

Studi
sull'Aristotelismo
medievale
(secoli VI-XVI)



2024 | 4

Direttori

Alessandro D. Conti (Università dell'Aquila)

Cecilia Trifogli (All Souls College, Oxford)

Comitato scientifico

Fabrizio Amerini (Università di Parma)

Luigi Campi (Università di Milano)

Angela Longo (Università dell'Aquila)

Massimo Mugnai (professore emerito della SNS, Pisa)

Chiara Paladini (Università dell'Aquila e Universität Luzern)

Dominik Perler (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Aurélien Robert (CNRS, Paris)

Nicolas Weill-Parot (EPHE, PSL, Paris)

Comitato di redazione

Luigi Campi

Alessandro De Pascalis

Giacomo Fornasieri

Chiara Paladini

Logo e progetto grafico

Daniele Mele

Numero di registrazione: 176/2021 del 20/10/21, Tribunale di Roma

ISSN edizione cartacea 2785-5066

ISSN edizione digitale 2974-7198

Periodicità annuale

ISBN edizione cartacea 979-12-5669-048-0

ISBN edizione digitale 979-12-5669-049-7

Prima edizione: dicembre 2024

tab edizioni

© 2024 Gruppo editoriale Tab s.r.l.

viale Manzoni 24/c

00185 Roma

www.tabedizioni.it

È vietata la riproduzione, anche parziale,
con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata, compresa la
fotocopia, senza l'autorizzazione dell'editore.
Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Studi sull'Aristotelismo medievale (secoli VI-XVI)

anno 4, numero 4, dicembre 2024

a cura di ANDREA NANNINI
e DAVIDE RISERBATO

UNIVERSITÀ

Indice

- p. 9 *Introduction*
Andrea Nannini
- 25 *Latitudini, gradazioni e immensità. Panorami metafisici in Giovanni da Ripa*
Andrea Nannini
- 69 *Il terzo Principium alle Sentenze di Giovanni da Ripa. Una fondazione metafisica della mediazione cristologica nell'“ontologia dell'essere comunicabile”*
Davide Riserbato
- 129 *Immutatio vitalis. Una rilettura della visione beatifica in Giovanni da Ripa*
Alessandro Ghisalberti
- 149 *The Gnoseological Argument. A Comparison between Anselm of Canterbury and John of Ripa*
Luca Vettorello
- 195 *Jean de Ripa : chemins de l'infini actuel*
Luca Parisoli
- 239 *John of Ripa's Theory of Distinction*
Sylvain Roudaut
- 283 *John of Ripa's virtual intellectual intuitive knowledge between mysticism and naturalism*
Francesco Fiorentino

- 323 *John of Ripa on Experience and Reflexivity*
Jordan Lavender
- 351 *The Legacy of John of Ripa*
Monica Brinzei, Chris Schabel

Introduction

Andrea Nannini

Istituto di Storia della Teologia – Lugano (CH)

This special issue of the journal *Studi sull'Aristotelismo medievale (secoli VI-XVI)* is proudly and entirely devoted to the great Franciscan John of Ripa (fl. 1354/1355 ca.), also known as the Super-subtle Doctor, who finally begins to be recognized as a milestone in the evolution of XIV century thought. Since his powerful metaphysical system can outstand the logical and nominalist drift of the mid of the century, John of Ripa is a perfect figure to overcome the historically ineffective oblivion that has fallen on the period immediately after Gregory of Rimini. The occasion for this special issue was born at the end of 2022, when Davide Riserbato, Ernesto Dezza, Alessandro Ghisalberti and I organized a conference in the city of Ripatransone, which took place on the 29th of December. Thanks to the councillor for culture, Roberto Pasquali, we had the opportunity to share with the citizenship, in the prestigious venue of the Luigi Mercantini city theatre, an in-depth analysis of Ripa's philosophical system and its originality, appreciating its place within the more general framework of XIV century philosophy.

In addition to the splendid hospitality that the municipal administration extended to us – and which testifies the region's vivid interest in its illustrious medieval fellow-citizen – it is worth noting that the attendance of Alessandro Ghisalberti represented the link with a previous conference, held in Ripatransone in the year 1997, from which the collected volume *Giovanni da Ripa e dintorni: una cultura della complessità*

proceeded¹. This volume had the merit of presenting a relatively up-to-date picture of John of Ripa's main ideas, locating him within the very complex context of mid XIV century thought, but it also had a great limit: almost all the aspects on which the attention of the scholars focused came mainly, if not exclusively, from the Prologue of his *Lectura*.

Despite the relevance of this collected volume, a crucial point must be strongly emphasized: in the absence of critical editions of the works of a medieval author (or in the presence of a very small portion of edited texts), it is impossible to grasp the globality of his thought and to appreciate its meaning for the history of philosophy. Back in 1997, the only available texts of John of Ripa were the *Quaestio de gradu supremo* (the *quaestio collativa* of his *Lectura*²), the two volumes containing the impressive Prologue of his *Lectura*³, and the *Determinationes*⁴, an important text, but posterior to Ripa's masterpiece, which remains his mighty (and largely unedited) *Lectura super Sententias*.

Of this *Lectura* – most likely dating back to 1354/1355 – which originally covered all four books, only the first book survives in its integrity, while the second in a highly abbreviated form, and the third and fourth only in a fragmentary way. Has anything changed, then, in the period between the two conferences in Ripatransone? A little, from the point of view of secondary literature; a lot, from the point of view of critical editions: I was able to publish the critical editions of the first and the second distinctions of Ripa's *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*⁵, while the third and the eighth are available in a provisional form in my PhD dissertation, dating

1. Cristiani (2001).

2. About the nature of this text and the problems related, cf. Kaluza (1987, pp. 261-262).

3. Jean de Ripa, *Lectura super I Sententiarum. Prologi quaestiones I & II*, A. Combes (ed.), Vrin, Paris 1961; Jean de Ripa, *Lectura super I Sententiarum. Prologi quaestiones ultimae*, A. Combes, F. Ruello (eds), Vrin, Paris 1970.

4. Jean de Ripa, *Determinationes*, A. Combes (ed.), Vrin, Paris 1957.

5. Iohannes de Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum. Distinctio secunda*, A. Nannini (ed.), Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, XXXIX), Roma 2020; Iohannes de Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*.

back to 2014. Luckily, the second distinction is the true – “the truest”, to be honest! – heart of Ripa’s metaphysical system, so that his philosophy can now be approached with a clear view of the main aim of his thought, namely, to (re)build a powerful metaphysics, which does not let an excess of logic to loosen the richness of a thought that must have as its ultimate goal an understanding of the whole of reality and a perfect tangency with theological knowledge⁶.

Up to the reader is the choice of believing or not what I am proposing, which clearly – at least partially – modifies the common perception of the second half of the XIV century. There is no doubt, however, that the following questions are among the most fertile grounds of research: what did John of Ripa add to the philosophical speculation after William of Ockham? Why is he not so well known as his mighty confrere? And why have scholars always had some difficulty in appreciating Ripa’s thought and legacy, up to the point that he has always ‘simply’ been labelled a Scotist? In order to present this author in as much detail as possible, but at the same time without repeating what is already well-known – basically, apart from the date of his *Lectura* (1354/1355), very little is known about Ripa’s career and life – I refer to the introductions to my two recent volumes of critical editions, which also contain a respectful and detailed analysis of the earlier work of André Combes, the first editor of Ripa’s monumental writings, whose effort must not be forgotten or set aside. Thus, freed from the need of a biographical and bibliographical introduction, the present volume has the scope of answering the kinds of question mentioned above, with a series of contributions devoted to various aspects of Ripa’s thought. These contributions range from metaphysical to gnoseological aspects, and they are no longer only based on the *Prologue* of Ripa’s *Lectura*, but they touch new and

Distinctio prima, A. Nannini (ed.), Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, XL), Roma 2023.

6. I already proposed a similar interpretation in Nannini, Schabel (2018a), p. 144.

yet-to-be-discovered distinctions of its first book. I am also proud that a dear friend of mine, Davide Riserbato, has contributed to this volume with the critical edition of the *principium Tertii* of Ripa's *Lectura*, so that scholars will be able to approach his Christology not only from the *Prologue* of the *Lectura* or from the *Determinationes*, but also from a place specifically dedicated to this theme.

About my contribution, which opens the volume and which I believe could be a good starting point for understanding Ripa's main metaphysical structures, I deemed appropriate to focus on the most relevant aspects of his metaphysics, which is essentially Neoplatonic, imbued with elements from the so-called mathematical theology, in particular the concept of latitude. As I stated above, the true heart of Ripa's philosophy is located in the second distinction of book I of his *Lectura* – which represents, in some respects, the broader version of the already known *Quaestio de gradu supremo* (even though, roughly speaking, ten times more extended) – so much so that only who masters the second distinction can presume to understand John of Ripa's thought. The interesting feature of this text is that it explicitly puts together, one by one, all the single bricks that compose Ripa's philosophical thought. Basically, we are dealing with a 'latitudinarian' metaphysics: each entity, even the merely possible ones, is identifiable by a degree of intensity; to be more specific, each entity is identified by several degrees of intensity (one for each of its perfections: *esse*, *vivere*, *intelligere*, specific perfections, accidental features, and so on), so that any entity can be compared to each other according to an order of perfection among created beings. One of Ripa's main tenets is that a created infinity is possible, so that a special intensity must be reserved for God. Hence, God is located even above infinity, in a special and simple degree of intensity which Ripa labels 'immensity' (*immensitas*). This super-simple degree of intensity contains any possible perfection in a way impossible to share for creatures, so that Ripa structures a rather innovative metaphysical device, which is named *replicatio unitatis divinae*, according to which each perfection can be communicated by God *ad extra* (allowing any of

God's perfections to be participated in, even though in an analogous way, against Duns Scotus' univocity of being). Thanks to this feature, Ripa proposes one of the most refined theory of the perfection of species (*perfectio specierum*), a still underestimated conceptual plexus that had grown more and more in importance since the time of Henry of Ghent and James of Viterbo⁷. It can be said, conclusively, that Ripa's philosophy provides nothing less than an ordered and complete metaphysical image of reality as it flows from its first cause, to which it always remains inextricably connected. This fundamental framework must constantly be kept in mind whenever any text of Ripa is approached, because otherwise it would not be intelligible at all.

Davide Riserbato's contribution points out an example of this feature. Alongside the precious and first edition of a text from the third book of Ripa's *Lectura* (its *principium*), it shows the constant presence of those elements of Ripa's metaphysics to which I devoted my paper and which are inserted here in a more Christological context⁸. According to Riserbato, the *principium Tertii* contains all the Christological suggestions that are found scattered throughout the whole *Lectura*, and thus it represents a sort of Christological fulcrum – just as the second distinction of the first book represents its metaphysical one – and anticipates many traits that will be more carefully developed in the later *Determinationes*. The text edited in Riserbato's paper is extremely useful not only from a theoretical point of view, but also from a historical one; for the *principium Tertii* contains several explicit references to masters and bachelors who were commenting the *Sentences* at the same time of Ripa, ranging from a Dominican to a Cistercian, with the presence of a Carmelite and an Augustinian. Since a common tract of most

7. On this topic see my recent article on Peter Ceffons and John of Ripa, Nannini (2024).

8. Riserbato, pp. 72-73: «Come il III Libro delle *Sentenze* anche il *principium* che ne inaugura il Commento verte su temi cristologici. Nella formulazione del suo enunciato la questione sembra presentare un interesse di natura gnoseologica, ma a una lettura meno superficiale si rivela di ordine eminentemente metafisico».

medieval texts, including Ripa's, is to keep the quoted authors in a form of anonymity, therefore Riserbato achieves an excellent result in identifying at least the Carmelite, who is Johannes Balisterii. This hint may be of extreme importance for anyone who is interested in making critical editions of later medieval texts, because one of the hardest duties in editing texts from poorly known periods is to find the anonymous sources frequently referred to. From a conceptual perspective, Riserbato conducts an in-depth analysis of Ripa's Christology on the basis of a yet-unknown text, and he ends up suggesting that Ripa may not have wanted to sustain the *homo assumptus* theory, but he could have simply intended to think of the hypostatic union in terms of a renewed subsistence theory. Inside this *principium*, Ripa distinguishes and contrasts the various forms of union (*unio essentialis* and *unio suppositalis*) that are used to characterize the hypostatic union not only as a mere intervention of a divine supposit over a created nature, but in the much more complex terms of an essential union that brings the *plenitudo deitatis* inside the assumed nature. Although there is no explicit mention of Christ being the «intrinsic infinite (and created) being», of which Ripa states the possibility in the second distinction of the first book and in the *Quaestio de gradu supremo*, it must not go unnoticed the fact that Christ represents, both in a theological and in a metaphysical sense, the summit of creation.

Since the communication of the divine essence to creatures is perfectly realised in Christ in terms of fullness of divinity (by virtue of the essential union), and thus flows from Christ to the blessed as participation in the beatific enjoyment of the same divine essence, the contribution of Alessandro Ghisalberti, with its focus on the nature of the beatific vision itself, becomes of extreme importance. John of Ripa has a famous and original theory about the beatific vision, which is well-known under the name of *immutatio vitalis*: basically, since a rigorous information is impossible, because it would entail that the fullness of divinity with his immense degree of being is communicated to any blessed soul, the only way to explain the fruition of the immense divine essence is

to posit a modification (*immutatio*) that does not affect the perfection of a human being, but only the perceptiveness of its faculties, the intellect and the will, which belong necessarily to a being endowed with life (so, an *immutatio* which is also *vitalis*). Since the critical edition of the first distinction of book I of Ripa's *Lectura* allows further investigations, Ghisalberti focuses on a specific aspect that is not present in its *Prologue*. The finitude of the human soul poses a metaphysical issue: despite its intrinsic finiteness, is its capacity finite or infinite? This is a widely discussed problem, which also involved the heresy of the free spirit, condemned in the decree *Ad nostrum*. It pitted Richard Kilvington⁹ against Adam Wodeham, the first admitting the human soul's infinite capacity (required to perceive an infinite God), the latter negating it and advocating the need of a supernatural intervention to expand the soul's finite capacity. According to the *immutatio vitalis* theory and to the original distinction between three habits (*formabilitas*, *causalitas* and *perceptio*), Ripa can easily overcome both positions: as a finite being – and, in addition, not the supreme one within the *perfectio specierum* grid – the human soul is clearly finite and endorsed with a finite capacity (against Kilvington); at the same time, however, no miraculous intervention is needed (against Wodeham) for the blessed to perceive the immense divine essence in the beatific vision, because it is sufficient that its perceptiveness (and not its being) would be vitally modified.

The close connection between the created domain and its metaphysical origin lays at the basis of Luca Vettorello's contribution. Through a conjoined reading of Anselm of Canterbury'sgnoseological argument and Ripa's highly original argument for God's existence, Vettorello invites the reader to reflect on the centrality of the divine in medieval thought, and about the surprises that the Middle Ages can still hold in store. In the case of St. Anselm, Vettorello insists on a groundbreaking reading of thegnoseological argument, according to which the crucial word "greater" would

9. About Kilvington see Michałowska (2021).

not directly refer to the actual existence of something, but to the *idea* of something existing in reality, as opposed to the idea of something that does not exist in reality: «suppose it [*ndc.* God] exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which [*to conceive it exists in reality*] is greater». According to this reading, there is no recourse to the problematic principle of superiority of existence, and the comparison is not ontological (thought *vs* reality), but gnoseological, that is, between two different ideas of God. This leads to infer that «the theist idea of God is conceptually greater and richer than the other idea (*ndc* the atheist's), because it is thought with a thinkable property more (a property that the atheist idea refuses to include)» (p. 161), and since all the contenders in the argument accept that God is «something than which nothing greater can be thought», there is a clear contradiction in the atheist's way of thinking about God. According to Vettorello, Ripa's reading represents one of the rare cases in the history of thought where the correct understanding of Anselm's argument is tangible. Besides, we are probably dealing with the first argument in the whole history of philosophy that moves from an existing infinite series of second causes – alongside with a real created infinity – to infer the existence of a God who, therefore, is necessarily above the infinite (if this were not the case, He would coincide with the same infinite series or with the infinite created being). This is one of the main reasons in support of Ripa's claim of God's immensity. Vettorello examines not only the *quaestio prima* of the second distinction (where the *a posteriori* proof of God's existence is discussed), but delves much deeper into Ripa's texts. Thus, he establishes a comparison with Anselm of Canterbury moving from the *quaestio secunda* of Ripa's second distinction of book I, where Ripa asks about the impossibility of conceiving a non-existing God. In this question, Vettorello finds several similarities between the two masters, Anselm and Ripa, testifying both the importance of Ripa's new reading of Anselm's gnoseological argument and its reception in the history of philosophy. Lastly, Vettorello identifies a specific place in Ripa's second

distinction where the Supersubtle states the superiority of God over the principle of non-contradiction, which is «an extremely original and brilliant thesis, which makes John of Ripa very modern, anticipating Descartes by centuries and anticipating some theories of contemporary logic, such as Dialetheism» (p. 183).

The connection between some of Ripa's intuitions and modern or contemporary thinking should by no means appear to be a gamble, since the richness of Ripa's thought explicitly suggests this possibility. Moving from the central concept of immensity and stressing the relevance of the Neoplatonic tradition within Ripa's metaphysics (Grosseteste and Ps.-Dionysius), Luca Parisoli tries to establish several connections between some tenets of the Supersubtle's *distinctio secunda* and contemporary mathematical thought. The starting point is Ripa's main thesis about the infinity of creation and the need for God to be even beyond infinity. Emphasizing even more the originality of Ripa's demonstration of God's existence, Parisoli reads it as follows: «L'infini potentiel requiert la nécessité de l'infini actuel, la thèse aristotélique est bouleversée : le chemin des causes infinies n'est pas une régression qui dérange, c'est la manifestation de l'ordre» (p. 214). Parisoli proposes to read Ripa's concept of *latitudo* not as an image of a magnitude derived from the physical world, but as a formal property that makes it possible to investigate objects that are not limited to our actual world. He points out that the model for this formal property is a concept that will also be proposed by Frege, who will formalize much more precisely than Ripa the fact that we can have several *latitudines*: some in different orders of sets with infinite elements, others within each of those orders. Ripa's claims that there are, or there can be, multiple levels of infinity, and that there is a distinction between an infinite numerical series, on the one side, and the "infinite number" (which mimics the metaphysical perfection of the intensively infinite creature), on the other, reflect intuitions that, although expressed in the natural language, can be found in a more formalized way in Frege or Cantor. The very same *replicatio unitatis divinae*, which is a central point of the

whole metaphysics of Ripa, can be compared to Frege's or Lacan's operational concept of 'repetition', while the concept of 'unality', which Ripa implicitly infers from Grosseteste and the Ps.-Dionysius, can be juxtaposed to Cantor's way of representing the ensemble of numeral cardinality. In addition, Parisoli tries to connect Ripa's metaphysical innovations with the non-Euclidean geometries, anticipating some of Lobatchevsky's intuitions, although this aspect is not limited to Ripa and could also be found in the Cistercian Pierre Ceffons (fl. 1348), who is another groundbreaking author of late scholasticism. Very interestingly, Parisoli revisits even the psychoanalysis of Lacan in the light of some of Ripa's insights: just as Lacan shows a strong attraction to formal logic, often referring to the Neoplatonic tradition, and to Cantor and Frege, in his effort to formalise the factors that unveil the human unconscious, Ripa's formalisation – conducted within the natural language – attempts to grasp the discourse of divinity through one of the most daring and refined metaphysics in the entire history of thought.

Ripa's super-subtlety makes him able to address a classical Scotistic structure, namely, formal distinction, from a very specific perspective, as Sylvain Roudaut shows in his paper: «the primary motivation driving Ripa's intricate theory of distinction results from his radical gradualism: its capacity to elucidate the intricate structure of God and creation» (p. 273). John of Ripa's theory of distinction represents much more than just the repetition of a mere Scotistic thesis, and this suggests that Ripa may not be simply treated as a Scotist. Ripa too is interested in the way in which various entities can differ one from another, but differently from Duns Scotus, he classifies the forms of distinction in a clear threefold hierarchy: gradual distinction, formal distinction and real distinction. While the real distinction separates two entities, the formal distinction distinguishes – within a single entity – all the aspects that it possesses, and the gradual distinction indicates the degree of intensity in which any of those aspects is possessed by a specific entity but not by another. Relying on precious texts

coming from the eighth distinction and the still unedited seventeenth, thirty-third and thirty-fourth distinctions, Roudaut interprets John of Ripa's theory in very specific terms: 1. the real distinction implies that two things must exist apart from one another; 2. the formal distinction can firstly, 'horizontally', regard various formal reasons present within a single entity, but it can be also implied in a 'vertical' discourse concerning God and participation, since any of the formal distinct aspects implies a specific origin located in God and independent from any other. This is a remarkable element, which is clearly connected with the *replicatio unitatis divinae* mechanism, which I mentioned above and several times in my articles, and which is deeply intertwined with Ripa's entire metaphysical system; 3. the gradual distinction, which is recognized as a highly original Ripan element by Roudaut, implies that two entities sharing a formal element differ in the degree of perfection of that same element. These three kinds of distinction are the sole ones admitted by Ripa, which consider them to be distinctions *ex natura rei*; under this respect, not only John of Ripa cannot simply be treated as a Scotist, but he moves away from other master's treatments of the topic, like that of Francis of Meyronnes, suggesting an even higher level of originality. Roudaut's contribution offers not merely an outline of these distinctions but also a presentation of their interrelations: real distinction implies formal distinction, and formal distinction implies gradual distinction. John of Ripa appears to be probably the only author who inserted graduality and degrees of being in almost any entity and in any of the three forms of distinction, giving even more meaning to the idea of 'latitudinarian metaphysics' that I mentioned above. Several aspects turn out to be interrelated to such an extent that we can «witness the coherence of the fundamental principles of the Ripan system as well as the systematic character of his theory of distinction» (p. 265).