INTRODUCTION

On the most basic level, the articles brought together in the present volume aim to contribute to the charting of the (often subtle) links between the medieval and early modern periods in the fields of metaphysics, philosophical theology, and modal theory. In selecting this line of inquiry the volume is consciously intended to offer support for the stance that in the higher or speculative sciences no sharp divide exists between the later Middle Ages, on the one hand, and the Renaissance and early modern period, on the other.

In adopting such an approach, one emphasizing historical continuity instead of discontinuity, the volume can be seen as challenging at least two related sets of convictions concerning the intellectual life of the period 1400-1700. First, prominent Renaissance and early modern thinkers portrayed their own intellectual projects and accomplishments as radical breaks with the scholasticism characteristic of the Middle Ages and also dominant in their own time; the volume to no small extent takes as its point of departure a reluctance – or, at least, a hesitation – to accept these bold claims. Second, a large part of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography has taken the Renaissance and early modern claims of fundamental innovation at face-value; in emphasizing the continuity that exists between the thought of the medieval and of the early modern periods, the volume is part of an attempt to offer a more balanced view of the intellectual production of the later period. Simply accepting the self-assessment of Renaissance and early modern thinkers certainly provides the intellectual historian with a very convenient way of organizing an overwhelming amount of historical data, inasmuch as it gives a clear-cut division between what is modern and what is medieval, between what must be included in any historical account and what can safely be ignored. Nevertheless this type of rigid historical periodization becomes much less convincing when one turns to the sources. Especially during the latter half of the twentieth century a great deal of fresh research uncovered more and more common ground between the medieval schoolmen and their early modern counter-parts. A brilliant and well-known example of this

R.L. Friedman and L.O. Nielsen (eds.), The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400-1700, 1–7.

pioneering work is the thoroughgoing re-evaluation of the Aristotelian traditions in the Renaissance undertaken by Charles B. Schmitt.[1]

The papers collected here fall into two distinct but closely related groups. The articles that form the first group – those written by Hoenen, Panaccio, Honnefelder, Biard, Friedman, Knuuttila, Kusukawa, and Schabel – originated within the framework of an international network that was focused on reconsidering the borderline between medieval and early modern thought. For reasons of practicality, the network was organized around four symposia of which each had a particular discipline or a set of related disciplines as its focus. The chosen subjects were the traditions of Aristotelian natural philosophy;[2] ethics and political philosophy;[3] grammar and logic;[4] and metaphysics and philosophical theology. With the support of the European Science Foundation (ESF) larger and smaller meetings and workshops were organized during the period 1999-2001. The main meeting of the group that dealt with the traditions of metaphysics and philosophical theology took place at the Institute for Advanced Training in Järvenpää, Finland, in the late summer of 2000. Among the contributions that derive their origins from this gathering, some view their subject from the vantage point of institutional history, whereas others deal with the development of particular doctrines or ways that various strands in the transmission and development of learning interacted. This diversity of approach closely reflects the overarching aim of the network, which was to further contact between various disciplines.

The articles in the second group – those by Coombs, Knebel, Roncaglia, and Mondadori – sprang from a more informal collaborative effort aimed at charting the reception and development in the early modern period of medieval modal logic and modal theory more generally. These articles have, of course, intrinsic value as contributions to the history of modal theory. Moreover, they contribute to the main objective of the volume by

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[1] See in particular C.B. Schmitt, Q. Skinner, and E. Kessler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, as well as B.P. Copenhaver and C.B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*. (*A History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 3). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, and their extensive bibliographies.

[2] The results of the work by this group are published in C. Leijenhorst, Ch. Lüthy, and J.M.M.H. Thijssen (eds.), *The Dynamics of Aristotelian Natural Philosophy from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*. (Medieval and Early Modern Science, vol. 5). Leiden: Brill, 2002.

[3] J. Kraye and R. Saarinen (eds.), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Ethics and Politics*. (forthcoming in The New Synthese Historical Library).

[4] S. Ebbesen and R.L. Friedman (eds.), *John Buridan and Beyond. The Language Sciences 1300-1700* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters, forthcoming).

investigating the way that medieval thought served as a fertile basis for developments in the early modern period.

In spite of their diverse origins, the two groups of papers complement each other inasmuch as the study of the nature and the origin of possibility and impossibility, contingency and necessity is of immediate and obvious importance for the science of metaphysics. Thus, throughout the period, modalities and modal logic were of pivotal importance in a great deal of theological and metaphysical speculation, just as discussion of explicitly metaphysical and theological questions furthered significant developments in modal theory.[5]

The centrality of modality and modal logic in philosophical theology and metaphysics is clearly brought out by Chris Schabel's study of the early modern discussions concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom: if God's foreknowledge is unerring, then what he foreknows cannot not occur; if this is the case, the question arises: how can man enjoy freedom of the will? The discussions this question gave rise to are well known to historians of both Renaissance (e.g. Salutati and Pomponazzi) and early modern thought (e.g., to some extent, the Erasmus-Luther debate and the later clashes on *scientia media*). By surveying the discussion of the issue from 1250 through roughly 1700, however, Schabel is able to show that Peter Auriol's (d. 1322) radical reduction of the scope of divine foreknowledge had a likely impact on Pietro Pomponazzi and possibly also on Martin Luther.

Two articles on the scope and object of metaphysics also reveal the centrality of modal issues. Thus, Ludger Honnefelder argues that Kant's transcendental philosophy can best be understood, historically speaking, as part of a metaphysical tradition initiated by John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and mediated by, among others, Francisco Suárez and Christian Wolff. Central to this Scotistic tradition of metaphysics is the univocity of the concept of being. Such a concept of being has as its content the minimal being associated with non-repugnance to existence – i.e. pure logical possibility – and it forms the subject matter of metaphysics as transcendental philosophy. Thus, at its very foundation, metaphysics is tied to modal issues.

Joël Biard studies the role of God as metaphysical first principle (i.e. first cause), and here again modality plays an important role. Biard examines several medieval views on what the study of metaphysics may contribute to our knowledge of God, his existence, and his attributes, and argues that Scotus moved God into the heart of metaphysical speculation. A

[5] For a discussion of the interaction between modalities and theology and metaphysics, see S. Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1993.

fundamental principle in Scotus' theology is the utter contingency of God's will, and he rejected physical proofs of God's existence precisely because he believed that they compromise God's absolute freedom. To most medieval thinkers, however, God is first principle in the sense that he guarantees the natural order; Biard compares this view to Descartes' philosophy and argues that Descartes too used God as first principle, but in the sense of guarantor of human knowledge.

Simo Knuuttila investigates how medieval and early modern thinkers assessed the scope and validity of the general laws of logic. With regard to modal theory, one of the two specific cases Knuuttila addresses is that of Descartes' well-known claim that eternal truths are dependent on God's will, i.e. that not even the "logically impossible" binds God in any way, but rather depends on God's power and will. The other instance that Knuuttila examines is that of the difficulties raised for syllogistic logic by Christian belief in the Trinity, and here Knuuttila scrutinizes Martin Luther's views, along with the twelfth- and fourteenth-century background. He shows that the logical conception of merely extensional identity, of great influence later on, was originally developed in medieval discussions of the logic of the Trinity.

The focus on the divine origins of logical possibility in Knuuttila's paper ties in directly with the second group of articles in the volume. Thus, Jeffrey Coombs' paper on the origins of logical possibility among Catholic scholastics of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries is a detailed examination of precisely this topic. Where does logical possibility arise? Coombs identifies three main answers: transcendentalists, who claim its origin is independent of God; modal voluntarists (like Descartes), who maintain it depends on the divine will; and divine conceptualists, who say that it depends upon the divine intellect. Coombs details many arguments for each of the three positions as well as many arguments against each one offered by proponents of one of the rival views. Also in this context, the close ties between modal theory, metaphysics, and philosophical theology come to the fore.

Sven Knebel investigates the rise of the use of "moral modalities" among scholastic (especially Jesuit) theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Are there degrees of possibility and impossibility, contingency and necessity? Knebel traces in primarily theological contexts (for instance, discussions of salvation) the development of a probabilistic notion of, e.g. impossibility, on which something is "morally" impossible when there is only the slightest chance of its ever occurring. Thus, moral impossibility is not as strict as metaphysical or physical impossibility. Moreover, Knebel shows how moral modalities were employed in the

discussion of a genuine "moral modal logic" by seventeenth-century Jesuits in Spain.

A popular seventeenth-century logical handbook, Christoph Scheibler's *Opus logicum*, is the focus of Gino Roncaglia's article, in which Scheibler's work is used as a springboard to examine modal logic in Germany in the period. Scheibler divided his discussion of modality into two distinct parts, and Roncaglia follows this division. The first part deals with modality as a metaphysical phenomenon, in Scheibler's case how evaluating modality involves a metaphysical consideration of essences and essential properties. The second part treats a more properly logical or propositional modality, including such themes as the difference between absolute and modal propositions, the distinction between the compound and the divided sense of a proposition, and the number of modes. In his exposition, Roncaglia considers quite a few other figures from the period, granting us a view of rich and dynamic debates on a variety of topics as well as their medieval background.

Fabrizio Mondadori looks for the roots of the central Leibnizian notion of "compossibility" in the thought of Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus. Mondadori maintains that to the scholastic "syntactic" notion of compossibility, which was a reflexive and symmetric relation, Leibniz added transitivity to arrive at his "metaphysical" notion of compossibility. Thus, the medieval view was a foundation that Leibniz developed and altered significantly. Of crucial importance to the medieval syntactic view of compossibility is non-repugnance or lack of any contradictory opposition. Especially Scotus, Mondadori concludes, took "the first major step in the direction of a purely 'syntactic', as well as of a 'metaphysical', treatment of the notion of compossibility."

The majority of the papers in the volume, then, deal in central ways with the boundary between modality/modal logic and metaphysics or philosophical theology. The other papers contained here explore early modern metaphysics and philosophical theology from somewhat different angles. Thus, Maarten Hoenen studies one of the most striking intellectual phenomenon of the fifteenth century: the *Wegestreit* – the controversy between, on the one hand, the *via moderna*, based on nominalism and with its roots in Ockham, Buridan, and Marsilius of Inghen, and on the other, the *via antiqua*, taking its point of departure in realism and looking back to Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. Hoenen gives the *status quaestionis* on the *Wegestreit*, its origins, and how it manifested itself at fifteenth-century universities. Just as importantly, Hoenen demonstrates how factors external to the actual philosophical debates between the two groups played an important role in the fifteenth-century