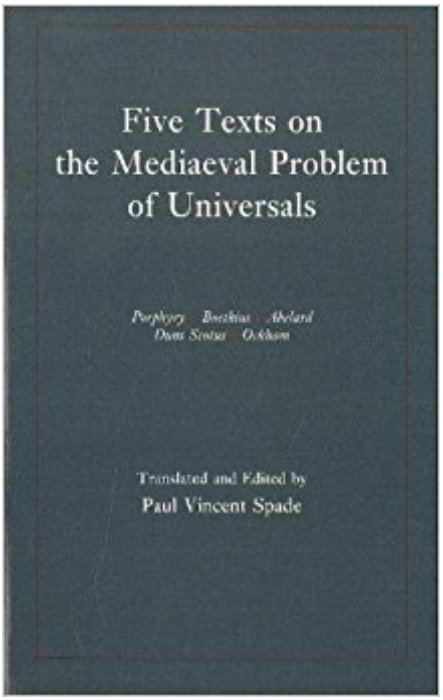
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Five Texts On The Mediaeval Problem Of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham



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Synopsis

New translations of the central mediaeval texts on the problem of universals are presented here in an affordable edition suitable for use in courses in mediaeval philosophy, history of mediaeval philosophy, and universals. Includes a concise Introduction, glossary of important terms, notes, and bibliography.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The translations are exceptionally sound philosophically, and they are as readable as is consistent with linguistic accuracy and fidelity to content. --Mathematical Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Greek, Latin --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"It is easy to motivate the problem of universals. Consider these two capital letters: A A. Ignore everything else about them and for now observe only that they are of the same color; they are both black.... Isn’t it obvious that you see two colors here, two blacknesses: the blackness of the first A, this blackness, and then the blackness of the second A, that blackness?... But aren’t they visually as distinct as the two letters themselves?... The problem of universals is in effect the problem of deciding between these answers" (pg vii).The reason I included this long quote is to illustrate Paul Vincent Spade’s wonderful introduction. He describes in a nutshell the underling problem of

Universals in a clear and precise way. This is especially important since the the Late Antique and Medieval philosophers who developed on the theory never manage to explain themselves this precisely. The importance of clarity and concise analysis is vital since the Medieval dialogue about the nature of Universals is complex, sometimes excruciatingly difficult, and an introduction which lays out the basic premises and questions is the first step of comprehension! Also, the introduction briefly summarizes each text EXCERPT and information on each author present in the volume. This volume includes excerpts from from Porhyry's 'Isagoge,' Boethius' 'Second Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge,' Peter Abelard's Glosses on Porphyry in his 'Logica 'ingredientibus,'' John Duns Scotus 'Ordinatio,' and William of Ockham's 'Ordinatio'. These excerpts trace in chronological order the main philosophers involved with the question of Universals starting with the questions first posed by Porphyry.The introduction and excerpts form an amazing (yet still somewhat difficult) text for a student interested in Medieval Philosophy. However, the volume's wonderful index of the main terms is a great tool for easy clarification and reference. This is simply an invaluable resource and a great starting point for the study of the Medieval problem of Universals!

That medieval institution we now call "the University" was started somewhere around the early 13th century in western Europe. In Paris, Bologna, and Oxford, the fledgling educational institution established itself against a backdrop of numerous Cathedral Schools, and distinguished itself from such via its enlarged curriculum and concentration of many masters and scholars at a single location in a guild structure.The University had quite a number of important issues with which it had to deal, including structural, political, and educational, but one of the greatest lay within the philosophical investigation of the subject called "universals" (confusingly, the similarity of the words "University" and "universals" seems to imply these two are closely related, but in actuality, are not). Universals was a concept brought forward from late antiquity via a man named Boethius, a Roman scholar who described various Platonic philosophical concerns in a work called "The Consolations of Philosophy" in the 5th century. (Boethius also translated an important related work, the "Isagoge," written by Porphyry.) The question of Universals concerns wether certain abstract qualities, such as color, shapes, etc., exist as Platonic, metaphysical realities, or are simply man-made naming conventions. Boethius' works were picked up and transmitted to the medieval setting, where scholars working in the early University began wrestling with this issue, important because it had become an essential component of the "quadrivium," the upper curriculum of the University (the lower part being called the "trivium"). The problem proved sufficiently durable to make it become a fundamental component of University education for at least two centuries, and helping establish

what was to become known as "Scholastic" theology. The University as an educational structure did not shed the problem of universals until the Renaissance, at which time it was abandoned, rather than solved (at least, in many minds).Spade's work here provides a good introduction to the problem of universals, but then goes on to provide Spade's own translation of a number of key works regarding the subject, including Porphyry and Boethius (both mentioned above), Abelard (one of the first, and most controversial, scholastic theologians), Duns Scotus (a key early scholastic from Scotland) and Ockham (a 14th century English philosopher who studied at Oxford). Due to its subject matter and the manner of presentation, this is not a book for trivial reading, and the attempt to follow and understand the content is likely to prove exceedingly difficult (hence the fact that this subject consumed more than two centuries of academic debate and discourse), but if you want to examine some source documents on the subject translated directly into English, this book will work well. Spade has also incorporated numerous footnotes and comments to assist with the task, and a short glossary of terms assists, as well. A bibliography of additional source materials is also provided.

Some good sections. Find the rest in a library.According to the editor (Spade), the medieval problem of universals attempted to address Porphyry's ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Three Unanswered Questions:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•1. Do Genera and species have true being, or do they reside in opinion only?2. If they have true being, are they corporeal essences or incorporeal?3. Do they have extra-sensory existence or are they located within the senses?Scotus: Universals are only distinct from the entity by a formal distinction, but this distinction is not merely a product of the mind.Criticisms:*The editor occasionally introduces new terminology in the translation without explaining what it is.*The selections do not actually appear to address each other. Boethius writes on PorphyryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Isagogue, which is fine, but when Scotus deals with Boethius, he deals with BÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s work on the Trinity. I suppose thatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not too big a deal, since this is one of the few places where Scotus is halfway lucid (p. 91).Recommendation:The sections on Abelard and Boethius could have been dropped. Instead, one could have added John Scotus Eriugena and Maximus the Confessor. In many ways they were harder realists than even Plato.

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