

VIA ANTIQUA AND VIA MODERNA IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: DOCTRINAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND CHURCH POLITICAL FACTORS IN THE *WEGESTREIT*

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INTRODUCTION: SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

In the years between 1475 and 1488 the German Dominican Servatius Fanckel attended the disputations held at the theological faculty of the University of Cologne and reported the debates in a notebook. This notebook has been preserved in the manuscript Frankfurt, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1690. It gives an account of the questions and arguments put forward, mentioning the names of the proponents and opponents. Servatius Fanckel designed the manuscript so that it could be used as a source book for information on topics and persons. He made an extensive subject index and catalogued the members of the theological faculty who participated in the debate. The records of participants are highly interesting. Biographical notes are attached to the names and, most remarkably, they mention doctrinal affiliations. Seventy-nine of eighty-three theologians are registered as adherents of a school of thought: *thomista*, *albertista*, *scotista*, *egidianus*, or *modernus*.¹

A quotation from one of the lists mentioning the names illustrates the nature of the information provided by Servatius Fanckel, who refers to himself as *thomista*:²

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¹ On Servatius Fanckel and his notebook, see Löhr 1926. A similar notebook reporting disputations held at Cologne was kept by the Dominican, Georg Schwartz (Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod st 688). I discuss this notebook in Hoenen 1998b.

² Frankfurt, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1690, f. 29^r. Information on the theologians mentioned in the quotation is provided by Löhr 1926, 26-27. Servatius Fanckel calls himself *thomista* on f. 31^v: "Frater Seruacius Fanckel, ordinis predicatorum. Thomista. Collector huius libelli."

Magister Andreas Westualus. Albertista.

Magister Jodocus de Augusta. Hunc uidi licenciatum. Thomista.

Frater et magister Richardus de Sittart, ordinis predicatorum. Thomista. Huius uidi aulam magistralem, respondi quoque de sacramento ordinis in eius uesperis anno 1480. Obiit 1483.

Magister Jacobus de Ammersfordia. Albertista. Hunc licenciatum uidi. Sub eo determinauit in quotlibetis anno 1479.

Servatius Fanckel mentions only one *modernus*: master Johannes Ryppe de Alen, who received his degree at the University of Erfurt and matriculated at the University of Cologne in 1465.³ In the summer of 1480 this single adherent of the *via moderna* defended a question on the unity of God.⁴ His colleagues at Cologne were disturbed by his assertions, however, and attacked him vigorously. Servatius Fanckel reports on that occasion: “magister Johannes Alen, modernus, qui posuit Colonie inconsueta, et bene scobatus fuit.” Evidently in Cologne the *via moderna* was the exception rather than the rule.⁵

Servatius Fanckel’s collection is restricted to debates among theologians.⁶ Other documents bear witness to similar disputes at the faculty of Arts. The manuscript München, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. 482, contains late medieval and early modern records from the University of Ingolstadt.⁷ Among them is a list itemizing disagreements between realists and nominalists in logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. I quote the part dealing with the first book of the *De anima*. Two items may suffice. The debate about the nature of universals is among them:⁸

Discrepant Moderni a doctrina Aristotelis et Realium in libro De anima in multis conclusionibus.

³ Frankfurt, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1690, f. 29r: “Magister Iohannes Alen, modernus”. For his matriculation at Cologne, see Keussen 1979, n. 306 (1465), 43, 732: “Joh. Ryppe de Aylen, magister artium Erfordiensis et pastor in Kerspe (...)”. In the fifteenth century, Erfurt was a stronghold of nominalism; cf. Märker 1993, 42-45 (with references to further literature on 94-96).

⁴ Frankfurt, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1690, f. 86r: “Utrum in deo uno simplicissimo sit trium personarum realis distinctio”.

⁵ Frankfurt, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1690, f. 86r *in marg.* On philosophical schools at Cologne, see Meuthen 1988, 170-202, and Tewes 1993.

⁶ The disputed subjects are listed in Löhr 1926, 33f.

⁷ Unfortunately, the manuscript is now lost. A description of the manuscript with partial transcription of its content is published in Ehrle 1925, 326-42. Further documentation on the *Wegestreit* in Ingolstadt is provided by Prantl 1968, vol. II, and Seifert 1973, 45-48 (n. 7) and 67-70 (n. 10). In Ingolstadt both *viae* (*beder weghalben*) were represented in separate colleges, although the *via moderna* predominated at the end of the fifteenth century.

⁸ Cf. Ehrle 1925, 336. The items in the list are arranged according to their place in the traditional order of the *corpus aristotelicum*.

<1.> Et primo circa modum investigandi quod quid est ipsius anime: utrum anima sit substantia et de genere substantie.

<2.> Item circa istam auctoritatem Aristotelis: "animal universale nihil est aut posterius suis singularibus", ubi valde diversimode sentiunt Reales et Moderni, quod universale posterius est suis singularibus, et si universale sit aliquid in rerum natura.

The anonymous compiler of this inventory claims that the realists were the only legitimate successors of the Aristotelian tradition: *Reales, sequentes dicta Aristotelis, discrepant a Modernis, qui plerumque ab Aristotele declinant*.⁹ The same type of claim can be found in the writings of Johannes de Nova Domo, Heymericus de Campo, and other contemporary authors. The significance of this contention, defended by realists but ridiculed by nominalists, will be discussed below.

As is clear from this evidence, the existence of philosophical and theological schools in the fifteenth century cannot be questioned. But the interpretation of the historical data is another matter. Research into the existence of schools originated in the beginning of the twentieth century. Scholars judged that nominalism destroyed the intellectual enterprise of Thomism and Albertism. It had questioned the harmony between philosophy and theology and denied the existence of universals outside the human mind, thus depriving physics and metaphysics of their ontological foundation.¹⁰

Further research showed that a number of doctrines which were considered to be typically "nominalist" were in fact widely held, being part of the doctrinal canon of late medieval scholastic thought, especially the emphasis on logic and the use of the notion of *potentia dei absoluta*.¹¹ Recent studies, therefore, investigate the issue from a broader perspective. They take doctrinal aspects into consideration, but also draw on institutional and prosopographical evidence. The main conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1. The formation of schools was intimately connected with the reading of set texts at the universities and the *studia* of the religious orders. Debates between schools were chiefly concerned with interpretations of Aristotle. Each school had its preferred reading of the *corpus aristotelicum*. The stimulus for the establishment of philosophical schools, therefore, was the scholastic educational system.¹²

⁹ Ehrle 1925, 338. See also the opening of the passage quoted above: "discrepant Moderni a doctrina Aristotelis et Realium".

¹⁰ Highly influential studies were Ehrle 1925 and Ritter 1975. Erwin Iserloh delineated the "destruktive Wirkung" (his words) of nominalism in Iserloh 1956, esp. 283.

¹¹ Courtenay 1990. See also Courtenay 1991.

¹² Braakhuis 1989, and Hoenen 1993a.

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