

Abelard's Answer to the Quarrel of Universals

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Abelard shifts the interest of the dispute regarding universals from the problem of the existence of universals as things to that of the meaning of universal names.

Introduction

BY THE “quarrel of universals” one may generally understand the dispute concerning the nature of that which is named by concepts whose extensions do not consist of an individual reality, i.e. a reality that is strictly determined in space and time. The main question it tries to answer is whether these universals are things, concepts or words. The threefold nature of the question gives place to a threefold possibility of answering it: realism, nominalism and vocalism. This division of the theories comprised within the dispute is itself currently under dispute. It is considered inadequate by some contemporary exegetes because of the multiple nuances that the answer of each author might have.¹ Still, we consider that such systematization is adequate for the modest purposes of this paper, and we are going to refer to it in order

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to give more structure to our presentation, even though its weak points will be emphasized when necessary.

In what follows we are going to focus on the originality of Peter Abelard's answer to the question at hand. This assumes two aspects: the analysis of the arguments that he brings against the theories of his contemporaries, and a discussion of his *status* theory as it appears in the *Logica "ingredientibus."* In order to properly refer to these specific subjects, a brief presentation of the philosophical context in which the dispute arises is required.

The Beginning of the Quarrel

ALAIN DE Libera sustains in his book entitled *La Querelle des universaux* that the dispute both opposes and unites late antiquity and medieval Platonism and Aristotelianism.² The opposition is based on the fact that Plato considers Forms as separate, whereas for Aristotle they are united with matter. The unity between the two points of view is given by the very existence of this problem concerning the nature of universals in both schools. These universals are the same with Aristotle's predicables: the definition, the genus, the unique property, the accident and the difference.³ Although the names of these universals are already used by Aristotle, the question of the way in which they exist is raised only later, by Porphyry, in his *Isagoge*; still, it must be mentioned that neither Aristotle nor Porphyry use the name *universal* in order to refer to the predicables.⁴

We can cite three questions concerning genera and species which Porphyry asks, without also providing an answer to, but which will be of great importance to other philosophers: "I shall attempt, in making you a concise exposition, to rehearse, briefly and as in the manner of an introduction, what the older masters say, avoiding deeper inquiries and aiming suitably at the more simple. For example, about genera and species—whether they subsist, whether they actually depend on bare thoughts alone, whether if they actually subsist they are bodies or incorporeal and whether they are separable or are in perceptible items and subsist about them—these matters I shall decline to discuss, such a subject being very deep and demanding another and a larger investigation."⁵

As one might see, Porphyry's questions are: (1) Do genera and species subsist, or are they only thoughts? (2) If they subsist, are they corporeal or incorporeal? (3) If they are incorporeal, are they separable or not?⁶ Porphyry chooses not to answer them, because any such attempt would be much too complex for the introductory purposes of his text.

Boethius, on the other hand, in his commentary to Porphyry's *Isagoge*, has the declared intention to stay as close as possible to Aristotle's initial point of view concerning the issue of universals.⁷ This seems to be an adequate move, given the fact that the text he is commenting upon is nothing else than a commentary to Aristotle's *Categories*. By the mere detail of using such a concept as "universals," although the reality it designates has the same characteristics as Aristotle's genera and species, he does not follow his initial plan.⁸ An even more important way in which Boethius distances himself from both Aristotle and Porphyry is the fact that he actually tries to answer Porphyry's three questions, and his responses are quite original: (1) universals subsist; (2) they are incorporeal; (3) although incorporeal, they subsist in sensible things. For such a position to become obvious one must mention that Boethius introduces a distinction between the way in which universals subsist and the way in which they are understood: they subsist in sensible things, but they are only understood as universals, independent of that which is sensible, by a process of abstraction.⁹

Only in the twelfth century does the problem of universals appear formulated in the terms in which Abelard himself is going to discuss it. A good synthesis on the matter, in spite of the fact that some important authors such as William of Champeaux are not mentioned, is made by John of Salisbury. In the *Metalogicon* (Book II, Chapter 17) he briefly presents the theories of different participants to the dispute, without explicitly naming the schools they belonged to (nowhere in the text do names like "nominales," "vocales" or "realistes" appear). Before presenting the content of this passage, we should first try to make the intention of the author clear. He wants to show that too much importance was given to an introductory text, namely, to Porphyry's *Isagoge*.¹⁰ The author's intention is to criticize his contemporaries, and we can suppose that his manner of presenting their arguments is not actually objective. This does not diminish the value of his text; on the contrary, it makes it more valuable, given the fact that it familiarizes us with the way in which the problem was actually debated in the Middle Ages, i.e. we have an inside view showing us to what extent some of the twelfth century authors devoted a great part of their works to the subject, while others considered that doing so was a mistake.

Following the scheme proposed by Alain de Libera, the first authors mentioned by John of Salisbury can be included in the category of vocalists and nominalists. The distinction between the two positions, however, is not emphasized by the author of the *Metalogicon*. Amidst the mentioned authors, one finds Roscelin of Compiègne and Abelard.

On the one hand, Roscelin and his followers say that universals are just word sounds.¹¹ Unfortunately, given the fact that none of this author's works have been preserved and John of Salisbury's presentation is so brief, we cannot say

how he answered all of Porphyry's questions. On the other hand, Abelard argues that universals are word-concepts ("sermones"). He is severely criticized by John of Salisbury, who says that he misinterprets anything that has ever been written about universals, in order to prove his own theory.¹² The same text presents Abelard as having many followers who considered it wrong that a thing might be predicated about another. This statement indicates the semantic nature of the doctrine of those who were to be named nominalists: they move the discussion to the level of meaning and predication. But the author of the *Metalogicon* finds this position weak because it is based on a misinterpretation of Aristotle. In fact, according to John of Salisbury, Aristotle mentions that such a predication is possible.¹³ In *On Interpretation*, Aristotle does make a distinction between the universal and the individual which is based on the concept of predication: the universal is what can be predicated of more subjects, whereas the particular cannot.¹⁴ Unfortunately, he does not specify what the nature of the universal is, i.e. whether it is a thing or a meaning, which led the nominalists to interpret it as not being a thing and also allowed John of Salisbury to criticize them on the basis of the very same passage.

The next nominalists mentioned remain anonymous. It seems they had a theory that could be summed up in the following manner: (1) the acts of intuitive understanding are genera and species; (2) genera and species are notions; (3) the acts of intuitive understanding are notions; (4) and the acts of intuitive understanding and notions contain the totality of universals.¹⁵ This theory is called the "notion theory" and it is believed—without thorough proof—that John of Salisbury himself defended it.¹⁶

In the remaining part of the chapter, John of Salisbury presents the realist theories of Walter of Mortagne, Bernard of Chartres, Gilbert of Poitiers, Jocelin of Soissons, as well as the opinions of two authors who remain anonymous. Walter of Mortagne and his followers say that universals are inherent to things. They distinguish between different states of existence. For instance, Plato is an individual because he is Plato; he is a species because he is a man; he is a genus because he is an animal, and he is the most general genus because he is a substance.¹⁷ Bernard of Chartres and his followers, John of Salisbury believes, consider that universals are forms. These might be characterized as the stable and eternal origins of things.¹⁸ Gilbert of Poitiers names universals native forms ("formae nativae"). These are forms that do not subsist in God's mind, but are inherent to created things. The form is sensible when it is in things that can be perceived by the senses, whereas when in the mind it is conceived as not being sensible. Moreover, the form is singular in things when they are considered one by one, but universal in things when they are considered together. Jocelin of Soissons, on the other hand, holds that only things within a collection have

universality. One of the authors that remain anonymous names genera and species “maneries” and John of Salisbury criticizes him not only for this name, which seems to come from a distortion of the Latin language, but also for the lack of clarity of his theory which does not specify whether it is discussing a collection or a single universal. Finally, the last author mentioned, who also remains anonymous, names genera and species statuses of things.¹⁹ It should be noted that at least at the level of the terms implied, one can say that there is a similarity between this author and Abelard.

The presentation of the context in which Abelard’s own theory was conceived is necessary because of the disputative character of Abelard’s own writings. His position must be understood in relation to that of his contemporaries and as integrated within a textual tradition that had developed throughout an entire century, but which had its roots in texts pertaining to the Late Antiquity. Even though we cannot fully trust the exposition made by John of Salisbury, it is sufficient in order to paint a picture of the discussions specific to his time and to integrate that which follows (the presentation of Abelard’s theory of the *status*) in a doctrinal and conceptual context. At the same time, John of Salisbury’s exposition has the advantage of being contemporary to the debate itself. This means that it gives us a privileged inside view into the debate.

Abelard’s Answer to the Quarrel

BEFORE PRESENTING the concept of *status*²⁰ which plays an essential role in his theory because it represents the ontological basis for universal names, Abelard argues against the different types of realist theories that he had encountered. His general argument against the possibility of universals to exist as things takes the form of a counterargument: the theories X, Y, Z are the only ones that sustain that universals are things, but the theories X, Y, Z are impossible because they contradict both authority and reason, so universals are names. It should be noted from the beginning that he does not offer arguments against all the theories mentioned above, and he is also more critical of realist theories than of vocalist ones.

The first theory that Abelard tries to argue against is material essence realism.²¹ He considers that both Porphyry and Boethius had formulated such a theory. In his opinion, Porphyry suggests that a common thing, such as the species “human,” is multiplied in particular things by the adding of different properties; for instance, a certain individual is formed of a collection of properties that cannot be found in any other individual. At the level of the species, the explanation remains the same: in every different species of the animal genus there is

an identical substrate, as if one were modeling from the same wax the statue of a man and that of an ox. The only problem is that whereas the same wax is not modeled in the shape of a man and of that of an ox at the same time, a universal is supposed to be the basis for different species and individuals at the same time. On the other hand, Boethius is said to consider that the same whole is simultaneously in more things, and when shapes are added to it is particularized. In other words, any universal is universal in nature but particular in act, incorporeal by nature but corporeal and sensible in act. This way, the same things that subsist as singulars are understood as universals.²²

Abelard's first argument against this theory is that a common material essence supposes that things with different forms are in fact identical. It is the fact that they share the same matter that makes them so. Thus we would find opposed properties. Or even worse, we would have to agree that contraries are no longer contraries when they are united in the same essence. The presence of contraries in something in the same time can be extended to the case of individuals. According to Abelard, if there were only one essential matter for each species in the genus and, furthermore, only one such essential matter in each species for the individual of that species, then rationality and irrationality would be at the same time in Socrates and in Brownie (the donkey), because Socrates is Brownie. The argument is sophistical:²³

- Socrates is Brownie, because everything that is in Socrates besides the form of Socrates is also in Brownie and is different from Brownie's form. This part of the argument is an obvious premise: if both Socrates and Brownie have a common matter—the animal genus—which is informed by different forms, then everything they are besides their very forms—which are supposed to particularize and individualize them—is the same in both of them.

- And everything that is in Brownie, different from Brownie's form is Brownie. So, Brownie's essence is Brownie; in other words, the matter, as long as it is informed by Brownie's form, is Brownie.

- So, whatever is in Socrates different from his form is Brownie. In other words, Socrates' matter is Brownie. It is at this point that the argument weakens. It is not necessary that the shared matter be Brownie in the absence of Brownie's form. There is a great difference between saying "Socrates and Brownie share the same matter" and saying "Socrates is his matter, thus he is Brownie." But Socrates himself is that which is different from the form of Socrates. Thus, Socrates is Brownie. These last two corollaries are of course false, given their premise.

Abelard's second argument against material essence realism criticizes the fact that this doctrine supposes that there are only ten forms. Each form is one of Aristotle's categories. All quantities and all qualities and all other essences are essen-

tially the same in themselves, and since two humans, such as Plato and Socrates for instance, are informed by the same forms we cannot say that they are different, because none of the ten essences can make a difference in their case.²⁴ To this argument one might answer that even though they are essentially the same, the forms inform matter in different ways. For instance, both red and green are qualities, but this does not mean that something red and something green are the same thing just because they are informed by the same category.

In the third argument against material essence realism, Abelard asks how we can call substances numerically multiple, since the diversity is that of forms, whereas the substance, which is also the subject, stays essentially the same. But it is absurd to suppose that the advocates of material essence realism thought that substances are multiple in themselves while maintaining that there is just one common essence. It is not the substances that are considered multiple, but the combinations of substance and accidents which differ from one case to another are multiple. For instance, Socrates is different from any other man due to the specific combination of forms that inform him.²⁵

The fourth argument, and by far the strongest one, is based on the fact that, according to this specific form of realism, individuals seem to be produced by their accidents. This supposes that accidents are prior to individuals, and differences are prior to species. But if accidents are prior to substances, then they exist outside of subjects,²⁶ which contravenes to the way in which they are described by Aristotle.²⁷

Still, these arguments against material essence realism do not suffice to conclude that the only other possible alternative is nominalism. That is why Abelard tries to argue against other possible forms of realism. These are indifference realism—a type of realism that sees individuals as universals—and collective realism.

Indifference realism states that individuals do not differ only in form, but also in their individual essence. What we can find in an individual, we cannot find in any other individual: they do not have a common form, nor do they have a common matter. Still, universals exist in things; not by virtue of a common essence, but by indifference.²⁸ This indifference is described by Abelard as a sort of resemblance; as if one were to say, for instance, in the case of the universal “human” that Plato and Socrates pertain to it by virtue of the fact that they do not differ in certain aspects.²⁹ Abelard’s argument against this particular type of realism is the following: Plato and Socrates do not differ either in the fact that they are not stones, which does not make not-being-stones their genus.³⁰ His argument against this theory is not necessarily very strong, because the theory clearly refers to similarity in what things are, whereas Abelard gives an example of negative similarity.

Another type of realism which Abelard argues against is that which defines the universal as an individual essence. According to this theory, every man is a

species, as long as he is a man. There are just as many species as there are individuals and just as many genera. But under the aspect of the similarity of natures, there are fewer universals than singulars.³¹ Just before criticizing it, Abelard reformulates this theory: every individual is a universal, because he is similar to others.³² This theory implies the multiplication of universals in particulars. For instance, in Socrates there are at least three universals: Socrates as Socrates, Socrates as a human, and Socrates as an animal. This is a form of the theory which John of Salisbury attributes to Walter of Mortagne and his followers.³³ Abelard's main argument against this theory is that it does not establish a clear distinction between being predicated of one and being predicated of many.³⁴

The last realist theory he mentions is the one which understands the universal as a collection,³⁵ i.e. collective realism. This theory states that universals are collections of individuals, and these collections are things, regardless of the individuals that compose them. In his study "Abailard on Collective Realism," Alfred J. Freddoso is of the opinion that Abelard's objection against collective realism is strong because it is based on showing the incapacity of such accounts to justify predication. The basis of this objection, made explicit by Freddoso, is the implicit distinction made by Abelard between integral and subjective parts.³⁶ In the *Logica "ingredientibus,"* when mentioning this type of realism, Abelard asks how a whole collection of men can be predicated of many without being predicated of each individual.³⁷

A possible solution would be to regard collections as integral wholes, and their individuals as integral parts. In this manner, universals are predicable of many, because the integral whole is predicable of all its parts as a collection. A possible counterargument, coming from a contemporary point of view, would be that in such a case we are dealing with identity and not with predication. Such an objection is to be overlooked, because the medieval distinction between predication and identity was not as subtle as the contemporary one. This kind of predication is of a collective type. Distributive predication is opposed to it. This latter kind of predication implies that the whole can be predicated of each of its parts. In this case the whole is no longer an integral one, but a universal one.³⁸ In order to make this distinction even clearer, Freddoso uses, for explanatory purposes only, Duns Scotus' distinctions between subjective parts and integral parts, and between the universal whole and the integral whole: when a whole consists of subjective parts, the definition of the whole is predicable of the parts. For instance, in the case of man, defined as a rational animal, the definition is applicable to any individual man. In the case of the integral parts which constitute a quantitative whole, the definition of the whole is not predicable of the parts.³⁹ This would be best exemplified by a team or an army. The definition of

such a collection, just like any of its properties, cannot be transferred to any individual member without the risk of fallacy.

Taking all this into consideration, we can see how such an account of universality fails to explain a simple predication such as “X is a man,” and Abelard’s question which we have cited above can be supposed to imply the following question: if universals are integral wholes and not universal wholes, then what analysis of simple predication can collective realism provide?⁴⁰ It is in showing this particular weakness of the theory of his opponents that Abelard’s argument becomes strong, because there is no possible way in which a collective realist could overcome it.⁴¹ Besides its inability to explain predication, the theory has another weak point worth mentioning: it supposes that individuals are prior to the whole, and it is actually universals which should be prior in any such account.⁴²

After criticizing these contemporary theories, Abelard concludes that only words can be universal.⁴³ It is words that can be predicated of the many, taken one by one, that are universals. Singulars are those that can only be predicated of one.⁴⁴ To predicate something is different from simply uniting words syntactically. Predication depends on the nature of things and tries to indicate something true related to it (it aims at clarifying the “status” of things), whereas syntactical binding only aims at correctly expressing a meaning. There is also a difference between universals and common nouns: universals can sometimes be verbs, but never common nouns; common nouns can appear in other cases than the nominative, whereas universals can only be in the nominative case.⁴⁵

As we can see from the definition given above, Abelard shifts the interest of the dispute regarding universals from the problem of the existence of universals as things to that of the meaning of universal names. The problem with universal names is that their meaning seems not to be connected to any particular thing—it is only individuals that exist as things for Abelard. It also seems, at a first superficial glance, that such concepts cannot refer to that which is common to things, because things are separate and do not have any common facts which could represent the meaning of universal names. Abelard even interprets Boethius as attributing no meaning to the universals themselves, but only to predications within a sentence, i.e. to predicates united to a subject. However, this is an opinion that Abelard rejects.

In the domain of meaning, Abelard makes a very subtle distinction between “*intellectum de eis surgentem*” and “*intellectum ad singulas pertinentem*.” This is supposed to be the distinction between an understanding which takes universals as a point of departure, but needs something else in order to have full meaning (this is the case of the conceptions which state that universals cannot have a meaning of their own), and the meaning that universals have on their own, a meaning which leads to an act of understanding. This meaning is independent of

the existence of the things which are named, and it is also independent of the meaning of sentences.

Abelard moves forward in presenting his point of view by making a further distinction: that between the common cause for the imposition of universal names and the common conception of the intellect about the similarity between things. He will also try to figure out whether we say “common word” because of the first or because of the latter. His conclusion will be that we say “common word” because of both aspects.

On the one hand, the common cause is that in which things are similar, independent of our intellection, objectively; the common conception, on the other hand, is linked to our subjectivity. An example of a common cause of imposition is, for instance, that people resemble each other in the fact that they are people; but this fact, also named *status* by Abelard, is not a particular human being, it is not a thing, nor is it a mental conception. Such is the common cause for the imposition of names, and the one who establishes the common word through which all essentially similar things are to be named understands their *status*. It is obvious that Abelard imagines that there is an initial moment in which things are baptized.

Furthermore, the common conception supposes an act of understanding established by the universals. This understanding is not based on the very form of that which is understood, but rather on a certain activity of the soul. So the form, as an action of the soul, will be something created by the mind.⁴⁶ The intellection of universals conceives a common and unclear image of more things.⁴⁷

To the question whether a name produces an act of intellection or an opinion, Abelard answers that a name produces an act of understanding rather than an opinion, because its inventor wanted it to represent the nature and properties of the thing named, even though this inventor could not see those properties clearly.⁴⁸

From this answer one can understand the following: (1) there is a *status* of things, which creates an unclear image of the nature of the thing to be named in the mind of the one who is to establish its name; (2) the name, once established on the basis of an intellection of the one who establishes it, creates further acts of understanding in the minds of those who use it. We can now conclude that there are two levels of universality: the *status* and the common conception. And for this reason, the name is initially given on the base of the *status* and later on that of the common conception, none of which are things.

According to Peter King, the idea that the meaning of a term is not necessarily linked to the existence of an entity which corresponds to it is based on a more subtle distinction: that between signifying things and signifying meaningful mental contents, a distinction which King⁴⁹ considers close to that which Gottlob

Frege establishes between sense and reference.⁵⁰ This comparison has only an illustrative value, given the fact that the distinction between sense and reference was made in order to clarify the assignation of proper names, more precisely, to explain the cases in which the same thing has two names. Such an approach accomplishes its purpose by shedding some light on what Abelard understands by *status* and by common conception, the two warrants of universality. It also has the great merit of showing how a medieval issue, formulated in similar terms and surrounding the meaning of names, remained a valid issue for centuries to come.

Conclusions

OUR INVESTIGATION allows us to make three remarks. The first is that Abelard's theory is integrated in a larger debate and his concepts are specific to the twelfth century. For his contemporaries he was just one of many who had tried to give an answer to the quarrel of universals. The second is that, although his arguments against the opposing theories are not very strong, they are sufficient for him to propose a new theory which does more than argue for new thesis, and which shifts the interest of the debate from purely metaphysical aspects to the domain of signification. The third is that his new theory is actually very close to the theories of the realists, due to the concept of *status*. This concept supposes that the universal name is actually based on something common to more particulars. But the difference between his theory and that of any realist is that Abelard never turns the similarity in which things find themselves into a thing.



Notes

1. For a detailed presentation of this issue see Augustine Thompson, "The Debate on Universals before Peter Abelard," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, 3 (1995): 409–429; <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hph/summary/v033/33.3thompson.html> (accessed 13 March 2012).
2. Alain de Libera, *La Querelle des universaux* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 14–17.
3. Aristotle, *Topics—Books I and VIII*, trans. Robin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 101b.
4. See de Libera, 17.
5. Porphyry, *Introduction*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 4.
6. Depending on the answers they give to these three questions, authors can be roughly characterized as realists, nominalists or vocalists. The obvious fracture is

between realism and the other two doctrines: if realists consider that the universal exists, both nominalists and vocalists argue that it is only individuals that have existence; the difference between these two is of a more subtle nature, the dispute being carried out at the level of the meaning of universal names. Vocalists say that the universal is not real, not even in that which concerns its meaning, whereas nominalists grant it some reality from the latter point of view.

7. Boethius, *In Porphyrii Isagogen commentorum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), I, 11, 167.
8. Boethius uses this very concept (lat. “universalia”) in his commentary to Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. *Ibid.*, I, 11, 166, l. 14.
9. *Ibid.*, I, 11, 167.
10. John of Salisbury considers this text to be a mere introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*: “But since, as an aid to understanding Aristotle’s elementary book, Porphyry wrote another [book] in a way still more elementary, the ancients believed that [this work of] Porphyry should be studied as an introduction to Aristotle.” Cf. John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon*, trans. Daniel McGarry (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2009), 10.
11. John of Salisbury’s presentation suggests that there existed a school of vocalists even after the death of Roscelin of Compiègne. This author is not cited too often in medieval texts: besides the *Metalogicon* II, 17, he is mentioned by John of Salisbury in *Policraticus*, VII, 12; he is also mentioned in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Epistola*, 2.35, 41, 51 and in *De fide Trinitas* (Migne, PL, CLVIII, 1189, 1192, 1206, 259 sqq.). We also have a letter ascribed to this author and addressed to Abelard: *Epistola ad Petrum Abelardum*, in which, unfortunately, there is no mention of his doctrine of the universals. Cf. Pierre Abélard, *Comentarii la Porfir*, trans. Simona Vucu (Iasi: Polirom, 2006), 171.
12. John of Salisbury, 112.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Aristotle, *Categories and De interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 17a–b.
15. John of Salisbury, 112–113.
16. Kevin Guilfooy, “John of Salisbury,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2008 Edition), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/john-salisbury/>>.
17. John of Salisbury, 113.
18. *Ibid.*, 115.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Lambertus Marie de Rijk defines the *status*, in the introduction to the edition of the Parisian manuscript of the *Dialectica*, as “the likeness as abstracted by human mind from a set of similar individuals. For instance, the likeness of Socrates and Plato is neither a thing, nor is it nothing, but their being man (*esse hominem* or *status hominis*).” Cf. Lambertus Marie de Rijk, “Introduction” to Petrus Abaelardus, *Dialectica* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1956), xciii.

21. Material essence realism is based on the fact that there are ten essences, each of which corresponds to one of Aristotle's categories. These categories exist and are without form up to a certain point. They are modeled into genera and species by differences. Species become individuals because of accidental forms. In other words, the genus exists as matter, the difference informs the genus which, once informed, becomes matter for the species. Further differences lead to the division of the species into individuals. Consequently, the individuals belonging to a species share one material essence. This does not mean that universals do not exist, but that they are found only as differentiated into individuals. The pure universal thing cannot appear actually, because it is impossible to put aside all the accidents. But mentally removing all accidents reveals an underlying metaphysical reality. Cf. Kevin Guilfooy, "William of Champeaux," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/william-champeaux/>>.
22. Pierre Abélard, *Logica "ingredientibus,"* in *Comentarii la Porfir*, 70–74.
23. *Ibid.*, 74–76.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, 78–80.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a–b.
28. Abélard, 78–80.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 88–90.
31. *Ibid.*, 78–80.
32. *Ibid.*, 84–86.
33. See John of Salisbury, 113.
34. Abélard, 84–86.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Alfred J. Freddoso, "Abailard on Collective Realism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 527.
37. Abélard, 80–84.
38. Freddoso, 528–529.
39. *Ibid.*, 530.
40. *Ibid.*, 533.
41. We can of course suppose the situation in which a realist might sustain that an account of realism does not necessarily have to imply an account of predication. But such a point of view would go against authority (Aristotle and Boethius link universality and predication) and it would be absurd to suppose that a medieval writer would accept such a point of view. Regardless of this aspect, Freddoso continues his argumentation. We have not presented his whole argument given that it goes beyond the intentions of this paper.
42. Abélard, 84–86.
43. *Ibid.*, 84.
44. *Ibid.*

45. Ibid., 90–94.
46. Ibid., 98.
47. Ibid., 104.
48. Ibid., 110.
49. Peter King, “Abelard on Mental Language,” *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, 2 (2007): 170.
50. Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference,” in *Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 566.

Abstract

Abelard’s Answer to the Quarrel of Universals

Our investigation has two main points: a contextualization of Abelard’s account of universals and a detailed analysis of his theory as it is formulated in the *Logica “ingredientibus.”* The interest of the first point is to show that Abelard is just one author among the many who tried to offer a solution to the debate. In order to do so, we follow and comment upon John of Salisbury’s presentation of contemporary theories on the subject. The interest of the second point, however, is to show how Abelard’s answer is subtle and important in itself. His theory is especially innovative due to the fact that it changes the framework of the debate: it no longer belongs to the domain of metaphysics, but to that of meaning.

Keywords

universal, Abelard, nominalism, realism, John of Salisbury, *status* theory