

Riccardo Chiaradonna, Gabriele Galluzzo (eds.), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, Edizioni della Normale, 2013, pp. 546, € 29.75, ISBN 9788876424847

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In the introduction to this volume, the editors present the problem of universals - one of the oldest in philosophy - by questioning how many categories must be introduced in ontology: are there only particular things, or is there something universal - which is shared and shareable by many particulars - which also lays claim to ontological status? Yet, if universal entities exist, the question is whether they are subject to spatio-temporal boundaries, like particular things. The problem of universals is generally regarded as falling within two main lines of solutions: realism and nominalism. The editors and contributors of this volume generally follow this model. Realism suggests that the general concepts present in our minds have beyond them a real basis *qua* some common entities. Nominalism argues that such concepts are only a consequence of our ability to generalize, and that there is no need to postulate any common entities to explain them (cf. p.12).

This collection of papers has two main objectives. The first is to highlight the contribution of the ancient tradition in such an important philosophical problem as that of universals, and thus to reconstruct the various strategies, typical for Antiquity, used to treat it. The second is to reconstruct the conceptual and historical context of polemic on universals in Antiquity (p.4). The volume also aims at linking ancient accounts on the status of universals with contemporary views on this issue. In this, the introduction to the work by Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo provides a useful outline of contemporary teaching of universals in connection with some ancient ideas. With respect to the realist position on universals, Chiaradonna and Galluzzo identify Aristotelians (such as David Armstrong) and Platonists (like Bertrand Russell and Peter van Inwagen). Both directions indicate that universals do exist, but contemporary Aristotelians assume that they exist only in their instances, while Platonists think they exist separately from them. Contemporary Aristotelians believe that universals are concrete, depend for their existence on the existence of their instances, and that it is reasonable to assume that Aristotelian universals exist in space

and time. According to contemporary Platonists, universals are abstract, beyond space and time, and do not depend for their existence on the existence of their instances (pp.6-7). Chiaradonna and Galluzzo suggest that the papers presented in this volume, especially those dealing with Plato and Aristotle, are relevant to many of the problems which are controversial for contemporary Platonists and Aristotelians.

In the first work in the volume, Mauro Bonazzi discusses the contribution of the Sophists to the development of the problem of universals in Antiquity. He emphasizes that Plato's polemics against the Sophists served to develop the former's doctrine of universals (p.25), whereas Socrates' influence on the development of Plato's theory of universals, according to Bonazzi, has been exaggerated (pp.37-38). Bonazzi pays special attention to the sophists Protagoras, Prodicus and Antisthenes. He examines the thesis formulated by the Sophists - that it is impossible to contradict - and shows that Protagoras understood it differently from Antisthenes and Prodicus: Protagoras associated it with the relativist and Man-Measure positions, whereas Antisthenes and Prodicus assumed that language can appropriately mirror the variety of reality, and that the contradiction is therefore only apparent. Despite this discrepancy, the three Sophists share the same nominalistic view of reality as always particular and variable.

Turning to the Meno, Bonazzi notes that Plato did not directly reject the premises of those with whom he argued, but approached them dialectically, having borrowed what could serve as material in support of his own views. Therefore, he started from the prerequisites made by moderate conventionalists among the Sophists - that is, that there is a relation between words and things - and insists that, if this is so, insofar as we can speak of classes of objects, there is unity beyond multiplicity (p.32).

Francesco Ademollo presents a work devoted to the reconstruction of Plato's theory of forms. Ademollo summarises Plato's account of forms in the Meno, and concludes that they are, at their core, general and universal, thus essentially unifying the multiplicity of things inasmuch as they belong to the same form. He then regards monadic and poliadic (i.e., relative) universals, self-predicated forms, forms as models, etc. He devotes much consideration to the question as to whether it is possible to treat forms as transcendental and, if it is, in what

sense. In this respect, he distinguishes two lines: transcendence of forms may mean that they exist in a different realm from that of sensible particulars (the position of Bertrand Russell in “The Problems of Philosophy”, ch.X), and that they exist without being instantiated by sensible particulars. Ademollo concludes that the *Timaeus* provides the notion of forms as transcendental in the first meaning (p.78) but, at the same time, Platonic forms are also “in” material things (but not in the sense of spatial locations), as follows, for example, from the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Cratylus*. Regarding the second meaning of transcendence, Ademollo correlates it with Frege’s conception of “sense”, and acknowledges its validity in such relation that in Plato forms may not be instantiated in anythings.

Marwan Rashed's paper is devoted to the mathematical ontology presented in the *Timaeus*. Rashed develops the position of Sarah Waterlow, who considers the *Timaeus* as Plato’s revision of his own criticism against his earlier ontology presented in the “*Parmenides*”. According to Rashed, it is precisely this approach which enables us to envisage Plato’s mathematical ontology in its true light (p.86). Rashed suggests that, within the framework of the main problem raised in the *Parmenides* - the one-and-many problem - there is an *aporia* regarding the transition from one to many. Aristotle solves this by admitting plurality in forms, whereas Plato does so by introducing mathematical and geometrical beings as taking place between (*μεταξύ*) forms and sensible particulars. Rashed reconstructs the Platonic hierarchy of beings by taking into account these mediating objects, and comes to a conclusion on the following hierarchy in Plato: numbers/forms (corresponding to dialectic); the mathematical realm, which is “between”: ratios (corresponding to arithmetic), surfaces (corresponding to geometry) and bodies (corresponding to stereometry). The next level is occupied by moved solids, which are the astronomical beings relating to *chora* (p.101).

David Sedley's paper discusses the relationship between various kinds of general terms and forms in Plato. Sedley disagrees with the widespread assumption that Plato postulated a form for each general term. Based on the *Republica* V and X, Sedley suggests that, in the canonical version of Plato’s theory of forms, forms relate only to pairs of opposite properties and to artefacts.

The work of Mauro Mariani and Gabriele Galluzzo discusses Aristotle’s account of universals. Disagreeing with the interpretation of the Stagyrite as a nominalist, Mariani and

Galluzzo, mainly analysing the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics*, provide an analysis of Aristotle's doctrine which reveals his moderate realism: the universals are distinct - in terms of being and unity - from the particulars about which they are predicated. The discrepancy between the approaches of the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics*, as Mariani shows, is that the *Organon* deals in particular with universals regarding accidents, whereas Aristotle is not interested in them in the *Metaphysics*.

Riccardo Chiaradonna's paper deals with universals in Boethus of Sidon and Alexander of Aphrodisias (who, Chiaradonna believes [pp.299-300], are the two main Aristotelian commentators in the post-Hellenistic age), as well as in some Platonic commentators, mostly Dexippus and Simplicius. At the beginning of the paper, Chiaradonna quotes a fragment from Dexippus' commentary on the *Categoriae* which contains a criticism against Peripatetic teaching on the dependence of the universals of particulars and the impossibility for universals to exist independently of particulars. In this fragment, Dexippus conflates the teachings of Boethus and Alexander in this relation. However, as Chiaradonna shows, the two commentators in fact developed different and alternative Peripatetic readings of Aristotle. The position criticised by Dexippus may be understood in two senses. First, universals do not possess any kind of existence distinct from that of particulars; second, universals are distinct from particulars, although they are not independent of them and could not exist without them. Chiaradonna calls the first approach "extensional", which implies the understanding of universals in the sense of *collection*; the second approach, corresponding to moderate realism, he calls "intensional". He shows that Boethus adhered to the first line and Alexander followed the second.

One more work by Chiaradonna in this volume is devoted to universals in Ancient Medicine.

Peter Adamson considers the doctrines of Aristotle, Alexander, Plotinus and Porphyry on unique instantiation. He shows that the sensible objects of this kind were considered by the Neo-Platonists as sharing some features with intelligible objects, despite their physical status. Adamson distinguishes between two sorts of examples which were given by the Neo-Platonists to illustrate unique instantiation: cosmological, examples being the sun, moon and the cosmos, and counterfactual, or examples of things in the sublunary world, such as the instance of a single

person living on Earth. Adamson shows how the fact of the uniqueness of the cosmos and celestial bodies in Plotinus' and Porphyry's doctrines implies their eternity and divinity.

The concluding article, by Johannes Zachhuber, is devoted to universals in the works of the Greek Church Fathers. This paper consists of three parts: the first deals with the teaching of Apollinarius of Laodicea, a figure which Zahhuber regards as the first Patristic author, who systematically used the notion of universal nature; the second part covers the teachings of Basil of Caesarea and especially Gregory of Nyssa, who significantly altered and redesigned the concept of universal nature of Apollinarius, adapting it to the needs of the later Nicene theology; the third part is devoted to the "canonisation" of Gregory's theory in Byzantine theology.

As a whole, the book provides a very useful outline of the development of the problem of universals in the ancient (and not only) philosophical tradition and of its context, and represents a new step in the study of this subject. I think the drawback of this volume is that, although it contains a number of contributions which are important but only of secondary relevance for the proper topic of universals in ancient philosophy (such as the contributions about universals in Ancient medicine, and in Patristics), some of the topics which are directly related to this subject are not addressed or are given too little attention. For example, the volume only briefly touches upon Plotinus' doctrine of universals and on the "intellective" theory of universals by Iamblichus. Yet factually it does not deal with the respective doctrines of the later Platonists, such as Proclus, Ammonius, son of Hermias, and Damascus.