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“WILLIAM OF CONCHES AND THE *DRAGMATICON PHILOSOPHIAE*”

ABSTRACT

This dissertation about William of Conches and the *Dragmaticon Philosophiae* is divided into two sections. The aim of the first section is to reconstruct the life and the literary works of one of the most important teachers of Chartres of the twelfth century. The aim of the second section is to analyse his most important work, written between 1146 and 1149, after undergoing a noteworthy process of rethinking, reorganization and enlargement of his youthful work, called *Philosophia*, which had been bitterly attacked by the cistercian monk William of Saint-Thierry, who denounced its serious theological errors in 1140 or 1141.

The enquiry about the life of William of Conches, to which the first chapter is dedicated, has produced some interesting results, which seem to open new areas of research, especially regarding the philosopher's place of birth (which may not well be Conches, but Saint-Martin du Tilleul) and the last phase of his life, which could have ended in England at the court of Henry II (to whom William was tutor during the writing of the *Dragmaticon*), or in Paris as *magister scholae*. The enquiry about the literary works of William of Conches, to which the second chapter is dedicated, deals with a detailed presentation of the historiographical debate, that has so far led to the identification of the works currently attributed to the philosopher.

The first part of the third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the accusations, with which William of Saint-Thierry attacked the teacher of Chartres in his *De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis*, and to the verification of their legitimacy. The second part instead is dedicated to the description of the *Dragmaticon*' structure and the novelties of this work with respect to *Philosophia*, the presentation of the *Dragmaticon*' s purpose, thus the *tractatus de substantiis*, and the description of the research method used. With respect to the latter, William of Conches claims to conduct his research *philosophice*, in accordance with the typical approach of philosophers, who deal with universals expressing themselves through *rationes necessariae*, but when he investigates the substances of the physical world, he cannot always argue *philosophice* about them because of their mutability, and must sometimes argue *dialectice*, in accordance with the typical approach of dialecticians, who deal with particulars expressing themselves through *rationes verisimiles*.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the presentation of William's definition of substance as *res per se existens* and to the description of the *species* of substance in the order in which William presents them in the *Dragmaticon*. After he speaks about God and the angels expressing himself through *rationes necessariae* derived from faith, he then deals with the elements. In the *Dragmaticon* William defines element as what is first in the composition and last in the resolution of the body and describes it as a body that is invisible, imperceptible and unextended *per se*. The feature of unextension attributed to elementary bodies gives them a paradoxical ontological status, as there are no bodies devoid of the three dimensions of space. But the paradoxicalness of this description stems from the fact that in the *Dragmaticon* William describes element from the point of view of philosophers, who speak about universals expressing themselves through *rationes necessariae*. According to philosophers element is a body without dimension, because it is not a physical being, but a metaphysical one, that is an abstract form similar to a geometric point. The philosopher then can only postulate the existence of beings, which are first in the composition and last in the resolution of the body, but he cannot prove their existence *in re*. However, it is from the fact that postulating the existence of simple and minimal particles of the bodies is more rational than not postulating it, that can stem the existence *in re* of these particles.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the distinction between *opus creatoris* and *opus naturae*. God creates simultaneously all elements *ex nichilo*, mixed in a big body mass, so as to occupy all the existent room. The following *exornatio mundi*, which is the correct and balanced disposition of the elements in the world and the formation of the bodies of living creatures, concerns nature, a kind of ordering principle inside the elements, which God uses to produce the same from the same in the world. In the *exornatio mundi* nature operates within the concept of the same from the same, when it drives the elements to their cosmic place. In an already formed world nature operates the same from the same, when it initiates physiological mechanisms (like generation and formation of bodies, nutrition, appetite, retention, digestion, expulsion, growth and sleep) typical of an organic structure.

The sixth chapter deals with the description of the works of nature in the world through the analysis of the main macrocosmic phenomena, which take place in the four *elementa mundi*.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the description of the operations in the human body which depend on nature, and of those that do not depend on nature, but on the soul.

Some of the operations that depend on the soul (like breathing, sense, imagination and voluntary motion) are common to animals and men. Some others (like wit, memory, opinion, reason and intelligence) are common to men and divine spirits. The animal soul is mortal and develops spontaneously in an organic body, whereas the human soul is a separate and immortal substance. It's created directly by God and joins the body without changing its physical nature and takes its course by means of a very fine airy substance, that arises from the liver, goes through the heart, where it causes breath, and arrives in the brain after two refining phases.