

All that is Intelligible, Ontology, and Charts: A Brief Assessment of the Birth of Ontology

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Abstract

In this commentary motivated by Øhrstrøm & Uckelman (2022; this issue), I provide important remarks concerning All that is Intelligible and Ontology – and how both concepts evolved.

Key words: All that is Intelligible; Entity; Ontology; Clemens Timpler; Jacob Lorhard; Rudolph Goclenius the Elder; Petrus Ramus

IN A DEPARTURE FROM PRIOR COMMON CONSENSUS, Clemens Timpler asserted – in his treatise on metaphysics (1604) – that All that is Intelligible (and not entity) was the subject-matter of metaphysics. With very few exceptions, his contemporaries – including Rudolph Goclenius the Elder – continued to regard entity as the subject-matter of metaphysics. One exception was Jacob Lorhard, who in 1606 also referred to metaphysics as ontology. Evidence documenting a connection (if any) between Lorhard and Goclenius needs to be presented. It would be best not to closely link Lorhard to Petrus Ramus or to “Ramists.” As initially conceived, Timpler’s All that is Intelligible as well as Lorhard’s adoption thereof as the subject-matter of ontology both appear to have been short lived. In what follows, I draw on Freedman (1988, 1993, 2001, 2009).

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During the 16th century (and prior thereto) entity appears to have been universally (or close thereto) regarded as the subject-matter of metaphysics. But a focus broader than entity was presented in a treatise on metaphysics first published by Clemens

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Timpler in Steinfurt (Westphalia) in 1604. This treatise was republished in Lich (1604), Marburg (1607), Frankfurt am Main (1607, 1612), and Hanau (1606, 1608, 1612, 1616).

In Timpler's treatise the subject-matter of metaphysics is All that in Intelligible (*omne intelligibile*), which is divided into two sub-categories: Nothing (*Nihil*) and Something (*Aliquid*). Something – which is equivalent to being (*esse, est*) – is either Positive Something or Negative Something; the latter is Privation (*privatio*). Positive Something is either essence (*essentia*) or entity (*ens*).

With what were apparently very few exceptions, Timpler's All that is Intelligible (as the subject-matter of metaphysics) was not accepted by his contemporaries. It was sometimes attacked by Lutherans while Reformed Protestants generally distanced themselves from it. Almost all Lutherans, Reformed Protestants, and Roman Catholics continued to regard entity (*ens*) as the subject-matter of metaphysics.

One of those very few exceptions appears to have been Jacob Lorhard, who – in his *Ogdoas scholastica* (1606) and his *Theatrum philosophicum* (1613) – not only considers All that is Intelligible as the subject-matter of metaphysics, but also uses the term ontology (*ontologia*) to refer to the latter. As Marco Lemanna has shown, Lorhard apparently organized his own presentation of metaphysics by adopting the organization of Timpler's metaphysics.

The Steinfurt 1604 edition of Timpler's treatise on metaphysics contains a preface – dated July 15, 1603 – by Rudolph Goclenius the Elder (1547-1628). That same preface is included in all subsequent imprints of Timpler's metaphysics treatise. Text by Goclenius is interspersed with Timpler's own text in the Lich 1604 and Marburg 1607 imprints. Non-interspersed commentary (*scholia*) by Goclenius is contained in the Hanau 1606 as well as in the Frankfurt am Main 1607 and 1612 imprints while his extended non-interspersed commentary (*notae et scholia*) is to be found in the Hanau 1608, 1612, and 1616 imprints.

In his preface dated July 15, 1603 Goclenius indirectly mentions Timpler's views on the subject-matter of metaphysics without approving or disapproving of them. However, Goclenius specifically states – on page 1 of his treatise titled *Isagoge in Peripateticorum et Scholasticorum primam philosophiam, quae dici consuevit metaphysica* (1598) – that the subject-matter of first philosophy (that is, of metaphysics) is entity (*ens*). And that same view (together with a citation of Timpler's opposing view) is defended by Goclenius on pages 9 and 10 of his *Conciliator Philosophicus* (1609).

Goclenius does not include a segment on metaphysics within his *Lexicon philosophicum* (1613). In the margin of the left column of page 16 therein, however, he mentions the following: ὄντολογία & *philosophia de ente*. *Ente* (the nominative of which is *ens*) should be translated here into English as entity – not as being. That is consistent with Goclenius's previous statements – from the years 1595 and 1609 – that entity is the subject-matter of first philosophy (metaphysics).

Several points concerning the connection between Lorhard and Goclenius should be mentioned. In 1927 Franz Gundlach published a very well documented catalog of Marburg University professors from 1527 until 1910 (Gundlach, 1927). Jacob Lorhard is not listed there as a Professor of Theology (in 1607 or in any other year) and he is not mentioned there by Gundlach anywhere else at all. Assuming there is no evidence to the contrary, it is possible that Lorhard did not move to – or even visit – Marburg.

And in that case it could be possible that Goclenius utilized the Greek term *ὄντολογία* (for ontology) without having any knowledge of Lorhard's treatise (in which the Latin term for the same is used). And while the subject-matter of ontology for Lorhard is All that is Intelligible, for Goclenius the subject-matter of ontology appears to have been entity.

Lorhard's *Ogdoas scholastica* (1606) – within the copy thereof in the Augsburg Staats- und Stadtbibliothek – consists of seven components (presented in the following order): Grammar (Latin and Greek), Logic (concluding with two pages on method), Rhetoric, Astronomy, Ethics, Physics, and Metaphysics. His *Theatrum philosophicum* (1613) consists of ten components (discussed – within the copy thereof in the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel – in the following order): Grammar (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), Logic (concluding with two pages on method), Rhetoric, Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, Astronomy, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Music. In both of these two publications, the text consists entirely of charts. These charts contain numerous subdivisions – including some that are dichotomous – of selected concepts.

Charts such as those used by Lorhard are sometimes deemed to be “Ramist” and/or are associated with Petrus Ramus. With regard thereto the following two summary comments are in order. First, many of Ramus's own publications do not contain such charts. And second, during the 16th and 17th centuries such charts were utilized by many authors, including (i.) some authors who thought highly of Ramus (for example: Johannes Thomas Freigius), (ii.) other authors who were critical of Ramus (for example: Bartholomew Keckermann and Clemens Timpler), (iii.) still other authors who used Ramus's writings in combination with writings by additional authors (such as Philipp Melanchthon or Aristotle), and (iv.) yet still other authors who had little or no connection with (or knowledge of) Ramus. The following conclusion can be ventured: it might be best not to closely link charts (such as those used by Lorhard) to Petrus Ramus or to “Ramists.”

While Timpler's All that is Intelligible (*omne intelligibile*) was not accepted by his contemporaries as the subject-matter of metaphysics, the meaning of that term began to evolve shortly after the initial publication of his metaphysics in 1604. By the 1630s it generally was referred to (1) all that is knowable within all individual academic disciplines (and sub-disciplines) as well as (2) a new discipline – often referred to as gnostologia – that focused on the general principles underlying those disciplines and sub-disciplines. Some treatises and academic disputations on gnostologia were published in Central Europe at least into the first decade of the 18th century.

And while Lorhard regarded the subject-matter of ontology to be All that is Intelligible, the focus of ontology became narrower thereafter. In a disputation published in Rostock in 1619 (Olthoff & Eyben, 1619), the subject matter of metaphysics – as well as the subject-matter of ontology – is entity. In a disputation presided over by Liborius Capsius in 1639, the subject matter of metaphysics (which is equated with general ontology) is entity. And well into the late 18th century entity (*ens*) continued to be the focus of ontology. As initially conceived, Timpler's All that is Intelligible as well as Lorhard's adoption thereof as the subject-matter of ontology both appear to have been short lived.

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