

Abailard's Theory of Universals

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I Peter Abailard's *Logica Ingredientibus* [1]¹ occupies an important position in the medieval controversy about universals. Following the tradition transmitted by Boethius, Abailard recognizes that universals are predicable of and common to distinct individuals.² Before he offers his own theory of universality Abailard criticizes several alternative views, including two variants of realism attributable to William of Chempeaux and a version of nominalism proposed by Joscelin.³ Abailard's own theory is a hybrid of nominalism and conceptualism. In the sense of predicability, universality belongs to words alone.⁴ In the sense of commonality, universality falls to concepts. Abailard realizes that an adequate theory of universals must include an explanation of predication revealing, on the one hand, the truth conditions for the attributions of universal words and, on the other hand, why individuals fall under the concepts they do. Accordingly, Abailard like Porphyry⁵ asks, but unlike Porphyry answers, three questions of the semantics and ontology of universals:

- (1) What is the common cause by which the universal word, a predicate, is correctly imposed or predicated?
- (2) What kind of concept of commonality is understood in an intelligent act of predication?
- (3) Is a predicate called common because of the common cause of imposition, the concept understood in predication or both?

Abailard's responses to these questions are notorious and raise as many issues as they resolve. It is my primary purpose to reconstruct Abailard's answers in such a way that his nominalism and conceptualism are intelligible.

*I am grateful to Professor Paul Vincent Spade for discussing Abailard's theory of universals with me and advising me of nuances of the Latin text. An anonymous referee of this *Journal* has also offered me several insightful criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper.