

## REVIEW

*That Most Subtle Question* (Quaestio subtilissima): *The Metaphysical Bearing of Medieval and Contemporary Linguistic Disputes*. By DESMOND PAUL HENRY. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1984. Pp. xviii, 337.

D. P. Henry's stated aim is to find a formal language (containing a grammar and a logic) that both *adequate*, in the sense of formalizing "appropriate samples of mediæval metaphysical discourse" in such a way that they are intelligible, and *minimal*, "in the sense that [it] results from a pre-analytic agnosticism making as few presuppositions as possible concerning the ontological commitments of the discourse undergoing analysis" (p. 263). The (only?) formal language satisfying these criteria, Henry argues, follows the syntactic rules of Ajdukiewicz's categorial grammar and the logical rules of Leśniewski's Protothetic, Ontology, and Mereology. This conclusion—no surprise to anyone familiar with Henry's work—is supported by abundant quotations, in facing Latin and English, from a wide variety of mediæval sources.

Henry begins in §0 by citing the title of a work in one of Rabelais's satirical library lists: "The Most Subtle Question: Whether a chimæra buzzing around in a vacuum is able to eat second intentions (kicked around for ten weeks at the Council of Constance)." Both 'chimæra' and 'vacuum' were classic examples of non-denoting terms, empty names, and with this allusion Henry raises problems about the logical role of names, arguing first that logic should be "aloof" from questions about whether terms have reference, and second that mediæval discussions of the parts of speech are best understood with reference to Ajdukiewicz's categorial grammar. The short §1 is given over to a reprise of these conclusions, filled out with Boethius of Dacia's comments about the relation between grammar and metaphysics.

The main burden of §2 is to argue that the logic of this functorial language is that given by Leśniewski. To this end, Henry spends §§2.1–2.3 trying to establish that analyzing the copula with the referential interpretations of quantification, which excludes non-denoting names (Russell) or turns all names into predicates (Quine), is misguided. The remainder of the chapter, §§2.4–2.7, argues that the copula should be analyzed as the primitive, but interpreted, epsilon-functor '... $\in$ ...' of singular inclusion, which does not

guarantee the reference of its terms. Much of Henry's case here relies on an interpretation of Garlandus Compotista's comments on singular syllogistic and William of Ockham's theoretical strictures on definition. From the epsilon-functor a series of functors may be defined which are the surrogates in Ontology for quantification: 'partial inclusion', the functor for 'some...is...', does not require that its subject-term refer.

The rest of the book elaborates and refines the main analysis. The next two chapters form a pair: §3 is devoted to an analysis of verbal forms or, more generally, proposition-forming functors, in the mediæval discussions of participial and paronymous signification; §4 to abstract forms of such functors, in particular in debates over the problem of universals, the nature of collections, and classes. There are many citations, but the principal figures treated are St. Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Boethius of Dacia, and the Roman Boethius. The final chapter, §5, covers a miscellany of topics: whether indefinite sentences (sentences with no explicit quantifier) have existential import (§5.1); the relation between matter/form and indeterminate/determinate (§5.2); and Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence (§5.3). The last section of the book, §6, is a technical appendix in which Henry lays out the basic framework of the Ajdukiewicz-Leśniewski language.

Henry is extremely sensitive to logical points that are often blurred in the secondary literature. He correctly distinguishes term-negation and propositional negation, which modern logic conflates; he rightly insists on the logical importance of singular and indefinite propositions, while modern logic typically deals only with explicitly quantified universal and particular propositions. His discussions of how a term signifies its significate, the subtle relation between paronyms and abstract nouns, and the semantic complexities of assertions about genera and species are valuable. His insistence on logical "aloofness" should be taken seriously by philosophers of logic. Further, the scope and nature of the problems he raises, and the wide variety of texts he appeals to, indicate an attempt to re-think our understanding of mediæval philosophy: a challenge which should not be ignored.

However, there are drawbacks in Henry's book. He tries to cover too much, and his treatment of many topics is inadequate. But this is of a piece with a more serious problem, which is that Henry does not seem very concerned to accomplish his stated aim—finding a formal language that

is adequate and minimal. He indiscriminately cites texts to support his claims from Boethius, Garlandus Compotista, St. Anselm, Peter Abelard, William of Sherwood, Patrick of Ireland, Thomas Aquinas, Boethius of Dacia, Duns Scotus, Giles of Rome, William of Ockham, Jean Buridan, Paul of Venice, several anonymous authors, and others, without once pausing to ask whether there *could* be a single language covering all these philosophers. Nor does Henry examine what these philosophers have to say about the relation between logic and metaphysics (other than the initial passage from Boethius of Dacia), or justify, in particular cases, his claims of adequacy and minimality. Moreover, the citations are usually so brief and removed from context that Henry's formal interpretations can't be assessed. For example, it is central to Ontology that the copula take as arguments items of the same semantic type (names), but most mediæval philosophers rejected this assumption, treating subject and predicate as of different semantic categories (name and verb). Nor does Henry bother to examine what these philosophers had to say about the copula, even when their comments are extensive and theoretically elaborate. There is a formalization of Heidegger's famous sentence "The Nothing noths" is §2.681, but no discussion of the exclusion of non-denoting terms from Mental Language, the mediæval nominalists' ideal language. And so on.