

ANA MARÍA MORA-MÁRQUEZ, *THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY NOTION OF SIGNIFICATION: THE DISCUSSIONS AND THEIR ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT*, (INVESTIGATING MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY, 10), LEIDEN: BRILL, 2015. 183 PP. ISBN 9789004298675 (HBK)

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This is the 10th volume in the series *Investigating Medieval Philosophy*, published by Brill, and consists of four, somewhat uneven, chapters. In the first chapter, Mora-Márquez begins by focusing on, and explaining in great detail, the two primary sources for thirteenth-century debates about signification, viz., Aristotle's *Perihermeneias* and Boethius' second commentary on the same. The most important passage in the former, which is examined at length, is the second sentence, where Aristotle says (and I paraphrase) that "written and vocal words are signs of concepts and things." Thanks to Boethius, however, we are informed of a discrepancy between Aristotle's account of language in his *Perihermeneias* and what he presents in his *Categories*, namely that in the *Categories*, things are immediately signified by words, whereas in the *Perihermeneias*, concepts are immediately signified by words. In time, this conflict developed into what Duns Scotus called a *magna altercatio*.

In the second, and by far the longest, chapter Mora-Márquez turns to this *magna altercatio* about whether concepts or things are primarily signified by language. In the first half of the thirteenth-century, most authors, such as Nicholas of Paris and Robert Kilwardby, hold that concepts are primarily signified by utterances. However, by the end of the thirteenth-century, this view gives way to the opposite view, which claims that external things are primarily signified by utterances. In order to make sense of these various debates, the author divides up the objections into three main kinds: a categorical angle advocated by Radulphus Brito and Walter Burley; a semiotic angle, advocated by Peter of Auvergne,

Radulphus Brito, Roger Bacon, and Peter John Olivi (the latter two being strongly influenced by Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*); and a verificational angle, advocated by Martin of Dacia and Radulphus Brito. In the second part of this chapter, Mora-Márquez turns to the interesting question of whether words lose their signification with the destruction of their significate. For example, would it be true that "every man of necessity is an animal" (*omnis homo de necessitate est animal*) if no men existed? Accordingly, Mora-Márquez sketches four different answers to this question: Roger Bacon argues that words lose their signification and so the statement is neither true nor false; Boethius of Dacia argues that terms do not lose their signification, nevertheless the statement is false since no man exists; Peter John Olivi also argues that terms do not lose their signification, but the statement is true in one sense and false in another; and finally an Anonymus author argues that the terms do not lose their signification and thus the statement is always true, regardless of whether there are any men in actual existence or not.

In the third, and shortest, chapter, the author introduces the influence Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* has in the thirteenth-century debates over language. Writing about the same time as Boethius, Priscian became the main source for the theoretical study of grammar in the late Middle Ages, however, his account of grammar differed in substantial ways from Aristotle's and Boethius's description. Whereas Aristotle seemed to be primarily, if not exclusively concerned with truth and falsehood, and thus his account of language focused only on subjects and predicates, Priscian seemed to be primarily concerned with poetry, and thus he introduced other basic parts of speech, including participles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions.

In the final chapter, Mora-Márquez focuses on the role of the significate in grammar and in logic, first focusing on pre-modists, such as Ps-Kilwardby and Peter Helias, and then finishing the chapter with an analysis of the modist tradition, including Martin and Boethius of Dacia and Radulphus Brito. On the whole, as Mora-Márquez points out, the thirteenth-century evinces a tendency towards a narrower and more coherent use of the notion of signification, which compliments the intent to solidify the scientific status of logic and grammar.

On the whole, this is a very thorough work. The author limits her study to a few key issues and traces those issues as they were debated by the key figures of the thirteenth century. Its only drawback, which is also its strength, is that it is very technical. The thirteenth century debates concerning signification are complicated by any standard, but Mora-Márquez navigates them very well. It is

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definitely written for the medieval scholar and is a welcome contribution to a much neglected aspect of medieval thought.