

Ontology

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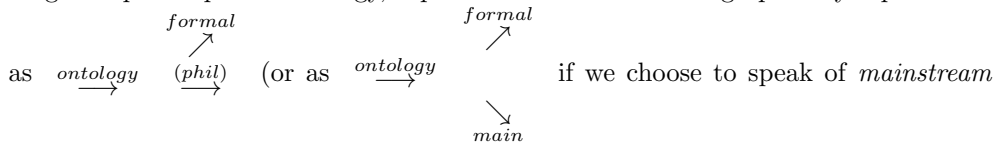
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In this issue, with the publication of an article based on the fourth part of the medieval text *Treatise on the Origin of the Categories* by the Latin scholastic philosopher Dietrich of Freiberg JKSS continues the project of bridging philosophical and formal ontology. The reason for choosing a late medieval text as the backbone of this project is as follows: Ontological inquiry reached an acumen in Latin Scholasticism (13th-14th centuries), with the likes of Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham featuring as the authors of comprehensive works that critically synthesize the concepts and authoritative writings of Aristotle – *the Philosopher*, as they called him – and his Arab interpreters, in particular Averroes (*the Commentator*); this synthesis established the core vocabulary contemporarily in use in the field of ontology. The reason for choosing this late medieval text lies in its exceptional representativeness of Albertism, the philosophical movement rooting in the interpretation of these *auctoritates* by Albert the Great that built itself as strong as to oppose the abovementioned scholastics in heated academic debates.

But what is meant by “bridging philosophical and formal ontology,” and does that matter to the contemporary context? I begin by answering the second question: Formal ontology is obviously a branching – perhaps a shedding, as suggested by B. Smith – of a discipline that has existed explicitly as such since the early 17th century but is as old as Parmenides’ *Poem*. As this was a philosophical discipline, to wit, Ontology, it is justified to say that formal ontology, or ontology simpliciter, is a branching – or a shedding – of philosophical ontology, a phenomenon that can be graphically represented



ontology instead of Ontology, namely as a disambiguation strategy). While this genealogy was easily ignorable, dismissible, or refutable in the very first tentative steps

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in the mid 1990s of formal ontology, which was then concerned with the engineering of domain or application ontologies from a purely machine-oriented viewpoint (e.g., Amazon ontologies), with the gradual realization that this ^{branch}_{shedd}ing cannot dispense with what in the field are called *upper* or *top-level ontologies* the need was felt to import – often reclaim – a jargon whose terms require long, intricate, and inconclusive (i.e. philosophical-like) elaborations, an unusual practice in machine-oriented subjects. This jargon includes terms such as *entity*, *substance*, *universal*, *particular*, and *category*, each of which has been the object of impressively complex discussions since they were firstly uttered in the Greek language – respectively as *on*, *ousia*, *to katholou*, *to kath' hekaston*, and *katêgoria* (transliterating ὄν, οὐσία, τὸ καθόλου, τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον, and κατηγορία, respectively) – and were later on translated into these easily recognizable Latin-stemming forms handed over from medieval metaphysics. But the fact that they are easily recognizable does not mean that they are easily understandable, and their misuse in the so-called upper or top-level ontologies is often the case – to the point that it actually matters, as has been discussed in some of the articles in this project. (The reader is referred to JKSS 2(2), 3(1), and 3(2).)

With this observation, I am not suggesting that formal ontologists take upon themselves the task/burden of further clarifying these millennia-ongoing conceptualizations, and it is here precisely that I speak of the need to bridge Ontology and ontology: It falls into the scope (upon the shoulders) of the former the task (burden, respectively) of continuing this indispensable practice, simply because philosophical ontologists are the ontologists that have the necessary training, if not the inclination, to do so. This bridging, however, requires not only the willingness of formal ontologists to welcome this division of labor, something that I prognosticate will not be easily the case unless some effort is made to bring these two research communities together (say, in events and projects), but also the readiness of those professionals of philosophy working in subjects that have a significant ontological component to undertake this task, or bear this burden, in all its complexity, which includes *sufficient* knowledge of both Classical Greek and Latin. This is particularly desirable in pedagogical contexts. If the reader is of the opinion that this comes with the job, then you are wrong: As a philosophy undergraduate student at the University of Porto (Portugal), once in a lecture I had to correct the member of faculty teaching Medieval Philosophy who wrongly stated that *ens* is the infinitive of the verb *be* in Latin. (A deplorable lack of the desired readiness aka competence: This lecturer, then writing a Ph.D. thesis on Peter of Spain – frequently also known as Petrus Hispanus (Portugalensis) – actually argued with me when I repeatedly told him that *ens* is the present participle – and a medieval neologism for philosophical use at that – of the Latin verb *sum*, whose infinitive is *esse*.)

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