



FOREWORD

## Metaphysica paupera: New insights into the history of metaphysics between the middle ages and early modern philosophy

Annarita Angelini, Fosca Mariani Zini and Paolo Ponzio

(Received 8 November 2024; accepted 8 November 2024)

First, there was a strange misunderstanding. On the one hand, Francesco Petrarca considered that the *magistri artium* had impoverished philosophy, reducing it to a formal, above all logical, activity that failed to answer the questions specific to human beings about their nature, moral orientation, and destiny. On the other hand, a long-standing historiographical tradition has emphasized the unphilosophical, and even less metaphysical, nature of thought during the Renaissance, which is seen above all as a pedagogical and artistic culture, or the ultimate projection of aspects, contents, and methods of medieval philosophy, destined to be surpassed only after the so-called ‘revolutions’ of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Without denying authors such as Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Pomponazzi, and Giordano Bruno a specific philosophical character, they were considered exceptional cases, isolated from the cultic context of their time.

However, the historiographical discussions of recent decades on the breaks and continuity between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance have undoubtedly contributed to underlining the theoretical nature of Renaissance philosophy, albeit often expressed in different ways, compared to medieval and scholastic thoughts.

The articles in this issue of *Diogenes* seek to clarify and create a more profound understanding of *metaphysica paupera*<sup>1</sup> over the *longue durée*.

Here, poverty does not so much mean indigence as a form of simplicity and essentiality, or speculative attention to poor objects in the sense of something small, neglected, minimal. It is an approach that could – we hope – help us to move away from the polemics that distribute praise and blame on the strong or weak, rich or poor nature of this or that philosophy, by analyzing instead what seems at first sight to be of little importance, remaining on the margins, but which can signal significant changes in the order of philosophical questions and their conceptual inventions. It is, in some

---

<sup>1</sup>Some of the articles published here were presented during the conference: *Metaphysica paupera. La spéculation métaphysique humaniste* CESR, University of Tours (June 15–17, 2022). The conference was organised by Fosca Mariani Zini and Christian Trottmann, with the support of CESR, l’UMR 7323, of the UFR Arts et Sciences Humaines and of ANR’s project ANTHRAE: *Les pouvoirs de l’âme. Anthropologie de l’expérience (XIV–XVI)*, directed by Fosca Mariani Zini.

cases, a metaphysics emancipated from ontology, which establishes a relationship with other disciplines, most notably natural philosophy, mathematics, and a specific *scientia mentis*.

So, Amalia Salvestrini shows how the Franciscan conception of minor beauty is developed in a positive appreciation of poverty as the simplicity of mathematical relationships, which is taken up by Bonaventure's morality and metaphysics and then by Luca Pacioli's mathematical thinking. Andrea Robiglio demonstrates how Dante, in the *Banquet*, proposes a hermeneutic conception of 'poor metaphysics'. But the meaning of poverty is positive. In fact, precisely because it is poor, such metaphysics opens the door to a new foundational understanding of human knowledge and conduct. Emilie Sérís demonstrates the ambiguity of the notion of nudity in the Renaissance, which allows for the development of a new concept of human dignity. This reflection is situated at the crossroads of several philosophical and mathematical traditions, but is developed by reflection on the arts.

Annarita Angelini defends the metaphysical conception of Cusanus, which underlines in a novel way the disproportion between *mensura* and *mesuratum*, promoting the indeterminate and the shadow as metaphysical objects. Fosca Mariani Zini takes up the opposition in Lorenzo Valla's thought between the richness of rhetoric and the poverty of dialectic, reinterpreting it as an opposition between complexity and simplicity based on the reduction of the transcendental to the *res*.

In the reflection on nature, Cecilia Muratori analyzes apparently minor problems in Telesio's thought (such as the generation of insects) to present an unconventional reading of his philosophy of two main elements – heat and cold. Christian Trottmann presents a reflection on the metaphysics of Pontus de Tyard who was a poet and philosopher. In particular, in his French work *Le Second Curieux* (1558), one notices an impoverishment of metaphysics, reduced to a kind of cabinet of curiosity. It is suggested that the ambiguous notion of curiosities, or rather the character of the curious, allows an underlining of certain precious aspects of his metaphysics.

Simonetta Bassi offers a double analysis of Bruno's thought. On the one hand, the relationship between poverty and wealth as a result of the impact produced by economic changes and geographical discoveries is examined on an ethical level; and on the other hand, the development of minor entities such as *minuzzeries* is investigated in a reflection at the same time ontological and cosmological. Paolo Ponzio examines the philosophy of Thomas Campanella, in particular the impact that metaphysics receives from a specific feature of early modern philosophy and science, namely the historicity and individuality from which the consciousness of the provisionality of knowledge itself derives. Rossella Lupacchini traces the path of reflection on quantum monadology from Cusanus and Leibniz to Nishida, showing how this unity can produce an original conception of metaphysics as the metaphysics of indeterminacy or of the dialectical universal.

To sum up, the new insights into metaphysics that the poverty approach can provide concern two aspects in particular: on the one hand, they deal with the meaning of poverty and wealth, which can change signification and therefore value according to the fluctuating marker of what is considered a plus or a minus (as in the analysis of nudity or the simplicity/complexity of the arts of discourse). On the other hand, the uncovering of the power to divide and compare the plus and the minus that belongs to

the ambiguous notion of poverty offers a new vision of the foundations of a philosophy of nature which, by developing the notion of poverty as an essential element, makes it possible to positively consider the indeterminate, the infinitely small, or the infinity *tout court*. Whether this approach can be developed into a *minima metaphysica*, and whether this *minima metaphysica* and a *metaphysics of the infinite* can be symmetrized, remain to be further explored.

---

**Cite this article:** Angelini A, Mariani Zini F and Ponzio P (2024) *Metaphysica paupera*: New insights into the history of metaphysics between the middle ages and early modern philosophy. *Diogenes* 65(3), 299–301. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0392192124000130>