

Vicent Ferrer, *Quaestio de Unitate Universalis*. מאמר נכבד כבולל (*Ma'amar nikhbad ba-kholel*). Latin text and medieval Hebrew version with Catalan and English translations. *Bibliotheca Philosophorum Medii Aevi Cataloniae* 1. Edited by Alexander Fidora and Mauro Zonta in collaboration with Josep Batalla and Robert D. Hughes. Santa Coloma de Queralt: Obrador edendum, 2010. Pp. 367.

The Catalan Dominican friar and saint Vicent Ferrer (1350–1419) is best known for his abundant sermons, which he delivered beginning in the 1380s and continuing into the fifteenth century, well after the anti-Jewish pogroms of 1391 that led to mass forced conversions to Christianity. Less attention has been paid to Ferrer's few philosophical works in Latin, composed in the early period of his career, in the 1370s, before he began his years of active preaching. This edition by Alexander Fidora and Mauro Zonta and their collaborators offers the Latin text of one of those works, that commonly known as *Quaestio de unitate universalis* (*Question on the Unity of the Universal*), composed in 1370 to 1372 when Ferrer, only twenty years old, was a student in Lleida. Yet the editors present much more than an updated edition of the *Quaestio*, which has been edited twice in the last century (in 1909 to 1911 by Pierre Henri Fages, who rediscovered the text after it had fallen into oblivion for centuries, and again by John Trentman in a 1982 critical edition). It also brings to light a hitherto unknown Hebrew translation of the work that contains much more text than the Latin copy known to the previous editors. By editing and translating the Hebrew text for the first time and by translating the Hebrew rendition into Latin for comparison with the known version, Alexander Fidora and Mauro Zonta have provided a tremendously valuable and erudite work that forces us to rethink the content of Ferrer's philosophical thought as well as the extent of his impact and reception among both Christian and Jewish thinkers of the period.

Vicent Ferrer began his career as a Dominican friar in 1367, spending his initial years in Valencia and Barcelona before being sent to Lleida in 1369 to pursue studies in natural philosophy. There, he was soon distinguished for his abilities and became a lecturer in logic. As Fidora explains in his general introduction to the volume, the intellectual ambience in which Ferrer found himself was one dominated by questions of nominalism and the ongoing conflict between Franciscans and Dominicans, embodied in the rival interpretations of followers of Thomas Aquinas on the one hand and Duns Scotus and William of Ockham on the other. It was within these debates that Ferrer received his intellectual

formation and eventually participated as a defender of Aquinas's legacy in contemplating the question of universal and particular existence.

Following Aquinas, Ferrer proposed "a middle path between extreme realism on the one hand, and nominalism, on the other" (47). The *Quaestio* in its surviving Latin version first lays out the extreme rationalist position, similar to that of fourteenth-century "realist" philosopher Walter Burley, proposing that universals exist and possess a certain real unity. Ferrer then presents an extreme nominalist position, similar to that espoused by Ockham and his disciples, in which the unity and even the existence of the universal is denied as unreal. Against these two extreme views, Ferrer follows Aquinas in proposing that universal natures do indeed exist but that their alleged unity does not, being instead a product of intellectual generalization. Ferrer's argument thus addresses one of the central questions of fourteenth-century philosophical debates while at the same time connecting this philosophical discussion in a unique way with what would become one of his overarching concerns in later years—namely, a defense of the uniqueness of human beings and "the metaphysical and theological principles of individuality and moral accountability" (63).

Fidora's introduction provides a clear and concise overview of this philosophical and intellectual milieu, as well as a brief overview of Ferrer's life and a consideration of the philosophical themes at play in the work. The first half of the book after the introduction offers a new edition, prepared by Josep M. Llobet and Alexander Fidora, of the familiar version of the Latin text, which only survives in one fifteenth-century manuscript (Vienna, Dominikanerkloster 49/271, ff. 237r–241v) that has served as the basis of both published editions. Their version corrects a few points from Trentman's 1982 edition and further offers a translation of this text by Josep Batalla into Catalan and by Alexander Fidora into English. The quality of the edition is high, and I could find no errors large or small in either the Latin text or the Catalan or English translations. This new Latin version not only provides an updated text of the version that has been known to scholars for the last century and offers what is to my knowledge the first translation of this text into either English or Catalan, but it also establishes a necessary base text for comparison with the Hebrew version that follows in the second half of the volume.

Earlier editors of Ferrer's philosophical work were apparently unaware that it was cited in the fifteenth century by Dominican Peter Schwarz (Petrus Nigri) in his *Clipeus thomistarum*. Even more importantly, this overlooked passage in Schwarz's work does not correspond to the surviving text of the Latin in the Vienna manuscript and thus

points mysteriously to an alternate text other than the standard Latin version. Fidora and Zonta have found that this unidentified citation of Ferrer's work by Schwartz actually appears in a hitherto unknown Hebrew translation of the *Quaestio*, which Zonta has discovered in a late fifteenth-century manuscript now held in the Biblioteca Palatina de Parma (MS Parmense 2631 fol. 126v, l. 20–144r, l. 24). This text constitutes a Hebrew translation of Ferrer's work made by Aragonese Jewish philosopher 'Eli Habillo in the 1470s, who translated and studied numerous works of Latin Scholasticism. Zonta clearly summarizes the history of this discovery, then provides the first edition of Habillo's Hebrew text and translates that text back into Latin on the basis of the existing Latin translation and Schwartz's citation. The latter corresponds to Question 23 of the work, preserved also in the Hebrew version, which deals with the critical issue considered by Ferrer of the reality of universals. While this translation might seem at first a strange addition to the volume, it offers a critically important vision of what the original Latin may have looked like. At the same time, Zonta is careful to stress that his version is a preliminary, "very tentative" rendering and does not pretend to represent the original Latin text (185). In addition to Zonta's Latin version of the Hebrew, the edition also offers a Catalan and English translation version for easy reference.

The significance of Habillo's Hebrew translation for a proper understanding of Ferrer's text is hard to overestimate. Not only does it show that the version preserved in the Vienna manuscript is incomplete and probably represents a condensed copy of the original made by Ferrer's student or a copyist, but it also suggests that the work may not have been titled *Quaestio de unitate universalis* as it has been received but instead may have been titled *Tractatus sollemnis de universalis* (*Solemn Treatise on the Universal*). This suggests also that Ferrer was not concerned merely with the particular question of the *unity* of the universal, as he is in the Latin text of the Vienna manuscript, but that he engaged more generally with the theme of the universal, considering related issues such as the location of the universal and its particular relation to the individual soul.

If this extensive and thorough presentation of the Latin and Hebrew texts, both in their medieval forms and in English and Catalan translation, were not sufficient, Fidora also provides an intelligent and well-written introduction in Catalan to the philosophical background and contents of the volume, itself accompanied by a facing-page English translation provided by Robert D. Hughes. In the second part of the volume, Zonta's helpful introduction to the Hebrew text and its editorial fate is likewise offered in facing Catalan and English. The edition

finally includes a Hebrew-Latin glossary and a complete index of sources and references found within the text. The care taken in preparing each of these sections—I can find virtually nothing to criticize or question in its organization or execution—is consistently evident. The only point I find worthy of comment is the repetition of the same bibliographical entries in the facing Catalan-English translations of the notes. It may have saved space to provide a single bibliography and use short-title or date references in the corresponding notes. This little quibble does not represent a criticism at all, but merely a suggestion for streamlining the scholarly apparatus.

This impressive collaborative effort represents a philological and philosophical tour de force that obliges us to revise what we thought we knew about Vicent Ferrer's philosophical work and its dissemination among contemporary Jewish and Christian intellectual circles. What is perhaps most significant and valuable about this work is its method. By presenting multiple versions of the same work and noting the correspondences between them in the notes, this edition highlights the importance of considering medieval philosophical writing, like medieval polemics, from a multilingual and, when possible, multidisciplinary perspective rather than simply from a single scholarly or linguistic angle. In offering this as the inaugural volume of the *Bibliotheca philosophorum medii Aevi Cataloniae*, which seeks to edit and translate works of medieval Catalan philosophy, the editors have produced a work of the highest intellectual caliber, setting the standard for future editions in the series very high indeed.

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