in this History because of its apparent effect on the character of later medieval thought, is summarised by Edward Grant in the second chapter of Part VII, especially with regard to its probable influence on the development of natural philosophy.

Part VIII begins with a full survey of the origins and development of philosophy of mind in the Middle Ages, carried out in a series of three co-ordinated chapters by Edward Mahoney and Z. Kuksewicz in a way that will help the reader understand not only medieval but also classical modern theories of mind. Medieval accounts of the theoretical links between philosophy of mind and moral philosophy are examined in J. B. Korolec's chapter on freedom of the will and Alan Donagan's chapter on Aquinas' theory of action.

Parts IX and X, on moral and political theory, are alike in beginning with chapters, by Georg Wieland and Jean Dunbabin respectively, that show how the reception and interpretation of Aristotle's treatises on those subjects shaped their development during the later Middle Ages. The



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remaining chapters in each of these Parts deal with specific ethical or political issues that were especially important to the medievals. In Part IX, on ethics, Georg Wieland examines attempts to accommodate the Aristotelian ideal of happiness within a Christian context, Timothy Potts lays out the particularly subtle medieval theory of conscience, and, in Chapter 37, D. E. Luscombe presents material that forms a natural transition between ethics and politics in his account of the natural foundations of morality and law. In Part X, on politics, Chapter 39, by A. S. McGrade, takes up the topics introduced in Part IX, Chapter 37, but in a more specifically political context. D. E. Luscombe contributes a chapter to Part X that is associated with his chapter in Part IX, this time pursuing the topic of the role of nature in the foundations of social and political institutions as the medievals saw it. Jonathan Barnes' chapter on justifications for war illuminates medieval applications of Christian principles and theories of international politics.

Because the humanist attack on medieval scholasticism aimed especially at overthrowing late medieval logic and most of the linguistic theory and educational practice associated with it, the first three chapters of Part XI, on the end of the scholastic period, are in one way or another devoted to issues of the sort that medieval logicians had concerned themselves with. In Chapter 42 E. J. Ashworth details the loss or repudiation of medieval accomplishments in logic, in Chapter 43 Lisa Jardine focuses on the educational reforms that may have constituted the primary motivation for the humanists' anti-scholasticism, and in Chapter 44 W. Keith Percival describes the new attitude towards languages and literature that saw them as subjects in their own right and not merely as instruments. In the last two chapters of Part XI and of the book John Trentman and P.J. FitzPatrick show us, first, the survival of scholasticism in the era of classical modern philosophy and, finally, the revival of scholasticism in the nineteenth century – a revival without which, as Dr FitzPatrick observes, this History would hardly have been written, however different its orientation may be from that of neoscholasticism.

One of the special virtues of a work of philosophical scholarship produced by many specialists of different sorts is to be found in the treatment of the same thinkers or closely related topics from different points of view. No system of cross-referencing could present the connections among these forty-six chapters adequately without becoming obtrusive; we urge the reader to refer frequently to the Index Nominum and Index Rerum in order to take full advantage of this History.

Limitations of space have naturally made it impossible for any of the

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contributing specialists to deal fully with his or her subject matter here, and so the bibliographical references are important not merely as citations of evidence but also, and especially, as guides to further study. The references are presented in the footnotes to the chapters in forms that are brief without being cryptic, and all such references are filled out in the general Bibliography. The Biographies, which are designed to help the reader make convenient identifications of the more prominent figures in medieval philosophy's enormous cast of characters, also contain many specialised bibliographical references that do not appear in the Bibliography.



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**I**

**MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL  
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