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Philosophie des Mittelalters: Eine Einführung by Hannes Möhle[*]

Hannes Möhle's challenging study examines a range of key medieval philosophical issues, and illustrates how philosophy stood separately from theology even while heavily influenced by Church and theological matters. Medieval philosophy's service to the Church, which often determined the direction of philosophical thinking, did not prevent constant philosophical development alongside a notable degree of intellectual experimentation, curiosity, and fractiousness. Möhle's focus on issues makes for cohesive prose. Much medieval thought, as he describes it, was reactive to pressing intellectual concerns including the influence of Arab writers or of controversial churchmen such as Abelard.

Given the dynamic, even disputatious nature of both medieval theologians and wider society, philosophy often faced fresh challenges, such as with the introduction of Aristotle's corpus. The author's tendency to introduce the background to an issue (such as analogy versus univocity), relevant primary citations, and then analysis of these sources in relation to the issues clearly introduces the thinking styles of these figures and how they paralleled or diverged from each other. The

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author's focus on a few basic themes allows a deeper analysis of certain currents of thought at the expense of a wider discussion. Other books may therefore serve as better overall introductions to the period's philosophy. Möhle at times demands much of his readers' philosophical and historical knowledge, which may discourage some.

The "Introduction" discusses Augustine and basic philosophical challenges confronted by Christians in late antiquity while emphasizing the gospel's universal nature: Christianity "is not only about overcoming social barriers to provide joy, but it is an epistemically-founded universal claim in relation to the truth."[1] Throughout the book Möhle provides such definitions that speak to the contemporary reader, which demonstrates the timelessness of the issues confronted by medieval man. The book is not so much a history of ideas as an introduction to how medieval minds grappled with timeless truths that still challenge us. The debates over these philosophical issues found fresh impetus from Christian belief, the author shows.

Chapter Two, "Glaube und Vernunft," begins with Anselm, the "father of scholasticism," and his contribution to the development of the relationship of faith and reason. His *fides quarens intellectum* and *credo ut intelligam* form two pillars of Christian thought, one based on faith, the other reason. Möhle observes that it wasn't so much what Anselm said about the essence of God that had far-reaching consequences, as Augustine had already said as much, but the method the Archbishop of Canterbury established. As with his treatment of other critical thinkers of this millennia, Möhle spends considerable time examining Anselm's works and key notions, such as differentiating between *cogitare* and *intelligere*. In turning to Abelard after Anselm, the author highlights how the debate on faith and reason took an unexpected and, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, even revolutionary and

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[1] *Ibid*., 10. All citations are the reviewer's translations.

rebellious turn. The author details the resistance of traditional thinkers such as Bernard and Bonaventure. Möhle's analyses of individual thinkers include much nuance, as he pinpoints, for instance, Aristotle's influence on the Augustinian Bonaventure.

Chapter Three, "Natur und Schöpfung," highlights the contributions of Adelard of Bath, who translated many works from Arabic, and of Bernard of Chartres, who developed a Platonic understanding of matter and the archetypes. In Bernard's view, the "innate forms acted as bridges between the archetypal spirit-ideals and the world of images displayed by the perceivable world, though in no way were they a fourth instance besides God, the archetypal Ideals, and *hyle* (matter)."[2] Möhle includes a less conventional thinker, the pantheist David of Dinant and the reaction to his teaching, particularly by Albertus Magnus. This highlights philosophy's own sphere which was separate from theology. Philosophy served as a tool for finding solutions to the endless stream of intellectual issues generated throughout the period. While the author further discusses the influence of Platonism on the medieval worldview and the upheaval caused by the translation of Aristotle's works in the thirteenth century, he skips over significant areas of scientific inquiry, such as the work on illumination and optics by Robert Grosseteste and others, which leaves readers with an incomplete understanding of medieval philosophy and its critical and long-lasting influence on science.

Later topics include foundations to and limitations of the truth. Starting from Augustine, the author unfortunately leaves much out by skipping ahead to the reception of Aristotle's thought in the thirteenth century, including by Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. Such fascinating and vital thinkers such as Raymundo Lull and Gerbert Aurillac are, unfortunately, passed over. Readers do get a sense of the cen-

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[2] *Ibid.*, 75.

tral role Augustine played for medieval philosophy. His association of reason with God and God's creation formed the backdrop to much medieval philosophical activity. Möhle cites the North African saint: "So we declare that everything was created through reason. Man does not have the same design basis as a horse; it would be deceptive to doubt such a thing. All things are created according to their own reasons."[3] Where else are we to find the cause of these conditions, except in God? Augustine asks. Möhle then analyzes Bonaventure's *Quaestiones de scientia Christi*, highlighting the saint's Augustinian-Aristotelian view that parallels in some ways Aquinas's writings.

As in Chapter Six, "Metaphysik," Möhle clarifies the distinctions between Aquinas and Duns Scotus. For Aquinas, while the human intellect cannot perceive God's nature, through grace the human power of perception can develop and participate in some way in the eternal images or archetypes (*Urbilder*).[4] Aquinas founds his understanding of man's capacity for knowledge on man's finitude. Möhle highlights the importance for Thomas of form and matter, and how we can know the concrete *form* of matter, but not matter *per se*.[5] Through matter, humans, benefitting from grace, can come to knowledge of the immaterial world. This discussion shows the clear distinctions between Aquinas and Scotus.

Möhle covers Scotus's sharp criticism of Aquinas. Scotus accused the latter of proposing an overly-restricted view of our capacity to understand the material world. Möhle notes that for Scotus, "When we generally know something, we also know the being as being (*ens inquantum ens*)."[6] He then outlines Scotus's quadruple way of knowing, pointing out that this means that for Scotus, like for Augustine,

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[3] *Ibid.*, 95.
[4] Cf. *ibid.*, 106.
[5] Cf. *ibid.*, 108.
[6] *Ibid.*, 115.

man is capable of coming to know God by natural means, not only by supernatural means as Aquinas asserts. Scotus's epistemology has ramifications for his metaphysics, as Möhle explains in a later chapter, in which he compares in some detail Aquinas's concept of analogy with Scotus's understanding of univocity.

Möhle traces the argument over the role of truth and knowledge in salvation. Was every piece of the truth relevant to salvation, as Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux argued, or not, as Abelard asserted? This debate influenced how churchmen judged the role of the curriculum, including the trivium and quadrivium, in Church life. The liberal arts, Möhle observes, played a role in salvation for the medieval mind, which considered God to be rational. Discovering the world was therefore a religious undertaking. Unfortunately, the author goes over the trivium and quadrivium quickly, though he discusses Hugo of St. Victor's contribution to the understanding of music. Hugo identified a kinship between musical harmony and the harmony in the soul. This is one of the few instances in *Philosophie des Mittelalters* in which readers get an explicit depiction of the era's ideal of unity of thought.

Möhle covers the introduction of Aristotelian thought into medieval philosophy by tracing the work of Albertus Magnus. Effecting a synthesis of the Christian worldview with ancient philosophy, according to Möhle, the saint's wide-ranging investigations encompassed Euclidean geometry, causality, the relationship between the biblical and Aristotelian worldviews, and the natural world. Albert applied his learning to a "systematization of the various subject areas of the liberal arts" and to a renewal of the contents and methods of science.[7] Möhle then turns to William of Ockham's teachings on science and scholarship. Both Albert and Ockham applied Aristotelian methodology to investigation of the world instead of relying on traditional Church

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[7] *Ibid*., 146.

teaching about creation.[8] As when discussing many other thinkers, Möhle examines Ockham's views on philosophy of language, such as potential linguistic limitations to what we know and how the soul relates to concepts. Möhle is able to highlight, in other words, how medieval philosophy engaged in a religious quest of its own, apart from theology even while being informed by Church preoccupations. For the medieval mind, philosophically engaging with the truth was holy work and an extension of the Christian vocation. These thinkers were not developing any sort of Christian philosophy, but were Christians developing philosophy.

Möhle sheds light on the relationship between metaphysics and theology. Albertus Magnus defined metaphysics as the grounding principle of knowledge. Metaphysics is not just another discipline, but the discipline out of which all the others come, because it provides the structures that allow these others to order their knowledge. Möhle notes the occasional confusion in following Albert owing to the latter's mixing of *ens* and *esse*. Central to Albert's teaching on metaphysics is how to define knowledge. Möhle covers topics such as univocity and analogy, divine essence, being, and the relationship of metaphysics with theology in depth, and includes the thought of Berthold of Moosburg. This latter was familiar with a wider range of ancient writers than Albert. As with the other themes and thinkers in *Philosophie des Mittelalters*, the author identifies where Berthold differs from Albert.

By the end of *Philosophie des Mittelalters*, readers will have a better grounding in many of the longstanding or urgent concerns of medieval philosophy from the perspective of some of the era's central thinkers. Medieval philosophy's quest for the truth, as Möhle has it, amounted to a spiritual journey. The discipline seemed to have adopted a much more ambitious perspective than modern philosophy has done

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[8] Cf. *ibid.*, 156.

because of a great confidence that the truth exists and can be discovered.

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SUMMARY

This paper is a review of the book: Hannes Möhle, *Philosophie des Mittelalters: Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Springer, 2019). The author highlights that Möhle's book (1) examines a range of key medieval philosophical issues, and illustrates how philosophy stood separately from theology even while heavily influenced by Church and theological matters, and (2) provides readers with a better grounding in many of the longstanding or urgent concerns of medieval philosophy from the perspective of some of the era's central thinkers.

KEYWORDS

Hannes Möhle, medieval philosophy, Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Adelard of Bath, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, David of Dinant, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Berthold of Moosburg.

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