Irene Binini, *Possibility and Necessity in the Time of Peter Abelard*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, 326 pp., €138, ISBN: 9789004470286

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Peter Abelard never ceases to be a fascinating thinker, one whose crucial ideas and innovative solutions have been brought to light and brilliantly analyzed by scholars after a long oblivion. Irene Binini's *Possibility and Necessity in the Time of Peter Abelard* enriches the academic landscape with a synthesis of *Doctor Palatinus*' logics, presenting the thesis – already anticipated in some of Binini's recent essays – that Abelard's reflection on modals should be seen within the frame of the widespread interest in logical notions and their metaphysical and theological applications at the beginning of the twelfth century.

The outstanding elements of Abelard's theory are meticulously traced using the analytical techniques, typical of Anglo-American philosophy, already adopted – to remain in the sphere of the most conspicuous sources of Binini's study – by John Marenbon, Christopher Martin and Massimo Mugnai, employing historiographical methodology capable of focusing on the examined object without anachronisms. The reading of still unpublished sources also allows the author to place Abelard's peculiar theses in the context of the first half of the twelfth century, a period characterized by crucial changes in the logical curriculum, including the progressive dropping of sources that had been influential between the eighth and tenth centuries and which focused on translations of and commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon* and Boethius' logical works.

In the first of the three parts of her study, Binini clarifies terms, methods of analysis and sources shared between Abelard's logical works and a selection of anonymous treatises from the first half of the twelfth century – still being transcribed, edited and cataloged – whose presentation constitutes one of the most interesting elements and scholarly merits of this volume. The essays under analysis, preserved, with a few exceptions, as unique copies, form a part of collections of logical works preserved in manuscripts from prestigious libraries all over Europe. Sub-

stantial uncertainties concerning authorship, dating and circulation result from a composition to which different authors may have contributed at different times. Despite the reference to contemporary masters such as William of Champeaux, Alberic of Reims, Gausleno of Soissons and Abelard himself, notions of authorship and textual identity are not always applicable to them.

Theological debates on divine omnipotence and omniscience, developed by Anselm of Aosta and William of Champeaux through a dialectical and analytical approach focused on the definition and examination of the logical notions of necessity and possibility, show that most of the instances in Abelard's work, as well as some of the theses traditionally regarded as his innovations, were already known and used in contemporary sources. Nevertheless, if the distinction between semantic and grammatical structure and that between the interpretation of the modal terms *de sensu* (i.e. as a nominal predicate of the meaning of the relevant categorical proposition) and *de re* (i.e. as an adverb qualifying the inherence of the predicate in the subject) already appear in the sources of the time, Abelard appears to be the first to offer a systematic analysis of the existential implications and interaction of modal operators with other logical connectives, such as quantifiers and temporal markers, and to construct an organic theory of the conversion of modal propositions and their related syllogistics. The presentation – including useful graphics and schemes – of the system of relations of opposition, equipollence, conversion and inference between possible, impossible and necessary propositions is intended to show how Abelard conceives his modal logic as an extension of the logic of categorical propositions into a unitary system capable of applying the same principles to all utterances. While Abelard's modal thought has often been presented as an intersection of paradigms difficult to compose, Binini emphasizes the coherence of *Doctor Palatinus'* logic with the gnoseological doctrine of *De Intellectibus*. Indeed, the domain of the intelligible is defined by the faculty of knowing an entity from discerning the properties that constitute its nature. Abelard's peculiar position on universals, whereby only particular substances exist, is thus consistent with an ontological foundation of modals in the actual order of the world, from which counterfactual states of affairs are excluded. Indeed, the second half of the volume is dedicated to Abelard's definition of possibility and necessity in relation to the concept of "natura rerum," whereby that which is possible is not

incompatible with the nature of a thing and that which is necessary is implied or required by that nature. A large part of *Doctor Palatinus'* interest is directed to the analysis of puzzling cases in the twelfth century – such as unrealized possibilities or those attributed to non-entities and future things – with logical tools that take the debate of the time to a new level of sophistication. Binini thus notes the conspicuous differences between twelfth century logicians who define the truth conditions of modal propositions, appealing to alternative possible worlds, and Abelard's modal theory, which holds that the truth conditions of modal notions depend on the specific nature of currently existing entities.

The study concludes with a detailed examination – already undertaken in recent publications by Binini – of the refutation of the determinist argument that divine foreknowledge excludes the contingency of the future. Binini highlights the analytical tools by which Abelard, in the *Dialectica* and *Logica Ingredientibus*, evades the enigma of theological determinism from a perspective whose purely logical character may leave the reader dissatisfied. As noted elsewhere by the author, the defense of contingency as non-repugnancy with subject-specific powers doesn't remove suspicions about the necessitating character of individual accidents and external circumstances in the determination of a state of affairs. However, a discussion of the supposed fatalism in mature works, such as the *Theologia Scholarium*, probably due to dramatic biographical events chronicled in the *Historia Calamitatum*, remains excluded from the scope of this volume.

If Binini's lengthy study manages to bring the thought, culture and debates of a long vanished age to life, it's to her credit to outline the developments that this text imposes on research. Indeed, the claims about the logical treatises of the early twelfth century cannot be regarded as conclusive and must await their full transcription, publication and analysis. Moreover, the author imagines similar work that would inquire into the persistence of Abelardian elements in later modal logic, in a context deeply changed by the rediscovery of the *Prior Analytics* and the modal theories in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.