

Possibile ed impossibile in Paolo Veneto

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Abstract: Paul of Venice's view of the possible contaminates, to a certain extent, Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism on the basis of theological demands linked to the problem of creation. He would like to separate potency as the principle (or capacity) of any change (*potentia in esse*), proper to things that already exist, from potency understood as the pure possibility of something to become real (*potentia ad esse*), a potency that is not, on the other hand, connected with the existing, but has to do with the future. But he does not always adequately distinguish between the concept of potency as pure logical possibility (as taught by Duns Scotus) and that of potency as preformation, that is, as pre-determination, or pre-existence, of what will be actual/real. The ultimate outcome of this confusion is a form of necessitarianism *ex hypothesi* at the level of species, insofar as each species, while not necessary in itself, would nevertheless be necessary with respect to the conditions and circumstances that bring it into being: since such conditions have the capacity to produce it, they cannot but do so. At the level of individuals, however, Paul of Venice breaks with this form of necessitarianism by admitting in individuals the existence also of powers/possibilities that will not come into being – that is, of capacities that the species has but that a certain individual will never use. Therefore, at the level of individuals, he re-evaluates the empirical and observational character of knowledge, which is otherwise severely limited by the essentialist explanatory scheme he uses, according to which what a thing is or does necessarily derives from its substantial essence, which predetermines the types and spheres within which the phenomenal manifestations of the thing itself occur.