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THE MEDIEVAL CONCEPT OF TIME



THE MEDIEVAL CONCEPT OF TIME

STUDIES ON THE SCHOLASTIC DEBATE AND
ITS RECEPTION IN EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

EDITED BY

PASQUALE PORRO



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FOREWORD

Time is, undoubtedly, one of the concepts which has consistently attracted the attention of scholars of medieval thought, starting with the pioneering research of Pierre Duhem, continuing with Augustin Mansion and Anneliese Maier, up to the recent works of Kurt Flasch, Udo Reinhold Jeck and many of the authors included in this volume. In the last two decades especially, the various general works on the subject have been complemented by numerous specific works focussing on individual authors or individual problematic aspects; these have made it possible to achieve a more detailed reconstruction of the pattern of medieval debates on the nature of time and duration. Now is perhaps an appropriate moment to evaluate the progress made hitherto and to identify new directions for research. The aim of this volume is, thus, twofold: to provide a document on the current state of research for reference and consultation as well as a reliable starting point for further, more specialised studies.

The perspective adopted for this collection of contributions is a long-term one, the intention being to trace a path through the most important milestones in the evolution of the concept of time from Late Antiquity up to the beginning of the Modern Age and to identify any persistence, either in a positive or negative sense, of medieval conceptions in the various currents of thought up to the 16th and 17th centuries (Late Scholasticism, Renaissance Naturalism, so-called Modern Science).

This was the line followed by the International Colloquium held in Bari from 10th to 12th December 1998 (entitled *Le trasformazioni del concetto di tempo tra Medioevo e Età Moderna*) which inspired this volume. For various reasons, however, not all the presentations from the Conference appear in this publication, while others have been added in order to give as detailed a picture as possible. The collection begins with an acknowledgement of the late antique sources (the Neo-Platonists and Augustine); considerable space is then devoted to examining certain particularly significant positions in the Scholastic debate of the 13th and 14th centuries (the reception of the Averroistic doctrine, Albert the Great, the German Dominican school, Duns Scotus and the Scotist school, Ockham and Buridan,

Gerard of Odo and Nicole Oresme). An attempt is also made to trace deviations from and continuity of medieval thought in certain Renaissance thinkers (Campanella and Bruno), in the masters of Late Scholasticism (the Conimbricenses, Suárez, Caramuel), up to Galileo and Pascal and finally to the demolition, begun by Hobbes and completed by the Encyclopaedists, of the traditional medieval concept of eternity as an abiding 'now' outside time (*nunc stans*). Also included are a consideration of the interrelation between time and medicine in two quite distinct contexts (the Salernitan school and the beginning of modern medicine) and a glance at the theories on duration elaborated by medieval theologians parallel with the traditional Aristotelian concept of time.

It will hardly be necessary to point out that this attempt at a reconstruction makes no claim to be exhaustive; indeed, certain omissions are immediately apparent. While the Colloquium of Bari included papers on the doctrine of time in early medieval thought and in Thomas Aquinas, it has proved ultimately impossible to include them in this volume, even though there are many references to both throughout. On the other hand, it was considered inappropriate to include a contribution on the relationship between Descartes and the Scholastic sources on time because much excellent research on the subject has recently been published. Finally, there are no contributions on discussions of time in Arabic or Hebrew texts – a topic which obviously deserves to be dealt with separately and in depth. As already mentioned, this volume makes no claim to be the definitive work on time in the medieval period but aims rather to encourage further studies. It is in this, I hope, that its true value lies.

It is my pleasant task to thank those friends and colleagues who have agreed to contribute to this volume. I would like to thank Ferruccio De Natale, at that time Head of the Dipartimento di Scienze Filosofiche at the University of Bari, for his support in organising the Conference in December 1998. To Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer I would like to express my gratitude for including this volume in their prestigious series. I wish to thank Anna Arezzo e Marialucrezia Leone for their collaboration in preparing the indices. And finally, I am most grateful to Lisa Adams for her advice and help in revising the manuscripts.

Pasquale Porro