

Review of Ana María Mora-Márquez, *The Thirteenth-Century Notion of Signification: The Discussions and Their Origin and Development*. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015).

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In this slim, dense, and heavily text-based book, Mora-Márquez traces the development of the semantic notion of ‘signification’ (*significatio*) from its origins in two distinct Greek philosophical conceptions, *semeion* and *symbolon*, into a uniquely medieval concept. Because medieval philosophers drew from both logical and grammatical traditions when discussing signification, there is no unified conception of the notion which holds across the entire 13th century or in all relevant disciplines. Mora-Márquez teases out the differences, explains how they relate to each other, and identifies the roots of the differences. Due to the complexity of the material, the book requires careful thought and attention in order to grasp all of the subtle nuances in the ancient and medieval views.

The main argument is that over the 13th century two opposing ancient views of signification, rooted in the logical tradition of signification due to Boethius, and ultimately Aristotle, and the grammatical tradition of signification, due to Priscian, were developed into a single coherent concept. The coherence was eventually obtained by limiting the use of the concept in logic and grammar, and highlighting its use in simple linguistic institution. By the end of the 13th century, signification played a central role in the institution of linguistic signs, and almost none in logical and grammatical accounts.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is on “Signification of Concepts and Signification of Things”, and considers the question of what it is that words signify. In Part II, “Signification in Logic and in Grammar”, looks at applications of signification. Bookending these are an introduction, a conclusion, a list of abbreviations, a bibliography (unedited primary texts; edited primary texts; and secondary texts), and indices (of subjects; modern authors; and ancient and medieval authors). Primary sources in Latin and Greek are translated into English, by Mora-Márquez, with the originals in footnotes (which also contain comprehensive references to relevant contemporary secondary discussions). The translations occasionally incorporate infelicities, such as the use of “she” as the generic pronoun; while this may have become commonplace in contemporary philosophical literature, it is anachronistic to impose modern linguistic gender norms on medieval sources, particular sources written in a gendered language, whereby changing “he” to “she” makes the translation unfaithful. Additionally, while all primary sources in Greek and Latin are translated, secondary sources in other languages, such as French, are not translated.

In Chapter 1 Mora-Márquez argues that Aristotle’s theory of meaning in *Perihermeneias* is aimed at identifying the grounds for assigning truth or falsity to assertions, and in particular, when one assertion is contradicted by another, and that the dialectical context is essential to understanding the theory. Because the focus is on how one can convey information by means of assertions, it is the truth values of *assertions* (i.e., asserted sentences) rather than the truth values of (unasserted) sentences, that is important, rather than how we are able to create truthful linguistic representations. Signification is central to conveying information because of the connection between signification and “being a sign of”. In order for something to be a sign of something, it must be a sign *for someone*, i.e., one must have a particular person to whom the information is being conveyed. Boethius inherited this approach to language from Aristotle, but was also influenced by Porphyry, who, in contrast, *was* interested in how we are able to obtain truthful linguistic representations.

This mixed inheritance provides the foundation for the medieval discussions, two of which are chosen in Chapter 2 as representative and illustrative of different problems associated with the concept of signification. The first question is whether words signify concepts or things. Martin of Dacia and Peter Auvergne argued, contra Boethius, that names are imposed on and signify concepts, as opposed to things; they were contradicted by Robert Kilwardby (on the grounds that because words do not signify naturally, they cannot have signification by imposition) and Albert the Great (on the grounds that since

we cannot have cognitive access to essences, we cannot impose words directly on them). The second question, whether words lose their signification upon the destruction of their significate, is investigated through the sophism sentence *Omnis homo de necessitate est animal* (“Every man of necessity is an animal”), abbreviated OHNEA. The question is whether this sentence is true when there are no men, and in §2.2, Mora-Márquez identifies four ways in which this question can be answered: (1) When there are no men, *homo* loses its signification, and OHNEA is neither true nor false; (2) the signification is not lost, and OHNEA is false; (3) the signification is not false, and OHNEA is true in one sense but false in another (via a distinction between actual being and dispositional or habitual being); and (4) the signification is not lost, and OHNEA is true. The answers given by Roger Bacon, Boethius of Dacia, Peter John Olivi, and the author of the *Anonymous Alani* cumulatively provide witnesses for all four types of answers.

The second half of the book turns to the different ways in which the notion of signification is used in grammatical and logical contexts. In Chapter 3, we are introduced to the different definitions of “name” (= “noun”) and “verb” in the logical tradition of Aristotle and in the grammatical tradition of Priscian. Aristotle’s definitions pick out “the features that allow words to bring about assertions that are susceptible of truth and falsity” while Priscian aimed at determining “the features that allow words to be divided into different grammatical categories” (p. 121). In the final chapter, Mora-Márquez presents the view of the late 13th-century modist grammarians, who argued that the way in which a word signifies (its mode of signification) is what gives it the part of speech that it has. This can be contrasted with the non-modist approach of the logicians, who over the course of the 13th century followed Aristotle’s focus on the ways in which sentences can be used to make assertions and contradictions, and shifted from the question of how language can represent reality (i.e., questions of when and how sentences are true and false) to questions of argumentative method (i.e., when are two assertions contradictory).

In the conclusion, Mora-Márquez argues that the ultimate goal of a coherent notion of signification which could be used to justify both logic and grammar as scientific disciplines resulted in an increasing narrowing of the concept until it was no longer closely connected to either discipline. Modist grammar, whose heights were reached in the 1260s and 1270s, had almost entirely disappeared by the end of the century. Logic, too, was infected by the rampant nominalism that was in place by the end of the century, and in such an ontologically austere setting, it is not clear what role signification can play.

The book suffers occasionally from some non-standard English and a lack of uniformity of vocabulary. For example, on one page “communicational” is found used for exactly the same concept as “communicative” (a preferable choice), which is used on the next page. Similarly, in §2.1, “stand for” and “signify” are apparently used as synonyms; given that the former is often used as a translation of *suppositio* rather than *significatio*, this is confusing for anyone familiar with 13th-century semantic vocabulary. Elsewhere (pp. 119–120) what had previously been called “verbs” are called “attributes” without the change in terminology being explicitly pointed out. Finally, the awkward “dation” occurs in footnote 37 (p. 140), where “dating” would be more natural. However, I found only two typos, one in footnote 117 (“voluntary” for “voluntary”), and another that probably only I would notice, as my name is misspelled in the acknowledgements.

The primary audience of the book is specialists in medieval logic and philosophy of language, and those lacking this background will likely find the book hard going. But for the specialist, it is a phenomenal resource, meticulously researched, interesting in content, and filling a very important gap in our understanding of semantic theory in the 13th century. Now, all we need, as Mora-Márquez points