ALTERITAS

SOURCES OF THE NOTION OF "OTHERNESS" IN TWELFTH CENTURY COMMENTARIES ON BOETHIUS' OPUSCULA SACRA

Qui autem ponit in Deo pluralitatem ponit mutabilitatem, quia ubi pluralitas ibi est alteritas, ibidem mutabilitas.¹

"He who attributes plurality to God attributes changeableness, for where there is plurality, there is 'otherness' and there, too, is changeableness." The author of the Lectiones on Boethius' De Trinitate here brings together — somewhat discursively — several of the notions which eleventh and twelfth century writers on the Trinity seem to have associated with "otherness". In St. Anselm we find the same principle more succinctly expressed: ubi enim pluralitas, ibi diversitas.²

Anselm is anxious to emphasise that any departure from unity into any state other than unity amounts to a departure from the divine Perfection. But he does not dwell on the detailed implications of that assumption as the twelfth century commentators do. It is impossible to be sure whether the greater attention to technical detail in the twelfth century commentaries represents real progress in thinking about the issue of "otherness", or whether they are merely making explicit points of which Anselm himself was perfectly well aware, but for which he happened to have no use in the arguments which have come down to us. Anselm was not a writer of commentaries; in his treatises he introduces only such technicalities as are helpful to him in furthering his

¹ N. M. Häring ed. Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres (Toronto 1971) p. 142.26-7. For the evidence as to the authorship of each of these commentaries, see Häring's introduction.

² F. S. Schmitt ed. Anselmi Opera (Rome/Edinburgh 1938-68) 6 vol. 2.33.21, De Incarnatione Verbi.
argument; he is under no obligation to elucidate every word of an existing text. Yet the turn of the discussion in the commentaries on Boethius opuscula sacra suggests a renewed interest in the analysis of technical details in areas where Anselm sees no reason to labour the point. Even if we seek to account for this in part by the stimulus to thought which Boethius’ work on the Trinity would have given to the commentators, we are left with the possibility that, within the span of half a century, there had been a broad shift of interest and emphasis. The greater complexities of treatment of the notion of “otherness” may exemplify a generally heightened love of technicalities, especially in the fields of the artes in the early twelfth century.

It is possible to distinguish four areas of thought in which aspects of “otherness” are brought into play by eleventh and twelfth century writers. There is a good deal of overlap, and it would be misleading to suggest that these categories would have been recognizable to contemporaries. But for the purposes of this discussion it is convenient to consider separately the most common and perhaps the most important areas in which “otherness” is considered: the use of the mathematical principle of singularity and plurality, and the treatment of the category of “relation”. Mutabilitas and diversitas, changeableness and diversity, provide secondary areas of interest. The very terms most commonly employed in all four areas of discussion are, for the most part, conspicuously post-classical, abstract nouns in -itas, of a kind which was to prove increasingly useful to the scholastics. Pluralitas and multiplicitas in particular seem to owe their later currency largely to Boethius’ use of the terms in his Arithmetic. Diversitas is generally post-Augustinian in the sense with which we are concerned; mutabilitas was as appropriate a term to Martinus Capella as to Cicero, and alteritas is a late coining. Both the subject-matter and the technical terminology appro-


4. Important differences between twelfth century work on the Trinitarian controversies and the contributions of earlier writers would seem to arise from the new material provided by the rediscovered opuscula sacra of Boethius.

ropriate to the analysis of "otherness" would seem to have been best fitted to arouse interest in an age when the technicalities of the artes were being applied increasingly to the study of theology.

At this time of growing technical expertise, the first of the artes to have its larger possibilities "rediscovered" had been dialectic. In Aristotle's *Categories*, sections 6 and 7 deal with quantity and relatives; Boethius' *Commentary on the Categories* and later Abelard's *Prädicamenta* 6 take up a number of points about "otherness". Even in Augustine's *De Trinitate* the discussion of the reciprocal "otherness" of relatives owes a good deal to dialectical teaching 7. In the works on the *Categories*, under "Quantity", the notions of singularity and plurality are introduced and discussed 8, but the arithmetical principles on which these arguments are based may be traced at least as far as Nichomachus ' *Introduction to Arithmetic* and Boethius' rendering of it into Latin in the *Arithmetica* 9. Even if it was chiefly the encyclopaedists' summaries which provided material for the analyses with which we shall be concerned, the mathematical bias of the commentators would seem to suggest a reawakening of interest in *quadrivium* studies 10. There is some evidence that Boethius' *Arithmetica* may have been used directly as a source by some lecturers. Abelard remarks that he remembers his master mentioning it, although he himself has not studied the text as a whole 11. If, then, both dialectical and "mathematical" studies contributed to the development of ideas about "otherness" it seems reasonable to suggest that a broader interest in the technical details of the artes may lie behind. The study of one art is seen to throw light on the study of another.

The analyses of singularity and plurality introduce what is perhaps the most telling philosophical idea into contemporary

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7. See notes 35-7.
8. e.g. *ABELARD ed. cit.*, p. 64-5.
discussions of "otherness". Gilbert of Poitiers says: *omnis pluralitas aut tota est dualitas aut constat ex dualitate* \(^{12}\).

"All plurality is either wholly "twoness" or it is made up of "twoness"". We must assume that he has in mind here Boethius' principle that if "one" is to become plural, some sort of "otherness" must be introduced. In Chapter 4 of the second book of the *Arithmetica*, Boethius explains that the placing of one point upon another directly does not make two points; there will be two points only if the second point lies in a higher dimension (i.e. if the two points form a line). In geometrical terms it is easy to see how the second point may be set, as it were, "beside" the first: outside it, but next to it (*extra se invicem*) as Thierry puts it. \(^{13}\) In arithmetical terms, a convenient analogy might be with the multiplication of one by one (= 1) in contrast to the addition of one to one (= 2) (although the image fails to convey the quality of "outsideness" which distinguishes the second unit from the first). One, according to all the encyclopaedists, is the beginning of number but not itself a number, the source of plurality, but not itself plural \(^{14}\). "Two" is thus the first "plurality", and all larger pluralities must include, or be made up of, twos. When Gilbert of Poitiers goes on to say that "plurality comes from otherness": *pluralitas est ex alteritate* \(^{15}\) (and, elsewhere, we find: *pluralitatis principium est alteritas*) \(^{16}\) the commentators endorse the view that plurality demands not only the presence of more than one unit or unity, but also some means of separating the units, of making one unit "other than" the first.

Thierry of Chartres restates the point: *licet ab unitale descendat alteritas* \(^{17}\). "Let it be granted that "otherness" proceeds from unity". In geometry, that "otherness" takes the form of the *intervallum* or dimension \(^{18}\); in the realms of "arithmetical philosophy" it is much more difficult to identify and account for it. Our commentators are especially concerned to explain how, in

\(^{12}\) Gilbert, p. 74.10-11.

\(^{13}\) p. 545.20-1.

\(^{14}\) *Etymologiae* 3.iii.1 (Isidore), for example.

\(^{15}\) Gilbert, p. 74.20.

\(^{16}\) Thierry, p. 67.49.

\(^{17}\) Thierry, p. 82.21.

\(^{18}\) The term occurs in this sense in Boethius *Arithmetica*. 
the common experience of most of us, adding one to one makes more than one, when, in the Trinity, three Persons are brought together in one God. In the Commentum on Boethius’ De Trinitate a perplexing question is raised — perhaps had been raised on more than one occasion by Thierry’s pupils: how is it that Boethius says in one place that the repetition of “ones” does not necessarily add up to plurality, when he says elsewhere that it does so?

Sed quid est quod superius inquit quod unitatis repeticio pluralitatem non constituit, hic vero dicit quod pluralitatem faciat 19 ?

The resolution which is offered distinguishes between the repetition of the same “one”, and the counting of a number of different “ones” 20.

Elsewhere, Thierry has emphasised that it is one thing to repeat the same item many times, and quite another to add “one” to “one” 21. The key to this distinction again appears to lie in the presence or absence of some sort of “otherness”, which makes succeeding “ones” different from the first: Ad quod respondendum estimo quod in personis est numerus numerans et pluralitas accepta sic: repetita scilicet pluries unitas et diversitas huiusmodi quod una scilicet persona non est altera. Cum enim dicitur quod persone plures sint pluralitas hic solam unitatis repeticionem designat, non discretam rerum numerositam 22. Altera and discretion perhaps hint at a proccupation with the problem of showing how “one” may be somehow separate or different from “another”. Where there is no difference, there is no plurality: ubi non est differentia, nec pluralitas 23. “Even in things which can be counted, not every repetition of ones makes a plurality. How much the less so, then, in God” : etiam in rebus numerabilibus non omnis repeticio unitatum facit pluralitatem. Multo minus igitur in deo 24. Examples might be multiplied at some length; the notion recurs in the commentaries with a frequency which suggests that the apparent paradox of unity in plurality in the Trinity

23. Thierry, p. 112.90.
24. Thierry, p. 112.94-5.
posed almost the most pressing of the problems which confronted the commentators. Their tendency to offer the same solution again and again is an indication of the pleasure this mathematically inspired answer gave—and also, perhaps, of the limited potential of the idea for development.

The procedures involved in multiplication and division appear to have a bearing here. They provided certain variations on the central principle. In the Glosa on Boethius' *De Trinitate* we meet the view that the balanced "equality in unity" of the Trinity would be destroyed if division were to enter in: *Periret enim si divisionem incurreret* 25.

But that is impossible, because the definition of unity includes the proviso that unity is indivisible. Isidore, for example, says that the *punctum*, or point of geometry has no parts: *cuius pars nulla est* 26. Therefore, as the commentator says, unity flees from division: *unitas enim divisionem refugit* 27. He takes the idea a stage further; everything which "is" desires to be "one", and therefore it is necessary for it to take flight from division: *Omne ergo quod est unum esse desiderat. Necesse ergo est ut divisionem fugiat* 28. Indeed, where there is division, there is plurality: *Nam ubi pluralitas, et divisio* 29, and where there is division, there is "otherness": *Nam ubi divisio ibi est alteritas quia si non ibi alteritas nec potest esse divisio*. Quare cum dividunt, alteritatem ponunt in personis 30. Those who would "divide" the Persons of the Trinity imply a difference between them, and thus the presence of the undesirable property of "otherness". The peculiarly mathematical nature of these discussions of division may be contrasted with the dialectical "division" much more commonly found in twelfth century writings. Abelard gives up a whole short treatise to "division" in the *De Divisionibus* 31; he leans heavily on Boethius, and his interest lies almost exclusively within the province of definition by means of "divisio". Our

26. Etymologiae 3.xii.7.
27. Thierry, p. 80.58.
30. Thierry, p. 142.31-3.
commentators see division or separation-into-parts in quite another light: division merely introduces "otherness" into unity and thus destroys perfection.

Similarly, it appears that multiplication may involve "otherness". "One" multiplied by "one" is a special case; but the multiplication of pluralities increases plurality (just as addition "introduces" plurality). In the Lectiones on Boethius' De Trinitate we have: Prima vero equalitas repperitur in multiplicatione unitatis in se. Nam unitas semel nichil est nisi unitas. Nam si ibi plus vel minus esset, pluralitas ibi repperiretur et sic ex multiplicatione unitatis in se aliquid procederet quam unitas 32. "The first equality is to be found in the multiplication of unity by itself. For one times one is nothing but one. For if there were anything more or less, plurality would be found there, and so from the multiplication of unity by itself there would come something other than unity". Again, when we find Gilbert of Poitiers discussing "multiplicity" in any context but that of arithmetic 33, it seems evident that such arithmetically inspired passages as do appear in the commentaries of the school of Chartres may offer very telling evidence for the state of thinking on this particular aspect of the notion of "otherness". In the Glosa on Boethius' De Trinitate a passage of some length on multiplication mentions arithmetic explicitly 34. It is, then, within a quite narrowly defined area of technical interest with a mathematical character that these discussions of "otherness" and plurality, "otherness" and multiplication or division, may be said to lie. The principles involved are few and simple, and they are not taken further by these commentators into the realm of speculative theology. But they are made explicit in a way that they are not in Anselm’s writings; their treatment here tends to strengthen the view that certain areas of technical expertise were attracting fresh attention, outside the field of dialectical studies.

By contrast, the discussion of "relation" had always been connected with dialectical studies, even in the context of the problem of the "relation" which obtains between the Persons of

32. THIERRY, p. 225.55-8.
33. GILBERT, p. 63.27, 63.30, 63.42, 65.76.
34. THIERRY, p. 280.14-32, especially line 17.
the Trinity. Alcuin’s *De Trinitate Questiones*, which are modelled on the issues taken up by Augustine in his *De Trinitate*, include a reference to *relativa* : *secundum dialecticam relativa nomina sunt, quae ad aliquid aliud referuntur* 36. Boethius introduces into his commentary on the *Categories* a discussion of the Aristotelian examples : *dominus* and *servus*, *pater* and *filius* 37. The latter example proves itself especially useful to Augustine 38 in his consideration of the relations between the first two Persons of the Trinity. It is against this background of established viewpoints and extended discussion that we must set the instances in our commentaries where “otherness” arises in connection with “relation”. Boethius himself raises the problem, by his use of the term *alteritas* in Book i. v of the *De Trinitate* : *Quocirca si pater ac filius ad aliquid dicuntur nichilque aliud, ut dictum est, differunt nisi sola relatione – relatio vero non predicatur ad id de quo predicatur quasi ipsa sit et secundum rem de qua dicitur – non faciet alteritatem rerum (de qua dicitur) sed si dici potest... personarum* 38.

Gilbert takes up the lead to explain that we have here “an otherness of Persons” : *dicens hanc alteritatem esse personarum* 39. Later, he extends the argument to emphasise that an “otherness of Persons” is not an “otherness” of substance : *et per hoc recte monstratum quod alteritas personarum theologicarum non est rerum i.e. non secundum aliqua qui subsipse sint* 40.

The Chartrean *Commentum* on Boethius’ *De Trinitate* has : *vere, non facit alteritatem predicatio relationis* 41, “the predication of relation makes no alteration”. It creates no ‘otherness’, and : *relatio huiusmodi non facit alteritatem* 42. The discussion of predication had, by the early twelfth century, already reached such a pitch of technical complexity, that it would involve too long

35. PL 101.59-60, Quaestiones 7-10.
36. PL 64.230.
37. De Trinitate V.xi.12 ff.
39. GILBERT, p. 143.35-6, cf. 143.29-30.
40. GILBERT, p. 149.20.
41. THIERRY, p. 111.42.
42. THIERRY, p. 112.60.
a digression to go into its implications here. For our purposes it is enough to note that “otherness” raises difficulties in connection with the treatment of the dialectical category of “relation”; the immediate source of the commentators’ interest lies in the Boethian text itself, and they do very little with the notion of “otherness” in its own right. Perhaps it is simply that the more advanced stage of development of dialectical technicality tended to direct the commentators’ thinking into established channels in a way that mathematical studies were not yet equipped to do; thus they take up with interest the question of “otherness” in mathematics, but “otherness” and “relation” strike few sparks off one another.

The vocabulary of diversity and difference, and that of mutability, are intimately connected with the terms which are employed in the treatment of these two related areas of discussion of “otherness”. Thierry of Chartres states baldly:

Differentia enim facit pluralitatem: indiffer entia vero unitatem 43. “Difference makes plurality, lack of difference unity.” Elsewhere: differentiam namque pluralitas semper exig it 44, echoes the theme. He emphasises the absence of differentia between the Persons of the Trinity 45. The links with the notions of singularity and plurality are clear.

Mutability might be said to introduce another dimension into the discussion. In all the aspects of “otherness” with which we have been concerned up to now, the “otherness” has to do with the placing of “a” in relation to “b”; some adding, or positioning of “a” in a “place” external to “b”, or some reciprocal relation of two separate entities is implied. In mathematics, “unity” provides a fixed point of reference and all plurality is “other than” one; in the category of relation, each member of the pair may be said to contribute to the other’s “otherness”. In both these kinds of “otherness”, discrete units and the relation between them provide two essential ingredients. But in “mutability” we are forced to consider the possibility that the original “one” may itself be changed. Mutability, like “other-

43. Thierry, p. 177.3-4.
44. Thierry, p. 89.4.
45. Thierry, p. 93.29-30.
ness”, is an undesirable quality ⁴⁶, and in God there can be no mutability ⁴⁷, since mutability is the power to change from one condition to another, and that is a property of matter ⁴⁸. Both in its “obnoxiousness” and in its “alteration”, mutability would seem to be close to “otherness”.

Indeed, we find mutabilitas associated with the familiar vocabulary of “otherness”: Nulla in deo quidem mutabilitas, pluralitas nulla ⁴⁹. In deo enim nulla potest esse mutabilitas nulla pluralitas ⁵⁰. Alteritas ex mutabilitate ⁵¹. Nullam rei alteritatem vel mutationem facere queunt ⁵². But there is an important difference between mutability and the other notions connected with “otherness” in these twelfth century commentaries. Mutability is the power of alteration which affects the original fixed point itself, rather than an additional dimension which leaves the “one” unchanged, but allows “others” to exist outside it.

There is some evidence that both “otherness” and “alteration” may have been implied by the term alteritas. Certainly, the commentators are anxious to fit “mutability” into the familiar schema. Unity precedes every “otherness” says Thierry in the Tractatus de Sex Dierum Operibus, and unity precedes every mutability. The similar syntactical patterns of the two statements emphasise his concern to bring the two concepts into parallel: Omnem alteritatem unitas precedit... Omnem igitur mutabilitatem precedit unitas ⁵³. From immutability (unity) proceeds mutability: ab inmutabilitate descendit mutabilitas ⁵⁴. “Oneness” and “otherness” or “alteration” are shown to form a complementary pair, even in the case of “mutability”.

This search for pattern, this desire to show exactly how a concept may be broken down into its essential parts, and how

⁴⁷. Thierry, p. 75.27.
⁴⁸. Thierry, p. 162.61: mutabilitas enim aptitudo est transeundi de uno statu ad alium. Que aptitudo ex materia est.
⁴⁹. Thierry, p. 75.27-8.
⁵⁰. Thierry, p. 163.12.
⁵². Thierry, p. 111.56.
those parts are related to one another, has a good deal in common with the dialectical approach to problem-solving which seems to have dominated the training of scholars even in the first half of the twelfth century. It is undeniably a large element in Anselm’s approach to problem-solving, too, that he should employ such dialectical skills as he knew\(^55\). But if we compare a passage from the *Monologion* with the later discussions of “otherness” we have examined, it becomes clear that Anselm is by no means so anxious to make every technicality explicit and to give it a label: *Quoniam enim sicut supra constat nec partibus est compositus, nec ullis differentiis vel accidentibus intelligi potest esse mutabilis: impossible est ut qualibet sectione sit divisibilis*\(^55\). The *summus spiritus*, says Anselm, is composed of no parts, nor can He be understood to be changeable in any sense, nor can He be divided. Here and elsewhere, Anselm implies that nothing in Gilbert of Poitiers’ treatment of “otherness”, nor in that of Thierry of Chartres, would have presented him with any difficulties; he assumes, and makes use of, the underlying principles which they seek to bring out into the open.

Even if we make allowance for the special character of Anselm’s writing, and the peculiar difficulties which always attend on any attempt to discover his sources, it seems that the twelfth century commentators were interested in technical detail for its own sake, in a way that Anselm was not. The discussion and definition of “otherness” and “alteration” has become an interesting technical problem in its own right; its “growing points” seem to have lain chiefly in the study of those fields of the *artes* which had still been relatively little explored: those concerned with mathematical studies.

Reading

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56. Schmitt, 1.45.20-2.