REVIEW

Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages. By JORGE J. E. GRACIA. Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984. Pp. 303.

Jorge Gracia has written a splendid book on mediæval philosophy. He maintains a high level of philosophical rigour and clarity while being scholarly precise and historically sensitive. None of these demands are easy to meet; that Gracia should meet them all in a single work is an impressive accomplishment. His work should set a standard for those aspiring to treat systematic issues in the history of philosophy.

The systematic issue Gracia addresses is a difficult piece of metaphysics: individuation. He sensibly devotes the first chapter of his work to a careful discussion of individuation, independent of its treatment by any particular philosopher. He identifies six key issues relevant to individuation: the *intension* of individuality,that is, its connection with such notions as indivisibility, distinction, identity, and impredicability; the *extension* of individuality, whether all, some, or none of what exists is individual; the *ontological* status of individuality, that is, the metaphysics of individuality in the individual and its relation to the individual's nature; the *principle of individuation*, that is, the identification of the principle or cause of that in the individual which makes it to be individual and whether it is the same in all entities, in particular in substances, properties, and accidents; the *discernibility* of individuals, an epistemic issue; and the *linguistic* issue of the function of proper names and indexicals. Gracia carefully analyzes each issue, describing the welter of arguments used to support various theories and showing how the philosophical questions intermingle and overlap. For example, a bundle theory of substantial individuation fits well with the epistemic view that individuals are discernible by their accidents, each of which is compatible with the view that everything which exists is individual and that the central notion of individuality is indivisibility. Gracia's treatment is elegant, with a sophisticated appreciation of the philosophical complexities involved.

The analysis of individuality in the first chapter provides the framework for his investigations in the next three chapters; he examines the discussion of individuality by each philosopher, locating their views in the logical

space provided by his initial analysis. This "scorecard" approach takes full advantage of the fine-grained analysis presented in the first chapter, allowing Gracia to develop subtle and nuanced interpretations. It is a method to be used with caution, but in Gracia's hands works extremely well.

There are two distinct phases of mediæval philosophy in the Latin West. The later phase is the period of Scholasticism, defined by the assimilation and exploration of Aristotle's philosophical corpus. In the early phase, roughly 500–1200 AD, there is a relative scarcity of philosophical resources: aside from snippets in classical literature and the writings of the Church Fathers, the main source is Boethius—translations, commentaries, and summaries of Aristotle's logical works, and his own theological treatises. Boethius's formative influence on mediæval philosophy was immense, and Gracia devotes his second chapter to Boethius's remarks on individuation, scattered throughout his writings. Gracia offers a striking and penetrating proposal: that two philosophical "traditions" regarding individuation derive from Boethius. The first "tradition" is primarily based on Boethius's theological works, marked by a sensitivity to the metaphysical aspects of individuality, a concern with related theological issues, such as sameness and difference in the Trinity, and evolves from what Gracia calls "the standard theory of individuality"—the understanding of individuality as a ind of difference or distinction; the restriction of the extension of individuality to substances; a conflation of the principle of individuation with the epstemic principle of discernibility; the acceptance of a bundle view of individuation. John Scottus Eriugena and Odo of Tournai accept the standard theory; Thierry of Chartres modifies it; and the tradition culminates in Gilbert of Poitiers who, Gracia argues, puts forward "the most sophisticated metaphysical view of individuality that has come down to us from the early middle ages" (pp. 175–176). The second "tradition" is primarily based on Boethius's logical works, and is less interested in theology and metaphysics, concerning itself with the exploration of logic and language. Individuality is construed as a matter of predication, that is, an individual is that which is predicated of only one; the accidental principle of individuation is rejected; individuality is extended to all entities, both substances and accidents. Peter Abelard is the dominant figure here, along with his student John of Salisbury.

The third chapter is devoted to the first tradition. While Eriugena and

Odo are relatively well-known figures, little work has been done on Thierry and Gilbert, and Gracia's analyses of their positions are ground-breaking. Thierry carefully distinguishes difference and diversity, and breaks with the standard theory of individuation in rejecting place (spatio-temporal location we would say) as a universal individuator. More importantly, Thierry argued that only the accidents present in a substance at a given time could serve as individuators of that substance. But it was left to Gilbert of Poitiers to revise radically the standard theory, and Gracia's discussion of Gilbert is incisive and original. Gilbert, unlike his contemporaries, maintained a strict distinction between the epistemic and the metaphysical aspects of individuality; he is unique in this period for sharply distinguishing singularity, diversity, and individuality, and he rejects the notion that accidents, including place, can serve as the ultimate source of numerical difference. Gilbert's views are couched in the idiosyncratic language of his metaphysics, appearing in commentaries rather than *ex professo*, but Gracia moves through the scholarly complexities with a sure touch. Anyone who has struggles with Gilbert's obscurities will realize the depth of Gracia's achievement in developing a philosophically sophisticated interpretation. The discussions of Gilbert and Thierry alone are well worth the cost of the whole book.

The fourth chapter takes up the second tradition, which stems from Boethius. Gracia concentrates largely on Abelard's discussion of the problem of universals, including criticisms of contemporary positions and his own "word view" of universals and individuals. The analysis Gracia offers is penetrating, far more than anything yet published on Abelard. But when Gracia turns to Abelard's positive theory of individuality as linguistic, the discussion is a bit thin. (Indeed, Gracia's discussion of the function of proper names and indexicals is, of all the issues raised, the least adequate to modern standards of rigour and sophistication.) For example, Abelard presents an analysis of names–including demonstratives, indexicals, pronouns, and proper names—elsewhere in his writings that offers far more information about individuality than can be gleaned from his initial discussions of universals. Nor is it clear that Abelard is any more indebted to Boethius rather than, say, Priscian or the late eleventh-century theories of grammar. Still, much of what Gracia has to say is rewarding and valuable, though incomplete.

Gracia wears his erudition well: his book never bogs down in the niceties

of scholarship, which are handled deftly with an eye on the philosophical importance of the question. Non-mediævalists can, and should, read this book with profit. Mediævalists will find it a paradigm of clarity and rigour, both scholarly and philosophical. It is one of the most delightful philosophical works I have read in a long time. It is, simply, a splendid work.