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Anna Lukács (ed.), *Immovable Truth. Divine Knowledge and the Bible at the University of Vienna (1384–1419)*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2024, pp. 230.

This book marks one of the first attempts to analyse the pivotal aspects of the Viennese philosophical-theological milieu between the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century. This period witnessed the foundation of the University of Vienna in 1365, later endowed with a Faculty of Theology in 1384. This book explores the way in which new generations of theologians are both influenced by and can provide answers to issues and problems raised in the previous ones. Specifically, it focuses on a renewed interest in Biblical exegesis that occupied the central part of the career of three prominent masters, belonging to the first generation of Viennese theologians: Henry Totting of Oyta (1330–1397), Henry of Langenstein (1340–1397) and Lambert of Geldern (1350–1419). They devoted their attention to the Old Testament and authored a significant number of Biblical commentaries, touching upon philosophical aspects from a theological-exegetical perspective. Their interest in Biblical exegesis can also be interpreted as a response to the English — particularly Oxfordian — 14th century theology, which undertook a path often conflicting with Paris, where, starting from 1347, "The University stressed first and foremost truth in God" (p. 4), and several condemnations where issued against erroneous theses, such as the possibility for Christ to err, lie, or deviating from God's will, ideas that had been differently discussed by Thomas Bradwardine, Robert Holcot, Adam Wodeham, and Robert Halifax.

This is a crucial point, because Lukács builds upon Jean-François Genest's works,[1] grounding her analysis of the Viennese environment on two main ideas

[1] Jean-François Genest, *Pierre de Ceffons et l'hypothèse du dieu trompeur*, in *Preuve et raisons à l'université de Paris. Logique, ontologie et théologie au xive siècle*, edited by Z. Kaluza, P. Vignaux, Paris: Vrin, 1984, p. 197–214; J.-F. Genest, *Prédétermination et liberté créée à Oxford au xive siècle*, Paris: Vrin, 1992.

derived from Genest. On the one hand, Parisian condemnations had as consequence "That theologians were immured in an 'inextricable labyrinth': they could assert neither the contingency of the future, since it implied the hypothesis of a deceitful God, nor its necessity, since that implied God's participation in sin. This condemnation was the bedrock of the theological tradition at Vienna. Henry Totting of Oyta, Henry of Langenstein, and Lambert of Geldern repeated them [...]. The God of the Viennese did not lie and did not sin. These were not even theoretical possibilities" (p. 4); on the other hand, it is certainly true that Oxfordian theology (especially from the years 1320–1340) played a crucial role in the developments of the whole of 14th century philosophy, but there were recurrimg topics which would have been targeted as wrong not only, even though especially, in the Viennese milieu: "Genest identified five 'principal' English subtleties, namely 1) divine deception, 2) justification in false faith, 3) damnation in right faith, 4) Christ deceiving or deceived, and 5) the impossibility of revelation in the Word" (p. 5, n. 14). All the three Viennese masters, as discussed in this book, somehow directed their speculation against these English subtleties.

The very title of the book itself hints at this conflict: why is it entitled 'Immovable Truth. Divine Knowledge and the Bible'? While it is simple to intuitively recognize a connection between the Truth and the Bible, because "while everything flows and is undermined by change, the Bible remains unchanged. It stands immovable" (p. 147), more intriguing appears to be a quotation from Cassiodorus, which the three Viennese masters approached differently. According to Cassiodorus, prophecy is "The *divine breath which proclaims with immovable truth* the unfolding of events either through the deeds or the words of certain people" (p. 57). If the unfolding of events is proclaimed with an immovable truth, how can future events be contingent? To avoid being "immured in an 'inextricable labyrinth'" too, the first generations of Viennese theologians had to face the problem of contingency in different terms than before. Consequently, the notion of immovable truth introduces novel conceptions of necessity, contingency, the roles of the will and intellect, and their impact on Viennese speculation, diverging from the approaches of the 14th century.

The book is divided into an introduction and three main chapter. The introduction provides an overview of the arguments that will be discussed in every chapter, with each specifically devoted to one master. A brief but useful biographical note opens each chapter, providing information about the life, studies, and career of Henry Totting of Oyta, Henry of Langenstein and Lambert of Geldern. A common tract for each of them, is that before becoming masters at the University of Vienna, they all had been students in Paris, where they became acquainted with the condemnations that hit Mirecourt, Bradwardine and several other masters, as well as with Parisian and English philosophical subtleties. In the introduction, Lukács reconstructs some aspects of three recurring objects of discussion stemming from the 14th century: (1) Adam Wodeham's theory of the *significabile complexe*. (2) The tendency to reduce the use and the relevance of the syllogistic reasoning, progressively substituted by strategies that dealt with theological and trinitarian issues in ways different from the classical and logical approach. (3) A new conception of necessity, strictly conjoined to the speculation of Thomas Bradwardine, which can be furtherly analyzed subdividing a particular type of necessity — immovable necessity — into antecedent and subsequent necessity: the subsequent necessity follows the existence of something (thus being compatible with the free will), while the antecedent necessity precedes and causes the existence of something, and it cannot be compatible with free will. For instance, antecedent necessity can be extended to all three tenses (Bradwardine), challenging human free will, or restricted to the sole past and present (Buckingham) (p. 19–20). In a perspective like Bradwardine's, antecedent necessity strengthens divine foreknowledge, and this included the risk of a too strong form of divine intervention over the created world, up to the point that God could be seen as participating in every man's sins.

The three main chapters of this book present, one by one, the figures of Henry Totting of Oyta, Henry of Langenstein and Lambert of Geldern, focusing on their exegetical production and pointing at offering "a glimpse into their most unusual ideas" (back cover), even though Lukács does a comprehensive survey identifying sources and connections between their Biblical commentaries and the Parisian milieu, as well as their mutual relationship. The Biblical commentaries discussed in this book are all preserved at the Austrian National Library in Vienna, which includes the collections of the Collegium Ducale, the University of Vienna's college, to which the two Henries and Lambert donated their biblical commentaries (p. VII). Lukács offers numerous transcriptions from the manuscripts containing these yet unedited texts, providing the English translation in the main text and the original Latin text in the footnotes. These transcriptions are fundamental in order to obtain insights into these masters' ideas and their unedited works, which would otherwise be challenging to consult, due also to their significant dimensions.

Henry Totting of Oyta is the first to receive our attention. In 1384, he became professor at the University of Vienna, and amongst his vast output, the commentary on the first fifty Psalms holds significant importance. Within this text, "A new enterprise emerges, launched by Oyta and Langenstein together at the University of Vienna: opposition to English theology" (p. 27). Lukács provides an illustrative example of this attitude: Henry Totting focuses on the concept of life, moving from Psalm 17:47 (The Lord lives), attributing to the concept of life a value which is much more influenced by metaphysical realism than by a purely logical approach. Oyta frequently recurs to Thomas Aquinas' opinions, which are fundamental in shaping his view, particularly regarding God's knowledge and foreknowledge. A key role is played by the concept of idea (*exemplar*), which Oyta refines, restricting it to the domain of what is created or of what is to be created (while the 'Scotistic' domain of the mere possible appears to fade away). Consequently, "in Oyta's view, God lives only in so far as he has productive thoughts" (p. 34). The analysis of Psalm 34:28 constitutes the main discussion about the contingency of the future, declinated in a specific taste: "Oyta turns the analysis toward the preoccupations of fourteenth-century English theology. Did Christ's passion remain contingent even after Christ himself predicted it?" (p. 43), and he delves into two conceptual plexuses: the concept of necessity and a conflict with Bradwardine's notion of antecedent necessity. Lukács acknowledges that "Oyta's division is complicated and rather original — I could not identify any preexisting pattern for it" (p. 46). Necessity is divided by Oyta into immutable and violent necessity. Immutable necessity encompasses simple and conditional necessity. Within simple necessity, Oyta includes the *complexe significabile*, and entities belonging to the ontological status of "substances, i.e., part of an Aristotelian realism" (p. 47). This argument delves into the debate about the ontology of things as opposed to ontology of facts, where Oyta stands on the side of things; interestingly, Lukács underlines that "Harald Berger notes that fourteenth-century thinkers argued for the possibility of a fourfold ontology: there were substances, accidents, substance-accidents and *complexe significabilia*" (p. 47), a statement which can be corroborated by this book's analysis of the Viennese group of theologians, who opposed English theology with a more realist-based approach in philosophy, which was, however, not totally a novelty, since in 1350's Paris, for instance, the Franciscan John of Ripa already attempted to build a robust Neoplatonic metaphysics, to counteract both the logical shift of mid XIV century and the English 'reductionist' approach in metaphysics.[2] Under the conditional necessity, Oyta places abstract entities, which belong to a form of *secundum quid* — hence subordinated — necessity. Due to this overwhelming conception of necessity, it can be said that "necessity ends up [...] as the most pervasive, holistic nature of being" (p. 48), even though Oyta fiercely opposes Thomas Bradwardine on the topic of necessity and determinism, about which he "deduces objections against determinism. The first is that necessity only induces necessity" (p. 73); consequently, Oyta emphasizes the importance of the necessity of consequence against Bradwardine's antecedent necessity, in an attempt to re-establish human free will.

The second chapter, devoted to Henry of Langenstein, immediately portrays him as the most talented of the Viennese group of theologians. This chapter also appears to be the most theoretically rich of the three. Langenstein received his education at the University of Paris, where he came into contact with John of Ripa's ideas. He authored "the most successful and influential biblical commentary in the history of the University of Vienna: the commentary on Genesis" whose significance "lies in its being an encyclopedic work with a solidly traditionalist approach and in the more controversial and original theological ideas it carries" (p. 88). Langenstein's commentary includes a sort of autonomous *Treatise on Fatal Necessity* — which Lukács discusses in detail, and provides a table of contents as an appendix at the book's end — inside which the German theologian opposed, like Oyta, Thomas Bradwardine. Significantly, Lukács programmatically declares her intention in a footnote: "I intend to

[2] About these aspects, see my critical editions of Iohannes de Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum. Distinctio secunda*, edited by A. Nannini, (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, XXXIX), Rome: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 2020; Iohannes de Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum. Distinctio prima*, edited by A. Nannini, (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, XL), Rome: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 2023.

edit this 'most original writing and significant witness to late fourteenth-century philosophy'" (p. 89, n. 10), so that the maximum amount of attention should be paid to this hopefully forthcoming work. Langenstein's analysis is intriguing, because he often returns to an important dualism within both philosophy and theology between logic and metaphysics, "disciplines without which no one can engage in a discussion of this difficulty" (p. 92). Particularly noteworthy, Lukács acknowledges, in a footnote, that "what logic is, is clear; what is understood as metaphysics here should be more controversial and subject to further investigation" (p. 92, n. 17). I consider this note of the utmost importance, because I often sense the existence of a group of relatively overlooked authors who dedicated their activity to construct a robust metaphysics as a means of resisting the reduction of philosophy to mere logic. John of Ripa could be a perfect example of this tendency in the second half of 14th century, but even the Cistercian Pierre Ceffons may be able to offer some insights.[3]

Langenstein's *Treatise on Fatal Necessity* appears to have been an autonomous work, later incorporated in the commentary on Genesis. According to Lukács, this is a crucial point: "if we accept this thesis" — namely the *Treatise on Fatal Necessity* being structured and begun around 1385–1386 in Paris — "we also have to embrace its corollary: when he started to teach at the University of Vienna, Langenstein had already rejected syllogistic argumentation regarding divine matters" (p. 95). Interestingly, and this is a precious discovery of Lukács, Langenstein's *Treatise*'s structure and the nature of its questions are directly related to John of Ripa (the attribution to God of the immensity is an efficacious meter to confirm this hypothesis), even though Ripa is not an advocate of the extensive use of logic in metaphysics or theology, contrarily to what she affirms ("Lots of the topics are discussed because John of Ripa's commentary on Book I of the *Sentences* contains them. At the very least, this includes pantheism from Thomas Bradwardines' *De causa Dei* and the use of logic about divine matters" [p. 96]). From a conceptual standpoint, Langenstein's *Treatise on Fatal Necessity* challenges the idea of a causal chain of causes which would necessitate anything in the created domain, and, going far beyond Oyta, Langenstein condemns Bradwardine as heretic. Within the *Treatise on Fatal Necessity*. a central role is again played by the *complexe significabile*, which Langenstein "denotes — unlike its inventor, Adam Wodeham — as a thing, i.e., a substance" (p. 105), confirming once more that the substrate for this Viennese generation of theologians is a form of realist metaphysics, within which another novelty proposed by Langenstein can emerge, namely a strong conception of God's presence in our world. To avoid the pitfalls of the Amalrician's pantheistic outcome, but at the same time avoiding the Thomist solution of distinguishing between the being and the essence, Langenstein suggests the reader that "to be is said about God and creatures more equivocally than about substance and accident" (p. 112); nonetheless, God is present in

[3] See Christopher D. Schabel, *Pierre Ceffons et le déterminisme radical au temps de la peste noire*, Paris: Vrin, 2019; Andrea Nannini, *Ethical Implications of a Metaphysical Structure. Peter Ceffons and John Ripa*, in *Calculating Ethics in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by E.-A. Lukács, M. Michałowska, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2024, p. 236–309.

our physical world. About this aspect, it is extremely relevant to understand how 'presence,' which is a complex concept, "describes existence, place, spatial extension and temporality, but neglects materiality" (p. 113). Langenstein develops it within a framework of an "adverbial metaphysics," as Lukács states (p. 114), which denotes another point of contact with John of Ripa. Langenstein's metaphysics is built upon the first principle intended as "God is" (*deus est*),[4] which leads to the contingency of creation, as well as to a "hierarchical world view, where necessity and contingency are gradually distributed and vary not only from one species of being to the other, but also in time about the same being" (p. 116).

Lambert of Geldern, the last author to be discussed, appears to have a less theoretical attitude. He devoted his whole life and career to exegetical works, particularly inside a commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets, which circulated only within the University of Vienna. Lambert mainly deals with aspects related to the biblical exegesis, moving from the prophecy: "Geldern" identifies "three grades of prophecy. The first, lowest grade, is to sense the 'thoughts of the heart' of someone else. The second grade is considerably higher. It refers to the vision of the seraphic angels 'of the Trinity' […]. The third grade of prophecy is knowledge, which is far away from every human because it is not knowable in itself, though it is universal. This includes knowledge of future contingents, which, Lambert writes, do not have determined truth" (p. 161). In connecting future contingents with prophecies, Lambert modifies Cassiodorus' definition of prophecy shifting it from an 'immovable truth' to an 'open knowledge' (*aperta scientia*): "Prophecy is the divine breath, that is, open knowledge inspired by God, that a certain unfolding of events shall follow. Here 'events' is to be interpreted in this way: 'events' precisely as they have being, be they future, present or past" (p. 163). Lambert also delves into the question of God's and Christ ability to be liars — opposing, as the other Viennese masters, English theology — and his solutions have peculiar tracts. Amongst the most original ones, "Lambert uses the rarer concept of 'conprincipiation,' or copotentiality, for signifying that deception has to develop inside of a deceivable person" (p. 168), and he heavily relies on the idea of the moral perfection of God, which "is not an argument English theologians used to counter the possibility of divine lies" (p. 169). An important feature of Geldern is that he gives space to William of Auxerre as a primary source, and he uses some of his ideas to state that "in good future things, the human being consents and the divine principle acts. In bad future things, only the human being consents and acts. This pattern quoted from the *Summa aurea* testifies to Lambert's adhesion to the Viennese doctrine that God neither does evil (e.g., lie or deceive) nor participates in sin" (p. 176). As does Langenstein, Geldern also returns to the concept of equal contingency, according to which an event and its contrary are equally contingent. Lukács suggests that Henry

[4] Which, it is worth noting, represents another point of tangency with John of Ripa. See Iohannes de Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum. Distinctio secunda*, q. 2, art. 2, concl. 8, n. 375, ed. A. Nannini, p. 178: "Octava conclusio: 'Deum esse' potest dici aliquo modo simpliciter primum verum, et quolibet alio quod enuntiat positive de divina essentia naturaliter prius."

of Harclay might have been a source for this concept (p. 178, n. 70). Interestingly, Geldern even seems to quote from Richard FitzRalph, which is a yet-to-be-discovered sources even in relation to the Parisian theological environment of the 14th century. In Geldern's case, FitzRalph, alongside with Holcot and Halifax, is opposed to Adam Wodeham about the possibility of Christ lying. Under this aspect, "Lambert distinguishes assent by Christ and the blessed from other kinds of assent […]. Lambert explains this difference from the concept of connotation. Connotation is an ability only a few souls possess. For instance, Christ's soul connotes the truth of what is assented to: 'In the same way that the complex scientific assent denotes the truth to which the assent is related, so does the complex assent in the soul of Christ and the assent of the blessed in heaven denote the truth to which their assent is related'" (p. 184). Like Langenstein, Geldern also refuses to accept the validity of the syllogistic reasoning within the Trinity, even though he does not say a final word about this, demanding the task to more specified scholars. Interestingly, Geldern was acquainted with Petrarch, who is mentioned several times in his commentaries on the twelve Minor Prophets.

In conclusion, this book explores how new generations of theologians can respond to seemingly limiting external factors that hinder philosophical and theological speculation, restricting its outcomes within an 'inextricable labyrinth.' At the University of Vienna, a group of theologians formed "a common front against a mythological Minotaur: Oxford theology. Directed at common enemies, Thomas Bradwardine, Robert Holcot, Adam Wodeham, and eventually Robert Halifax, the solutions to the challenge contain common layers that each Viennese theologian built upon" (p. 195). Metaphysical realism, a rejection of a purely logical approach, a strong belief in an immovable truth preventing philosophy and theology from being turned into pure hypothetical speculation, are some of these common tracts. All three theologians analyzed in the book accepted the contingency of future stating that "God does not compel the human being to act" (p. 195), alongside the absence of divine omniscience as a counterpart of this statement. "In this world, the Bible, and *nothing other* than the Bible, was immovable truth" (p. 196). Alongside the works of other scholars (Christopher Schabel, Monica Brinzei, Ota Pavlíček, to mention just a few), this book contributes to the discovery of the history of Central European university contexts, which remain largely unexplored due to the scarcity of available texts. The book closes with an appendix containing a list of questions from the *Treatise on Fatal Necessity* by Henry of Langenstein, with foliation from ONB, Cod. 3902, a series of schemas showing the differences between various ways of conceiving necessity in Oyta and Langenstein, and a complete bibliography supporting the whole book, together with an index of names and an index of relevant things.

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