

Opening Address: The Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy

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Mr Minister,¹ dear symposiasts.

This symposium is to be both a celebration of Copenhagen as the *pro tempore* cultural capital of Europe,² an attempt to advance our understanding of medieval thought, and a family gathering.

It is, of course, an outrageous presumption to call Copenhagen the cultural capital of Europe. Paris would have a far better claim to the title, and so would several other cities. But I hope we can help show that for a *pro tem* capital it is all right.

For better and for worse, medieval Europe created much of the institutional and mental framework that now governs the world. One such creation was the kingdoms of England, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, which survive to this day, and other territorial organizations which were to develop into such states as the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. Another medieval creation was the international community of science and scientists, scholarship and scholars. Some medieval kingdoms did not survive, but the international community of science and scientists, scholarship and scholars never broke down, though it has seen difficult times. The stronger the states became, the stronger the temptation to provincialize teaching and study. But the urge to understand was stronger than national divisions. The community of research even survived the religious division of Western Europe in the sixteenth century and the loss of its common language, Latin, in the course of the next centuries. It also managed to spread far outside Western Europe.

This community of learning and research enables a minor European city like Copenhagen to have some role in science and scholarship alongside the big centres. In our field, it is the centre

1 The Danish minister of research, Mr Frank Jensen, honoured the opening of the symposium with his presence.

2 Copenhagen had been named Cultural Capital of Europe for the duration of 1996.

of one of the many informal networks that we symposiasts participate in. To me, at least, this particular network is very like that of a family. For the purpose of this meeting the family is called the Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy, and I consider this a family gathering.

People who do history of philosophy tend to operate with schools, the school of Aristotle or Peter Abelard, the Nominalist or the Hegelian school.

We all know that it is difficult to assign a precise sense to such locutions. A mixture of criteria are employed when school-affinity is established. A pupil of Mr X belongs to his school, but so does somebody who shares Mr X's opinions. All persons from the same institution may be grouped together as the school of whatever the name of the institution. There are several senses in which there is no Copenhagen school of medieval philosophy. There is no institution in this city whose primary purpose is to teach medieval philosophy. Very few scholars got their first introduction to the field here. Most of the people in this room have had most of their training elsewhere and can be claimed for other "schools" named after master, place, or theory. Nonetheless, I submit that there is a sense in which we may speak of a Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy, pioneered by Heinrich Roos (1904-77) in the 1940s, 50s, and early 60s, but reaching maturity only in the seventies with Jan Pinborg (1937-82).³ The school is held together by overlapping interests, similarities in methodology, and personal collaboration. – Just to prevent any non-initiated member of the audience from thinking that we suffer from megalomania, I must point out that it was not a Copenhagen idea to apply the term "The Copenhagen School" to the group whose most famous member was Jan Pinborg. The terminology was introduced by Prof.

³ For the life and work of Heinrich Roos, see the obituary in *CIMAGL* 24 (1978) and the bibliography in *CIMAGL* 13 (1974). For the life and work of Jan Pinborg, see obituary and bibliography in *CIMAGL* 41 (1982); obituary in *Københavns Universitets årbog* 1982, pp. 30-34; and the introduction to the memorial volume *De Ortu Grammaticae*, ed. G.L. Bursill-Hall, S. Ebbesen, K. Koerner, *Studies in the History of the Language Sciences* 43 (John Benjamins: Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1990). For both men, and for the school in general, see also S. Ebbesen, "Doing Philosophy the Sophistic way. The Copenhagen School, with Notes on the Dutch School", in: Alfonso Maierù (ed.), *Gli studi di filosofia medievale tra Otto e Novecento*, Roma 1991, pp. 331-359.

L.M. de Rijk of Leiden in the 1980s, and in the late 80s when a conference was gathered in Rome to sum up the last one hundred years of research on medieval philosophy one of the speakers was asked to cover the Copenhagen School and the Dutch School.⁴

Heinrich Roos had one pupil, Jan Pinborg. But as early as 1964 the minute Institute of Greek and Latin Medieval Philology⁵ in which master and pupil worked housed a foreign graduate student. The name of the guest was Winfried Fauser, and his topic of research was an obscure late 13th-century philosopher, one Radulphus Brito. I think Fauser played a pivotal role in making Pinborg and Roos interested in this obscure personality who now, as in his own days, is recognized as a first-rate thinker.

Fauser opened an era, though it took some time before we could see it, for we had to wait till 1974 before the next graduate student came here to work on his thesis. He was Christian Knudsen from Bonn, who stayed a year to study 14th-century thought and the theory of “intentiones” in particular. Then we had to wait another four years, and suddenly the place grew genuinely international. Two Americans arrived, Mary Sirridge and Katherine Tachau, both of them present at this symposium, as are all those who have worked for a longish time in Copenhagen in the eighties and nineties. They are: Iwakuma Yukio from Japan who obtained his Ph.D. degree from the University of Copenhagen. The Italian contingent, which consists of Alessandro Conti, the three Bolognesi – that is Roberto Lambertini, Costantino Marmo, Andrea Tabarroni – Riccardo Quinto, and Paolo Fait. More Americans, first Robert Andrews and now the second generation scholars, Russ Friedman and Kurt Boughan, both pupils of Katherine Tachau. From Germany, the country from where our first foreign guest arrived, we have had the pleasure of hosting Reinhard Hülsen. From Switzerland Christoph Flüeler. From Hungary Gyula Klima. And the line does not look like it will be broken. Italy, the great mother of medieval scholars at the moment, looks like she will send more of her sons and daughters to visit Copenhagen, and the first Russian has applied.⁶

⁴ See Ebbesen 1991 (preceding note).

⁵ In 1992 this institute was fused with the department of classical philology to form a new entity called the Institute for Greek and Latin.

⁶ Mrs Elena Lisaniuk of St Petersburg actually arrived in late 1996 in order to work on a dissertation about the theory of properties of terms.

If nothing else, then the alacrity with which our former guests signed up for this conference could make me believe that they do not regret their time in Copenhagen. But I did not need to be convinced. I knew. I knew because we have always stayed in contact, wherever people have ended up in the world.

The funny thing about the Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy is that this international non-organization started with a national Danish project, the edition of the collected works of Danish Philosophers from the Middle Ages.⁷ Fortunately, the Danish scholars who put their authority behind the project when it was first proposed in 1946 were not narrow-minded chauvinists. They left it in the hands of the man who had proposed it, Heinrich Roos, and he was a German who had only recently become a resident of this kingdom. The edition of the Danish philosophers has continued ever since, and two new volumes are to appear within the next couple of years, one edited by a Dane, Niels Jørgen Green-Pedersen, one by an Italian, Andrea Tabarroni.

It may be debatable whether the Copenhagen School is a real thing, a *res*, or just a modality, a *modus*, or perhaps a circumstance, a *status*. But whatever it is, it was born international.

There is an old Norse myth, very similar to the Greek myth about Meleagros. According to the myth a baby called Nornagest is granted by the Fates to live just as long as a firebrand from the hearth of his home is not consumed by the fire. Immediately, someone rescues the firebrand and extinguishes it, and Nornagest lives to see several generations of men until the brand is finally burned. The Copenhagen School is similar to Nornagest in that it was born with a simple condition of life or death. International collaboration equals life; isolation equals death. This symposium should help boost life and vigour.

It takes money to arrange a meeting like this. It is a pleasure to be able to express my gratitude to the Royal Danish Academy which provides us with roof and a variety of consumables; to the Carlsberg Foundation, to the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, and to the Faculty of Humanities of our university,

⁷ *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi*, published by Det danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (The Society for Danish Language and Literature). Volume I, *Johannis Daci Opera*, appeared in 1955; volume XII, *Nicolai Drukken de Dacia Opera*, in 1997.

each of which has contributed a substantial sum to this enterprise. In particular I am happy that it was not even difficult to persuade the donors that this was a worthy cause.

Guests have been invited on three criteria. (1) Either they belong to the Danish contingent. (2) Or they have had or are having a long stay in Copenhagen. (3) Or they are distinguished scholars with whom we have collaborated, but who have never spent any long time here and may therefore be presumed to be free of whatever prejudices we cultivate in this place.

The themes of the conference were determined by the interests of the Danish contingent. These obviously overlap with those of the foreigners who have been here or have collaborated with us from afar.

Any good conference looks forward. But in this case I want us also to look backwards. The reason is that between us, and together with people now dead whom we remember, we have developed a number of theories, or historiographical schemata, if you wish. As I am growing old, I have started to worry about the way our theories are being accepted by scholars who have never seen the theories in their making and do not know which problems within the theories their creators were worried about, or even which problems they were designed to solve in the first place.

Allow me to quote a circular that I sent to the participants a little less than a year ago:⁸

“The purpose of the symposium is to discuss critically some subjects that have been studied by people working in the Institute of Greek and Latin (Medieval Philology) in Copenhagen; to test the tenability of our old beliefs and conceptual frameworks; to indicate avenues for new research.

Below, I suggest some topics for discussion.

1. Modism. People routinely speak about modism these days, and in one way or another they all depend on Jan Pinborg’s work. But for one thing, subsequent work has thrown much light on the development of grammar before the supposedly modist era, for another it has shown that there never was a period in which all theoretical work in grammar followed “modist” principles, and finally it seems as if some scholars think in terms of a “modist

8 This quotation was not included in the actual opening address.

school” with greater internal coherence than the label was originally meant to suggest. There are also problems with defining clearly what is meant by “modism” in logic.

2. Intentions. Again Jan Pinborg’s work remains important for what is routinely said about intentions. But there are problems with which several of us have struggled. How, in particular, does one combine the sort of intentions that occur in theories of sense-perception with the first and second intentions of logic and psychology in, say, Radulphus? Or what about Boethius of Dacia’s *intentiones*? In some contexts it seems helpful to think of an intention as a piece of information, but not everywhere.

3. *Elenchi*, fallacies, supposition, sophismata, topics, and consequences. Much pioneering work has been done independently of Copenhagen, but persons linked to Copenhagen have also been very active in the field. It is by now a commonplace that 12th- and 13th-century studies in fallacies contributed to the development of a/the theory of supposition. And it is a platitude that theories of fallacies were connected with the study of the *Elenchi*. But how does the triad of *Elenchi*, fallacies, and supposition really work? Did the occupation with the *Elenchi* contribute considerably to the development of a theory of supposition, or was it rather the case that the theory developed independently and was imported into an alien context, that of the *Elenchi*? How is the genre of sophismata related, at different times, to the study of the *Elenchi*, to theories of fallacies, and of supposition? How does the *instantiae*-literature fit into the picture? Can we throw new light on the origin of the genre of *consequentiae*? Finally, with so many texts on fallacies published, can we begin to write a history of commentaries on the *Elenchi* and the related genres?

4. Logic, grammar, and theology from the second half of the 12th century. Several members of our group have worked on twelfth-century theology and its connections to logic and grammar. In spite of the recent symposium in San Marino⁹ I feel we still need a clearer picture of the interpenetration of the disciplines. Nominalists have attracted much attention in later years, but it might be time to look again at the late Porretans. Besides: I still

⁹ See the acts in: C. Marmo (ed.), *Vestigia, imagines, verba. Semiotics and Logic in Medieval Theological Texts (XIIIth-XIVth Century)*, Semiotic and Cognitive Studies 4, Brepols: Turnhout, 1997.

feel I know much too little about the cultural environment of men like Andrew Sunesen and Stephen Langton, and of Langton's influence on posterity (which I believe was great).

5. The Buridanian Tradition. Andrea Tabarroni is finishing an edition of Thuo de Vibergia's *Metaphysics* commentary, written in Erfurt in the 1430s. It has turned out to be heavily dependent on Marsilius of Inghen, who in turn leans heavily on Buridan. Since some members of our group have worked on Buridan and later logic, it might be an idea to discuss some aspects of the Buridanian tradition."

It is my hope that our discussions during the next four days will help us remember why we thought it was a good idea to talk about modism, why we thought intentions were a key concept in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, why we thought medieval theory of fallacies was important, and so on. I hope, of course, that we can reconfirm our belief in the importance of those subjects. But I also hope that we can clarify our own views on them and explain these views in a way that a new generation of scholars can understand. The clarification and purification ought to imply also a realization that some of the things we have believed in should not be believed in. I hope to live to old age, but I would be happy if already now my pet beliefs, many of which were shaped by Jan Pinborg, could be winnowed while there are still people around who can remember their purpose and fragilities.

Those of you who remember Jan will know that the best tribute we can pay to his memory is to discuss his views instead of just parroting them.