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Dialectical Problems in Paris and Cologne
Commentaries on *Topics* I.11

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In this paper, I would like to consider one particular passage in Aristotle's *Topics* in order to see how it was read, analyzed and commented on by different medieval scholars.

The importance of the *Topics*, somewhat neglected until relatively recent times[2], cannot be overstated. Not only was Aristotle's *Topics* a mandatory textbook for young *artistae*, but its study occupied most of the

[2] There are only two critical editions of medieval commentaries on the *Topics*, namely BOETHIUS DE DACIA, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, J. PINBORG, Hauniae (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi VI.1), Gad 1976; JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, qq. 13-15, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Brepols (Artistarium 12), Turnhout 2008. The most comprehensive study of the medieval tradition of commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics* is N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages*, Philosophia Verlag, München 1984. For the role played by Aristotle's Topics in Medieval Logic, see also E. STUMP, *Dialectic and its place in the development of Medieval Logic*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1989, K. JACOBI, ed., *Argumentationstheorie. Scholastische Forschungen zu den logischen und semantishen Regeln korrekten Folgerns* (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 38), Brill: Leiden–New York–Köln 1993.

lessons devoted to logic[1]. Moreover, the tradition of commentaries on this work influenced the development of the scholarly practice of the *disputatio*, since, as many commentators noted in their assessment of the Aristotelian text, much of the text, and book VIII in particular, focuses on providing instructions for how to conduct a dialectical dispute[2]. A similar case could be made for the passage analyzed in the following pages, namely, the definition of a dialectical problem. As I intend to show, the fact that a problem is defined in terms of opposing views on a particular subject, implies that this brief passage—be it implicitly or explicitly—offers a framework for the practice of philosophy as it was conducted in medieval universities. This feature will become more evident at the end of the survey.

The first section of the paper, then, will be devoted to the Aristotelian notion of *problema* such as it is presented in the *Topics*. Since my main aim is to analyze the medieval tradition of commentaries, I will rely on medieval authors for the overall standard interpretation of these passages. For this same reason, Aristotelian quotations will be taken from Boethius' translation. In a second section, I will analyze some of the issues that some medieval authors had to tackle when commenting on these passages, for which they offer diverse solutions. Finally, I will present some conclusions derived from this analysis.

As for the choice of commentators, I will consider mainly authors who had their academic careers in Paris and/or Cologne, ranging from the 13th to the 15th centuries: Albert the Great, Adenulphus of Anagni, Boethius of Dacia, Angelus de Camerino, Radulphus Brito, John

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[1] See, for instance, the importance of the *Topics* in the *Ripoll Compendium*; cf. S. EBBESEN, "The *Ars Nova* in the 'Ripoll Compendium'", en C. LAFLEUR (ed.), *L'enseignement de la philosophie au XIIIe siècle. Autour du 'Guide de l'étudiant' du ms. Ripoll 109*, Brepols (Studia Artistarum 5), Turnhout 1997, pp. 325-352.

[2] See Olga WEIJERS, "The Evolution of the *Trivium* in University Teaching: The Example of the *Topics*", in John VAN ENGEN (ed.), *Learning Institutionalized. Teaching in the Medieval University*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2000, 43-67, here p. 44.

Buridan, Hartlevus de Marca, Johannes Versor, Heymeric of Campo, and the anonymous compiler of the *Ripoll Compendium*[1]. The choice of this range of authors aims at developing an overall frame in which to identify continuities and changes within the commentary tradition. At the same time, the restriction to the Paris-Cologne axis aims at confining the vast number of commentaries on the *Topics*, for the most part unedited, to a more manageable sample. The fact that it is possible to trace cross-references between these commentaries is also of great importance, as will be shown in the final remarks.

1. Dialectical problems. The Aristotelian definition and its context

The Aristotelian definition of a dialectical problem appears in Book I, chapter 11 of the *Topics*. However, the concept of *problema* appears much earlier in the text. It is in fact mentioned in its very first sentence, when Aristotle states that his purpose in the *Topics* is "to find a method with which to make arguments about every problem by means of probable reasons" (*propositum quidem negotii est methodum invenire a qua poterimus syllogizare de omni problemate ex probabilibus*)[2]. Thus, the definition of *problema* in chapter 11 becomes of great importance, since it is directly linked to the very first lines of the *Topics*, in which the aim of the whole book is outlined.

Not only is the notion of *problema* mentioned at the very beginning of the *Topics*, there is also a reference to the universality of the method proposed, i.e. the possibility of applying this method to virtually

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[1] Of the authors considered here, Boethius of Dacia, Adenulphus of Anagni, Angelus de Camerino, Radulphus Brito and John Buridan were active in Paris. Heymeric of Campo was active both in Paris and Cologne. Hartlevus de Marca was the first rector of the University of Cologne. Johannes Versor's commentary, composed at Paris, was printed in Cologne and was very popular in the 15th century. Albert the Great's influence both in Paris and Cologne is beyond question. For details on these commentaries, see N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages*, pp. 382-417, as well as further references in the following pages.

[2] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.1, 100a19-20, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, p. 5.3-4.

all kinds of problems. This alleged universality did not pass unnoticed by medieval commentators. Boethius of Dacia, for instance, in q. 14 of his *Quaestiones super libros Topicorum*, asks whether dialectic can really teach how to deal with every possible problem (*utrum per hanc artem sciet homo arguere de omni problemate*)[1]. The objections to Aristotle's opening remark seem strong: in the first place, if dialectic is an art that teaches how to argue about every possible problem, then all other sciences would be superfluous. Also, since the amount of all possible problems is infinite, dialectic would teach our finite intellect how to deal with an infinite quantity of problems, which is absurd. Boethius' solution emphasizes two things: first, the dialectician is not interested in the proper subject of each science, but rather in a trait that is common to all of them, namely, the fact that every possible problem from every possible science can be expressed by means of a limited number of predicates:

> Dicendum quod per artem dialecticae sciet homo arguere de omni problemate, de quocumque praedicato fuerit illud problema sive de accidente sive de genere sive de aliis. Et hoc intendit Philosophus dicere, et sic sunt quattuor problemata, et illa docet construere et destruere consequenter in libro. Sciendum est etiam quod in omni materia, sive sit naturalis sive mathematica sive divina sive moralis, sunt proprietates a quibus accipit dialecticus communes intentiones et habitudines locales et omnia talia quae ipse per se considerat; et hoc patet homine diligenter consideranti. Ideo in omni arte et in omne materia potest dialecticus arguere, ex probabilibus tamen.[2]

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[1] BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 46.1-10: *Consequenter quaeritur in speciali de dictis in littera. Et primo utrum per hanc artem sciet homo arguere de omni problemate. Et videtur quod non. Nam si sic, omnes aliae scientiae superfluerent. Hoc est falsum. Ergo et cetera. Praeterea: Infinita sunt problemata vel possunt esse. Infinita autem ab intellectu apprehendi non possunt, et ideo de infinitis non potest esse ars nec scientia. Ergo per hanc artem non sciet homo arguere de omni problemate.*
[2] BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 47.22-33.

According to Boethius, then, a dialectician can consider matters pertaining to every possible science, since he does not focus on the subject itself, but rather on some intentions common to all sciences (*communes intentiones*). This solves, in one single stroke, both objections: other sciences are not superfluous, since they consider their own proper subject, whereas dialectic considers common intentions; and these intentions, themselves the subject of dialectic, are not infinite in number, since they in fact can be reduced to four: *diffinitio*, *genus*, *accidens* and *proprium*[1].

Most medieval commentators also applied here the distinction *utens*/*docens*, that is, the distinction between the knowledge required to master any art or science, and its applicability to other sciences. Thus, dialectic can be either an art in itself, whose rules the dialectician must command (this is the task of *dialectica docens*), or it can be a tool to be used in other sciences (and then it becomes *dialectica utens*). But even in this last case (for instance, a theologian discussing the eternity of the world in the context of the second book of the *Sentences*), the knowledge of dialectic is required in order to proceed correctly. The alleged universality of dialectic, presented in the very first lines of the *Topics* (*syllogizare de omni problemate*), is enforced precisely by *dialectica utens*[2].

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[1] The number of predicates will also be a matter explicitly dealt with by medieval commentators; see for instance JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 9 (*utrum praedicata sint quattuor tantum, seu utrum sint quattuor et non plura neque pauciora*), ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Turnhout 2008 (Artistarium 12), pp. 40-44. Special attention is paid to the fact that not all *quinque voces* are included: the silence over *species* and *differentia* in this passage of the *Topics* will be explained in terms of their tacit inclusion within *genus* and definition.

[2] See, for instance, ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *In I Topicorum*, ed. A. BORGNET, París 1890, Prooemium, 1, p. 235: *Est autem memoria tenendum (quod alibi dictum est) quod scientia dialectica sive de syllogismo dialectico, et est docens, et est utens: eo quod per doctrinam acceptum est. Et quod omnis sciencia docens modo demonstrationis traditur: quia aliter ex doctrina certus et stans habitus non generaretur: et ulterius nec scientia esset, nec doctrina. Utens autem eo quod per doctrinam acceptum est, scientia est conjecturis mixta, et ex habitudinibus localibus conjecturae et rationis trahens*

There is more, however, and Boethius himself points it out at the end of the passage quoted above: a proper trait of a dialectician is that he can argue about every possible problem, but only by means of probable arguments (*ex probabilibus tamen*)[1]. In the remaining lines of *quaestio* 14, Boethius states the difference between the *dialecticus* and the *demonstrator*:

> sic iudicamus propositionem probabilem propter proprietatem aliquam a parte subiecti habilitantem subiectum ad participationem praedicati, sed non necessitantem, qua proprietate sumpta pro medio concludimus dialectice praedicatum de illo subiecto. Et illam conclusionem asserimus sive consideramus sub formidine oppositae partis, quia sic sumpsimus propositiones praemissas. Et causa huius est, quia praedicata proprietas non necessario habilitavit subiectum ad participationem praedicati, sed solum probabiliter (...) Et haec est causa quare dialecticus potest arguere probabiliter ad partem utramque contradictionis. Non sic autem demonstrator, et causa huius patet per se.[2]

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considerationem; also JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 13, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 55.21-31: *Circa illa quaestionem* [sc. utrum omne problema sit dialecticum] *ponenda est distinctio; et quaedam problemata possunt dici dialectica ex eo, quod pertinent ad dialecticam docentem, et talia sunt problemata, de quibus pertinet pertractare in libris Topicorum. Alio modo problemata aliqua dicuntur dialectica ex eo, quod possunt disputari per rationes probabiles ad utramque partem contradictionis. Primo modo loquendo de problemate dialectico Aristoteles accepit problema dialecticum vel logicum, cum dixit alia esse ethica, alia physica, alia logica, nec membra illius divisionis sic coincidunt. Nihilominus tamen in secunda acceptione problematis dialectici vel logici membra praedictae divisionis bene coinciderent, unde et ethica et physica problemata possunt dici dialectica ex eo, quod possunt disputari per rationes probabiles et communes.*

[1] Another usual discussion among medieval commentators of the *Topics* regarding this point is whether any problem can be dealt with with both probable and demonstrative arguments, or some similar discussion (for instance, whether a man can have both knowledge and opinion regarding any particular conclusion); cf. BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, I, qq. 11-12, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, pp. 39-43; JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 3, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Turnhout 2008 (Artistarium 12), pp. 17-22.

[2] BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 47.40-48.54.

The distinction, then, is between the necessity of the conclusion of a demonstration, and the probability of the conclusion of a piece of dialectical reasoning. The latter is characterized by the fear that things may be, in fact, the opposite of what was established by the conclusion. The notion of fear (*formido*), then, becomes key to determine the distinction between science and *opinio*[1]. To put it briefly, the Aristotelian distinction between science and opinion establishes that, in the first case, the intellect cannot but give assent to a demonstration in which the conclusion is necessarily derived from the premises; whereas, in the second case, we can only give assent to one of the terms of a contradiction, but with the fear of the opposite term being actually the case. And since in the division of sciences assumed by medieval scholars, each kind of knowledge has a corresponding Aristotelian textbook[2], in the same way in which the *Posterior Analytics* were devoted to a theory of scientific demonstration, the *Topics* presented a theory of dialectical reasoning, characterized by probable arguments, thus dealing with opinion.

The fact that dialectic deals with opinion does not, however, mean that it is of no importance for the philosopher. In *Top*. I.2 Aristotle presents the threefold utility of this *negotium*, namely exercise, correct conversation and philosophy. These features were as important in Aristotle's context as they were in the scholarly *milieu* of the medieval university. Moreover, it can be argued that all these introductory remarks by Aristotle only make sense when understood in a context of active

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[1] For an analysis of this notion in medieval debates, cf. P. PORRO, "Il timore dall'altra parte. Il ruolo della *formido* nei dibattiti scolastici sull'assenso (da Tommaso d'Aquino a Pietro Aureolo)", *Archivio di Filosofia* 83.1-2 (2015), pp. 209-220. *Formido* will also serve as a key concept for the distinction between opinion and faith; see *infra*, section 2.1.

[2] For a summary of the medieval approach to Logic, see S. EBBESEN, "What counted as Logic in the Thirteenth century?", in M. CAMERON, J. MARENBON (eds.), *Methods and Methodologies. Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500-1500*, Brill, Leiden 2011, pp. 93-107.

dialectical engagement[1]. As Aristotle himself explains, and later commentators will repeat, a subject can be dealt with by a dialectician only insofar as it is disputable[2].

Incidentally, this explains why, at the beginning of the *Topics*, Aristotle claims that the method envisaged is designed to address every dialectical problem (*problema*) rather than every dialectical proposition (*propositio*) or thesis (*positio*). By its definition, a *problema* specifically includes both poles of a contradiction, whereas in the cases of *propositio* and *positio* one of these poles is only implied: a proposition is a sentence expressing probable knowledge for which there is no consensus; a thesis is a somewhat paradoxical proposition expressed by some notable philosopher, which goes against the common opinion, functioning as a starting point for a disputation[3]. For its part, a problem includes in its very formulation a disjunction, thus expressing explicitly the opposition that a proposition or a thesis only virtually do.

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[1] See for instance S. EBBESEN, D. BLOCH, J. L. FINK, H. HANSEN, A. M. MORA-MÁRQUEZ, *History of Philosophy in Reverse. Reading Aristotle through the Lenses of Scholars from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries*, The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Copenhagen 2014, 101-108; O. WEIJERS, *In search of the truth. A history of disputation techniques from Antiquity to early Modern times*, Brepols, Turnhout 2013. There is however a slight difference in the case of *obviatio*, a more technical notion for medieval commentators than the Greek *énteuxis*; see, for instance, P. SLOMKOWSKI, *Aristotle's Topics*, Brill, Leiden 1997, pp. 15-19.

[2] A different approach, however, seems to be the case in the *Ripoll Compendium*: although it is true that the main difference between the *demonstrator* and the *dialecticus* is that the former does not engage in actual disputation, the latter is involved with disputations only insofar as two of the three main goals of *dialectica* are concerned, namely *excercitatio* and *obviatio*. Dialectic *ad secundum philosophiam disciplinas* does not seem to require an actual disputation to take place, cf. C. LAFLEUR, "Logic in the *Barcelona Compendium* (With special reference to Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistici elenchi*)", in K. JACOBI, ed., *Argumentationstheorie*, pp. 81-98.

[3] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.10-11, 104a8-12; 104b20-21, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, p. 15.17-21; 17.17-18: *Est autem propositio dialectica interrogatio probabilis aut omnibus aut pluribus aut sapientibus, et his vel omnibus vel pluribus vel maxime notis, non extranea; ponet enim aliquis quod videtur sapientibus, nisi contrarium sit plurium opinionibus (...) Positio autem est opinio extranea alicuius notorum secundum philosophiam.*

It is true that, in *Top*. I.11, Aristotle himself acknowledges that his terminology is far from strict: the line between *propositio*, *problema* and *positio* can be occasionally blurred, and he even admits that in his time *problema* and *positio* were used as virtually synonymous [1]. However, in *Top*. I.4, Aristotle explains one key difference between *propositio* and *problema*:

> Differunt autem problema et propositio modo. Sic enim dicto, "putasne animal gressibile bipes, diffinitio est hominis?", et "putasne animal genus hominis?", propositio fit. Si autem, "utrum animal gressibile bipes diffinitio est hominis vel non?", problema fit. Similiter autem in aliis. Quare merito aequalia numero problemata et propositiones sunt. Nam ab omni propositione problema facies transsumpto modo. [2]

So, whereas the proposition is presented as a question which requires a "yes or no" answer, the main feature of the problem is the fact that it is presented in the form of a question in which both terms of a contradiction are offered, so that the *respondens* must opt for one of them, while rejecting the other [3]. The keyword in this brief description of the notion of *problema* is *utrum*, something that did not pass unnoticed to medieval commentators, for whom *utrum* was the word used to introduce a *quaestio*. Thus, Angelus de Camerino explicitly equates *problema* and *quaestio* in his commentary on this passage [4]. Moreover, in the section

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[1] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.11, 104b35-36, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, p. 18.8-9: *Paene autem nunc omnia dialectica problemata positiones vocantur*.

[2] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.4, 101b30-37, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, pp. 8.22-9.5.

[3] Hartlevus de Marca observes that, considered as a whole, i.e. as the disjunction between a proposition and its contradictory, a problem is always a self-evident truth; cf. HARTLEVUS DE MARCA, *Quaestiones libri Topicorum*, I, q. 7, ms. Erfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Dep. Erf. CA. 4° 270, f. 85va: *Nam si problema capitur pro totali disiunctiva ex contradictionis, illud nunquam est dialecticum, sed semper est per se notum*.

[4] ANGELUS DE CAMERINO, *Sententia totius libri Topicorum*, ms. Paris, BNF lat. 16126, f. 8ra: *problema dyalecticum non terminatum quod est idem quod quaestio*. For the notion of *problema non terminatum* in Angelus' commentary, see infra, section 2.1.

devoted to the *Topics*, the *Ripoll Compendium* states it explicitly: *est enim problema idem quod questio*[1].

There is another reason why the notion of *problema* is more operational for the dialectician than *propositio* and *positio*: unlike propositions and theses, which express, albeit as merely probable, one of the two terms of a contradiction, the opposition expressed by a problem can be such that it doesn't declare the prevalence of one of those terms over the other, thus remaining neutral. Following Aristotle's remarks closely, Heymeric de Campo offers a clear account of the relations between *propositio*, *problema* and *positio*:

> Sed quia problema coincidit cum propositione probabili et sint quedam propositiones habentes utramque partem contradictionis eque verisimilem per contrarios silogismos, immo etiam sint problemata neutra, id est utrimque eque potenter probabilia ut est illud utrum mundus eternus sit vel non. Dicebatur autem notabiliter in diffinitione propositionis non 'extranea' propter positionem, positio enim est opinio extranea alicuius notorum secundum philosophiam, id est singularis opinio a sensu philosophum vel sapientum vel contradicens, ut Heracliti dicentis omnia moveri, aliud Mellissi dicentis omnia esse unum ens. Ex quo patet quod omnis positio problema est sed non convertitur propter problema neutrum, nec tamen omne problema est dyalecticum, puta dubitatio alicuius indigentis sensu vel pena et non [esse] ratione, ut est illud an oportet deos venerari vel parentes honorare, qui enim hoc dubitant indigent pena, et illud utrum nix est alba, quod non potest terminari ratione sed sensu.[2]

A problem, then, is made up from contradictory (probable) propositions, and some of those problems are not decidable on account of the many arguments in favor of either alternative (the most prominent example is, again, the question *de aeternitate mundi*). A *positio* is a thesis advanced by a philosopher who seems to go against the general opinion. With these

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[1] C. LAFLEUR, *Le 'Guide de l'Étudiant' d'un maître anonyme de la faculté des arts de Paris au XIIIe siècle. Édition critique provisoire du ms. Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll 109, ff. 134ra-158va*, Québec 1992, p. 251, §923.
[2] HEYMERICO DE CAMPO, *Compendium Logicae*, ms. UB Basel, F IV 15, f. 100va.

definitions in mind, Heymeric explains that every position, precisely because of its polemic nature, is in a way a problem. But the existence of problems that cannot be decided precludes the possibility of considering every *problema* a *positio*: by definition, a *positio* cannot be neutral. Also, not every problem can be considered dialectical, since there are problems which cannot be decided, not because there are too many arguments in favor of either alternative, but rather because of the complete lack thereof. This is in fact one of the key aspects of the full definition of *problema* to be discussed by medieval commentators, as will be clear in the following section. Arguably, it is precisely this explicit appeal to "neutrality" that makes a *problema* the privileged form of scientific inquiry, the trait that dialectic offers as uniquely its own[1].

Finally, after presenting the main concepts and notions to be used throughout the treatise (syllogism, predicate, proposition, etc.[2]), the full definition of a dialectical problem is offered by Aristotle in *Topics* I.11:

> Problema autem dialecticum est speculatio contendens vel ad electionem et fugam vel ad veritatem et scientiam, aut ipsum aut ut adminiculans ad aliquid aliud huiusmodi; de quo aut neutro modo opinantur aut contrarie plurimi sapientibus aut sapientes plurimis aut utrique idem eisdem. Quedam enim problematum utile est scire tantum ad eligendum vel fugiendum, ut utrum voluptas sit eligenda vel non, quaedam autem ad sciendum tantum, ut utrum mundus sit aeternus vel non, quaedam vero ipsa quidem per se ad neutrum horum, adminiculantia autem sunt ad aliqua talium; plurima enim ipsa quidem per se non volumus scire, propter alia autem, ut per haec aliud aliquid cognoscamus. Sunt autem problemata et de quibus contrarii sunt syllogismi (dubitationem enim habet utrum sic se habeat vel non sic, eo quod in utrisque sint rationes verisi-

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[1] This "neutrality" is also something to be trained by a dialectician, as can be seen in the case of *dubitatio*, one of the three main types of *obligationes*; cf. S. UCKELMAN, "Deceit and indefeasible knowledge: the case of *dubitatio*", *Journal of Applied Non-Classical Logics* 21 (2011), pp. 503-519.

[2] Curiously, as every reader of the *Topics* almost immediately notices, there is no definition of what a *topos* (or *locus*) is.

> miles) et de quibus rationem non habemus cum sit magna, difficile arbitrantes esse quare assignare, ut utrum mundus aeternus vel non.[1]

As for its content, then, a problem can be a speculation about things to be pursued or abandoned, it can be about things we wish to know, or it can be about things that might eventually help us with any of those other purposes. From this definition, it may be safely assumed that there is practically no subject about which we could not formulate a problem: we either want to do something (this is expressed in terms of choice or avoidance), or we want to know something (thus the reference to truth and knowledge). And this we can do either directly or indirectly, i.e. we may want to determine something in order to help us to know something else, or in order to help us in our decision-making. Thus defined, a problem can be raised about almost any subject whatsoever. Once again, we find in this definition an appeal to the universality of the method implied in the first lines of the *Topics*.

However, there are in fact some limits to this alleged universality. The Aristotelian treatment of proposition, problem and thesis is framed by general remarks regarding what kind of inquiry is worthy of attention for the dialectician. The first remark states that at the onset of any problem there must be some kind of doubt (*dubitatio*) to be addressed:

> Non enim omnem propositionem nec omne problema dialecticum ponendum; nullus enim proponet qui mentem habeat quod nulli videtur, nec proponet quod omnibus est manifestum vel pluribus; nam haec quidem non habent dubitationem, illa autem nemo ponet.[2]

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[1] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.11, 104b1-15, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, Paris 1960 (*Aristoteles Latinus* V.1-3), pp. 16.22-17.15. This was a much quoted passage, especially in disputes on the eternity of the world (see, for instance, Thomas Aquinas' or Boethius of Dacia' discussions on the subject).

[2] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.10, 104a3-8, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, p. 15.13-17.

This caveat is repeated a few pages later. Once again, *dubitatio* plays an important role as the origin from which a problem may be raised by the dialectician. This time, however, Aristotle introduces a qualification to this type of doubt:

> Non oportet autem omne problema nec omnem positionem considerare, sed quam dubitavit aliquis rationis indigentium et non poenae vel sensus; nam qui dubitant utrum oporteat deos vereri et parentes honorare vel non poenae indigent, qui vero utrum nix alba vel non, sensus. Neque vero quorum propinqua est demonstratio, neque quorum valde longe; nam haec quidem non habent dubitationem, illa autem magis quam secundum excercitativam.[1]

So, according to Aristotle, the doubt the dialectician takes as a starting point for his/her inquiry must be addressed in terms that are neither evident nor unlikely. A question too simple would entail in fact no doubt and thus offer no stimulus whatsoever for the inquiry, whereas one too complicated would go beyond what is expected for an exercise. This last observation seems to imply a feature of dialectic that would eventually be picked up by medieval commentators: even if Aristotle claims that the utility of this art is threefold (*ad excercitationem*, *ad obviationes*, *ad secundum philosophiam disciplinas*), one of these goals, namely dialectical training, seems to be the main one[2]. In the distinction

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[1] ARISTOTELES, *Topica*, I.11, 105a3-9, translatio BOETHII, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, p. 18.13-20.

[2] The utility of the dialectical dispute in terms of both exercise and quest for the truth is reprised also when commenting on Book VIII, in which the rules of the disputation are laid out; see for instance BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 309.5-9: *Opponens autem in dialectica et respondens propter duas disputant causas, quarum una est, ut sint exercitati in disputatione dialectica in sustinendo positionem et in opponendo ad eam; secunda causa est ipsa cognitio veritatis.* For the threefold utility of dialectic both in Aristotle's times as well as in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see S. EBBESEN, "The Theory of *loci* in Antiquity and the Middle Ages", in K. JACOBI, ed., *Argumentationstheorie*, pp. 15-39, here p. 17: "a disputation can be carried on just to train the members of a school in the art of argumentation; they can exercise the art in debates with outsiders and thank their trainig

dialectica docens/utens, the former is explicitly equated with the art developed by Aristotle in the *Topics*; and it is in this sense that the importance ascribed to dialectical training makes sense, i.e. as the main goal of *dialectica docens*. As will be seen in the following section, this too might have been the view of many medieval commentators on Aristotle's *Topics*.

To summarize: Dialectic is an art studied in the *Topics*, which must be properly learned for it to be potentially applied in any other art or science. Its main trait is disputability, i.e. the fact that it deals with probable arguments in favor of both sides of a contradiction, in order to decide which one of them is the case. This disputability is expressed in the form of a problem. At one end, there is doubt (*dubitatio*), an indecision between the two alternatives of a contradiction that may not be completely shaken off once the dispute has actually taken place. At the other end, once one alternative has been favored by the dialectical arguments employed, there is fear (*formido*) that the opposite of what has been determined may actually be the case. Such is the complex web of concepts that the notion of *problema* entails, from which medieval commentators will elaborate their own distinctions and discussions.

2. Medieval discussions on *Top*. I.11

One of the key aspects of the Aristotelian definition of *problema* is its reference not only to form ("Is it the case that *p* or not-*p*?") but also to the reaction of a particular community towards it. This pragmatic dimension, i.e. how those involved in the process of a dialectical dispute make use of it, present it or react towards it, is not accessory. In Aristotle's terms, in order to identify a dialectical problem, there has to be a disagreement between those with expertise in one specific field of knowledge and the laymen, among different groups of laymen, or among different groups of

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for enabling them to deal with people who do not share the school's beliefs; finally, the disputation is a fine instrument of serious philosophical analysis."

those with expertise. As Aristotle claims, there is no sense in examining that which everyone holds to be true or that which nobody doubts to be false.

For medieval commentators, this meant that any taxonomy of dialectical problems would have to take into account not only the subject (there can be problems dealing with theological, metaphysical or ethical concepts, for instance), but also the way in which those involved in the formulation and solution of the problem react to it: there can be problems that go against common opinions, problems that go against the common view of the learned in a particular subject, and there can even be problems for which there is no clear solution. However standard the more general interpretations of dialectical problems were for medieval commentators, there were also discrepancies regarding some of these categories of dialectical problems, their place and importance. In the following section I will analyze first how different commentators debated the status of the "neutral" problem, followed by different attempts to construct a general taxonomy of dialectical problems.

2.1 "Neutral" problems

Of all the different kinds of dialectical problems presented by Aristotle, those about which it is not possible to produce an opinion (*de quo neutro modo opinantur*) constituted for some commentators an anomaly. If dialectical problems are those about which we can only have an opinion based on probable arguments, there seems to be no possibility of a dialectical problem about which we would not be able to have an opinion, however provisional. If *utrum* is the keyword that identifies the formulation of a problem, then *ne-utrum* seems to represent its opposite or, at least, its negation.

In the 13th century, some of the first commentators of *Top.* I.11 already noted this apparent contradiction in the Aristotelian text. As is usually the case for medieval scholars, this kind of dissonance is solved by offering an interpretation that saves the coherence of the Aristotelian

littera commented on[1]. Boethius of Dacia explains the passage in the following terms:

> Sunt etiam quedam problemata, de quibus neutro modo opinamur. Et si tu quaeras: Quomodo possunt esse problemata dialectica, ex quo de eis neutro modo opinamur? Respondendum quod de aliquo problemate possum neutro modo opinari dupliciter, aut quia nec habeo rationes ad partem affirmativam nec ad partem negativam, et hoc modo non est problema dialecticum, ut si quaeratur si arenae maris sunt pares vel impares; vel quia ad utramque partem contradictionis habeo rationes aeque probabiles, propter quod difficile est consentire magis in unam partem quam in aliam, et ideo neutro modo de tali problemate opinamur.[2]

For Boethius, then, there are in fact two kinds of problems about which we are not able to form an opinion. The first kind is not worthy of consideration by the dialectician, because there is no argument whatsoever in favor of either alternative. Boethius mentions the example of the number of grains of sand in the ocean (is that number odd or even?). The second kind, on the contrary, is worthy of the dialectician's full attention: there are problems, in fact, for which we have arguments of equal strength for both alternatives, and we are not able to tip the balance in favor of either of them because of their difficulty. Such is the case with Aristotle's own example, the problem *de aeternitate mundi*, to

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[1] This was a rather common procedure among commentators of Aristotle; cf. S. EBBESEN, D. BLOCH, J. L. FINK, H. HANSEN, A. M. MORA-MÁRQUEZ, *History of Philosophy in Reverse*; especially chapter 3, "Medieval Attitudes to Aristotle", pp. 43-55.

[2] BOETHIUS DACUS, *Quaestiones super librum Topicorum*, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 78.19-29. This treatment of the *problema de quo neutro modo opinamur* is not included in one specific *quaestio*, but in an *excursus* between qq. 28-29. For this particular feature of Boethius' commentary, see O. WEIJERS, "The Evolution of the Trivium in University Teaching: The Example of the *Topics*", en J. VAN ENGEN (ed.), *Learning Institutionalized. Teaching in the Medieval University*, Notre Dame 2000, pp. 43-67.

which Boethius himself devoted a treatise that can arguably be labeled "dialectical" in the Aristotelian sense developed in the *Topics*[1].

A few decades later, Radulphus Brito assigns a whole *quaestio* to this particular subject (*utrum problema de quo neutro modo opinamur sit dyalecticum*). At its core, there is the standard, twofold distinction: some problems are not susceptible to analysis through probable arguments, whereas others are, although the complexity and equal force of the arguments prevents us from arriving at an opinion in favor of one of the terms of the contradiction. But Radulphus does more than just repeat the usual explanation. In his *solutio*, he introduces another distinction (*secundum quid/simpliciter*) by which to separate true dialectical problems from just apparent ones:

> Dicendum quod problema de quo neutro modo opinamur potest esse dupliciter. Uno modo propter defectum rationis ad utramque partem vel ad alteram, puta quia non habemus rationes ad utramque partem nec ad alteram, sicut est de illo utrum astra sint paria vel imparia. Alio modo potest intelligi problema de quo neutro modo opinamur quando habemus rationes verisimiles et eque difficiles ad utramque partem, et tunc propter difficultatem problematis et equalitatem rationum neutro modo opinamur de illo problemate. Tunc dico ad questionem quod problema de quo neutro modo opinamur primo modo est dyalecticum quantum ad modum querendi, tamen simpliciter non est dyalecticum. Et quod quantum ad modum querendi sit dyalecticum hoc patet, quia eodem modo est ibi modus querendi sicut in aliis. Tamen simpliciter non est dyalecticum, quia problema dyalecticum simpliciter potest terminari per rationes probabiles, sed ad illud problema de quo sic neutro modo opinamur non possumus adducere rationes nec ad unam partem nec ad aliam. Ideo etc. Sed problema secundo

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[1] The analysis of medieval commentaries on the *Topics* should in fact be complemented with further analysis of the ways in which medieval scholars applied Aristotle's rules in their dialectical disputes. A very interesting case is Nicholas of Autrecourt's *Exigit ordo*; for the importance of the *Topics* in Autrecourt's treatise, cf. C. GRELLARD, *Croire et savoir. Les principes de la connaissance selon Nicolas d'Autrécourt*, Vrin, Paris 2005, esp. pp. 93-118. The case of Boethius of Dacia is also of interest, since we have both his commentary on the *Topics* and his treatise *De aeternitate mundi*, devoted precisely to Aristotle's main example of a dialectical problem. I intend to develop this kind of twofold approach in a forthcoming paper.

> modo dictum est dyalecticum, quia illud problema est dyalecticum quod potest speculari per rationes probabiles ad utramque partem contradictionis.[1]

Radulphus states here that in both kinds of undecidable problems, those of interest to the dialectician and those that fall outside his orbit, the *modus quaerendi* is identical. Thus, problems of the latter kind (the example he uses is whether the number of stars is odd or even) are only dialectical *secundum quid*, since their *modus quaerendi* is identical with that of true dialectical problems, namely, a disjunction between both terms of a contradiction. On the other hand, a true dialectical problem, i.e. one taken in an absolute sense (*simpliciter*), is that in which the choice between the two sides of a contradiction can be solved through probable arguments. Indeed, at the very end of the passage, the term "can be solved" (*potest terminari*) is slightly changed to "can be examined" (*potest speculari*)[2], thus implying that, even if the "neutral" problem cannot be finally determined, there is however the possibility of addressing it by means of probable arguments. It is the lack of arguments, then, and not the lack of a (probable) solution, that renders a problem un-dialectical.

A similar response will be advanced a few decades later by John Buridan in his *Quaestiones Topicorum*. Although Buridan does not devote an entire *quaestio* to this issue, he offers a solution similar to

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[1] RADULPHUS BRITONIS, *Quaestiones super libros Topicorum*, I, q. 38, ms. Erfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Dep. Erf. CA. 4° 276, f.112rb.

[2] For Radulphus' use of the verb *speculari*, see S. EBBESEN, "Radulphus Brito. The Last of the Great Arts Masters. Or: Philosophy and Freedom", in J. A. AERTSEN, A. SPEER, eds., *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 27), Berlin, New York 2000, pp. 231-251: in the extracts of his *Questions on the Metaphysics* offered as appendix 2 (pp. 243-247), *speculari* is used as opposed to *operari* to identify, respectively, speculative and practical sciences. In that context, metaphysics (*philosophia prima*) is described as *maxime speculativa*, since it deals with that which is in itself knowable in the highest degree (*de maxime scibilibus et speculabilibus secundum se*). The "highest degree" granted to metaphysics, then, seems to imply that the use of *speculari* in the context of dialectics should be considered below such high standard.

Radulphus' in the answer to the objections to his q. 13, *utrum omne problema sit dialecticum*. The example of the kind of problem that should not be considered by the dialectician is the question whether a house is burning in Sicily:

> Pro secundo argumento dico, quod problema, de quo neutro modo opinamur, dicitur dupliciter: uno modo de quo neutro modo opinamur propter abundantiam rationum difficilium pro utraque parte contradictionis adductarum, sicut esset illud problema, utrum elementa maneant in mixto formaliter vel non; et tale problema, de quo neutro modo opinamur illa causa, bene est dialecticum. Aliud est problema, de quo neutro modo opinamur propter defectum rationum probabilium ad utramque partem contradictionis illius, sicut est illud, utrum ardeat aliqua domus in Sicilia; et tale non est dialecticum.[1]

Buridan describes the twofold division in terms of abundance (*abundantia*) of arguments and complete lack thereof (*defectus*). The total absence of arguments renders a problem un-dialectical, as in Radulphus. On the other hand, abundance produces a similar effect, but in this case the possibility of assessing the arguments in favor of either alternative in the contradiction, at least to assess their equivalence, makes the problem worthy of attention to the dialectician. If a dialectical problem is solved when one alternative is chosen over the other on the basis of probable arguments (and thus with the fear of the opposite being actually the case), then the abundance of arguments may result in a curious instance of Buridan's ass[2], in which equally probable arguments

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[1] JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 13, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 57.5-13.

[2] The ass, which has not been located in Buridan's oeuvre, appears as a dog in JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Expositio et quaestiones in Aristotelis De caelo*, ed. B. Patar (Louvain, 1996), pp. 149-150: *Hoc etiam est sicut dicere quod, cane esuriente multum et sitiente, ponantur cibi et potus ex utroque latere canis omnino aeque propinque et consimiliter se habentes ad canem, canis ibi morietur fame et siti, quia qua ratione iret ad unam partem, eadem ad aliam: vel ergo ibit simul ad utramque partem, quod est impossibile, vel remanebit ibi et morietur.* Following Aristotle (*De caelo*, 295b), Buridan claims that this is of course false.

are placed in front of a dialectician, who, unable to make a choice, leaves the problem unsolved.

Buridan's solution to this *quaestio* is also interesting for other reasons. First, without mentioning Radulphus' discussion of the *modus quaerendi* of a problem, Buridan separates dialectical *problemata* from those that are presented merely *sophistice*: it is possible to present a problem in which a first principle is opposed to its negation ("is it possible for something to be the case and not to be the case at the same time or not?"), but that would be a sophistical rather than a dialectical problem, since one of the alternatives is manifestly true, whereas the other cannot be defended by any probable argument[1]. On another interesting note, he also applies the vocabulary of the latitude of forms to dialectical reasoning, claiming that the trait of a dialectical conclusion is that its assent is produced *infra latitudinem certitudinis simpliciter*[2].

Although both Buridan's and Radulphus Brito's commentaries circulated widely in medieval universities[3], so did other commentaries of

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[1] JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 13, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 56.19-24: *Et talia etiam non dicuntur problemata dialectica propter hoc, quod non possunt disputari ad utramque partem contradictionis; verbi gratia sicut hoc problema, utrum contingit aliquid simul esse et non esse vel non, una pars illius problematis—contingit simul esse vel non esse—autem est ita manifestum, quod altera pars non potest probari ex probabilibus, licet bene sophistice.*

[2] JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Quaestiones Topicorum*, I, q. 13, ed. N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, p. 56.29.

[3] Radulphus' commentary is mentioned in manuals from the 15th century in Paris, Cracow and Prague, and even an anonymous commentary preserved at the Ratschul-bibliothek, Zwickau, mentions one "Radolus Britonis" in the margin when dealing with this passage of Book I of the *Topics*, although the unknown author uses the Buridanian distinction *(h)abundantia*/*defectus*; cf. ANON., *In librum Topicorum Aristotelis* I, Ms. Zwickau, Ratsschulbibliothek XXXIII I.14, f. 177ra: *Attende tertio. Duplex est problema neutrum. <Unum est> de quo neutro modo opinamur propter habundanciam rationum difficilium que pro utraque parte contradiccionis potest adduci, et tale problema est dyalecticum, quia potest speculari per rationes probabiles ad utramque partem contradiccionis, et talis problematis utraque pars contradiccionis est probabilis et cum formidine videtur omnibus vel pluribus vel sapientibus. Aliud est problema neutrum de quo neutro modo opinamur propter defectum rationum probabilem ad utramque partem contradiccionis, sicut est istud utrum astra sint paria vel non, et tale*

Parisian origin and continental projection, in which this twofold division is enriched with further distinctions. In fact, Radulphus' and Buridan's twofold division seems to envisage a dialectical problem as a unit closed in itself, rather than an ongoing process. Other commentators introduced in their analysis a dynamic dimension to the dialectical problem, as already Albert the Great had done:

> Sunt autem quaedam problemata de quibus, hoc est, ad quae contrarii sunt syllogismi, hoc est, ad contraria contendentes: dubitationem enim habent utrum sic pro parte affirmativa, vel non sic pro parte negativa se habet veritas: eo quod in utrisque partibus contradictionis rationes sunt aequaliter vel quasi aequivalenter verisimiles: et hoc jam ante ambiguum diximus proprie vocari. Est enim *putatio* interminatus motus rationis super utramque partem contradictionis. *Ambiguitas*, quando utramque partem ambit per rationes aequales. *Fides* autem, quando in unam inclinatur et illi acquiescit. *Opinio* autem ex his generatus est non stans sed tremens habitus: eo quod rationem non habet sufficientem. Talia etiam sunt problemata, de quibus (hoc est, ad quae) pro una vel altera parte propter materiae difficultatem non habemus rationem: vel forte quia in talibus exercitati non sumus, cum sint magna materiae altitudine et subtilitate: et ideo sumus arbitrantes difficile esse, sive quod difficile sit in talibus assignare quare, hoc est, causam propter quid: et oportet in talibus ex signis procedere ad disputandum, ut utrum mundus est aeternus, vel non: quia oportet scire si est factus, vel non: et in talibus causae proximae et essentiales non inveniuntur. Melius exemplum est, utrum intelligentia sit ens secundum, vel non: et utrum intelligentiae in decem sunt ordinibus, vel non: et utrum intellectus hominis est intelligentia undecimi ordinis, vel non: et talia hujusmodi.[1]

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non est dyalecticum cum non possit utraque pars eius per rationes probabiles sic terminari. Buridan's commentary was one of the most well-known throughout Central Europe in the last decades of the 14th century and the first decades of the 15th, at least until the disputes among diverse schools relegated it to those places which privileged the *via moderna*; cf. M. J. F. M. HOENEN, "*Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna* in the Fifteenth Century: Doctrinal, Institutional, and Church Political Factors in the *Wegestreit*", in R. FRIEDMAN, L. O. NIELSEN (eds.), *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory*, 1400–1700, Dordrecht, Springer, 2003, pp. 9-36; Z. KALUZA, *Les querelles doctrinales à Paris. Nominalistes et réalistes aux confins du XIVe et du XVe siècles*, Lubrina (Quodlibet 2), Bergamo 1988.

[1] ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *In I Topicorum*, ed. A. BORGNET, París 1890, III, 2, pp. 270-271.

Albert identifies various kinds of problems about which we are unable to offer an opinion, but which nonetheless pertain to the realm of dialectic. Following Aristotle, there is doubt (*dubitatio*) at the starting point. The reasons for doubting, however, are various, according to Albert: the arguments in favor of either part are of equal force; the subject is of great difficulty; perhaps those who should arrive at the solution have not enough training in the subject at hand. He offers a distinction that departs from the Aristotelian text, and which can be read as hierarchically organized in terms of an ascent towards a greater degree of certainty; from mere consideration (*putatio*), to ambiguity (*ambiguitas*)[1], then faith (*fides*) and, at the highest rank within the realm of dialectic, opinion (*opinio*).

"Neutrality", understood in this context as lack of opinion, pertains strictly to the first two: in the case of *putatio*, there is merely an inception of the movement by which the rational mind will tackle the problem (*interminatus motus rationis*), and hence no true opinion; whereas in the second stage, *ambiguitas*, the equivalence of the arguments for either part precludes the possibility of choosing one of them. *Fides* and *opinio*, on the other hand, are stages in which the problem itself is drawn to a close: in the first case, by means of an external stimulus[2]; in the second, by means of dialectical reasoning. This last

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[1] In a previous passage, Albert traces the notion of ambiguity back to Boethius' *De differentiis topicis*, cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *In I Topicorum*, ed. A. BORGNET, París 1890, III, 2, p. 269: *et dicit pugnam quam considerans intellectus habet ad utramque partem contradictionis, per aeque validas vel quasi aeque valentes rationes, quod Boetius vocat ambiguum: quia aequaliter vel quasi aequivalenter ambas amplectitur partes contradictionis.*

[2] For "external" influences that incline the spirit towards one of the terms of a dialectical problem, see Radulphus Brito's allusion to "masters and friends" in his commentary of *Top*. I.11; RADULPHUS BRITONIS, *Quaestiones super libros Topicorum*, I, q. 38, ms. Erfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Dep. Erf. CA. 4° 276, f. 112rb: *Sed est notandum quod dicitur problema de quo neutro modo opinamur quia propter rationes probabiles eque difficiles quas habemus ad utramque partem non magis credimus uni parti quam alteri. Tamen possibile est quod aliquo motu proprie voluntatis vel ratione magistrorum vel*

case, however, produces unstable knowledge (*non stans sed tremens*): there is always the possibility of the opposite being the case.

Albert's inclusion of the concept of *fides* in this discussion is worth mentioning, since medieval discussions of the epistemological status of faith borrow many arguments and distinctions related to the *Topics*. On the one hand, neither faith nor opinion can aspire to the evidence of knowledge; but the contents of faith, unlike those of opinion, are held without the fear (*formido*) of the opposite being the case. On the other hand, it seems more common to find discussions of faith and opinion in texts devoted to the former than in those dealing with the latter[1]. In other words, it is when dealing with the epistemological status of faith (for instance, in the context of *Sentences* commentaries) that theologians make use of dialectical concepts, whereas it is less frequent to find *artistae* who resort to theological distinctions. It is not surprising, then, that Albert places *fides* below *opinio*, since the context of his analysis is the discussion of Aristotle's *Topics* and not a theological debate: unlike that held by opinion, a conclusion held by faith is firm; but a dialectical conclusion, albeit probable, is arrived at by weighing opposing arguments, without any external influence.

In the last decades of the 13th century, Angelus de Camerino repeats the by now common distinction between two kinds of problems about which there is no opinion. But, like Albert the Great, he also introduces a dynamic dimension to his analysis of neutral problems:

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amicorum [cod. *aliquorum*] *aliquis magis inclinetur ad unam partem quam ad aliam*. I have changed the "aliquorum" of the Erfurt manuscript into "amicorum", which is offered by both the Leipzig (Univ. B. 1363, f. 129ra) and the Paris (Paris, BNF, lat. 11132, f. 25va) manuscripts.

[1] For medieval debates on the epistemological status of faith, see C. GRELLARD, *De la certitude volontaire. Débats nominalistes sur la foi à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Publications de La Sorbonne, Paris 2014. In many places Grellard points out how these debates, mainly from *Sentences* commentaries from the 14th and 15th centuries, make use of concepts and distinctions pertaining to dialectic; see for instance the notions of *ratio topica* and *assensus formidolosus* in John Major; cf. C. GRELLARD, *De la certitude volontaire*, pp. 120-129.

> Notandum est quod de neutro modo opinari potest intelligi dupliciter: aut quia intellectus nullam habet rationem ad aliquam partem, sed quaerit[ur] et investigat eam, vel habet ad utramque bene efficaces et equaliter, et de tali bene est dyalecticum problema. Aut dicitur neutro modo opinari quia intellectus nulli rationi innititur quia non attendit ad quod sibi presentatur, sed motui suo vel alicui passioni qua trahitur et occupatur, et de tali sic neutro modo opinato non est problema dyalecticum, quia super problema dyalecticum habere debet aliquam rationem dubitabilem vel eam quaerere.[1]

The use of the particles *aut* and *vel* indicate the different levels of Angelus' distinctions. The distinction between dialectical problems and those that are not is presented as an *aut... aut...* opposition: the intellect can consider arguments or some other passion. Dialectical problems are those that deal with (probable) arguments. But within this first distinction there is another: dialectical problems can remain unsolvable because the dialectician has no arguments for either part of a contradiction, and thus he must set out to look for them, or (*vel*) because he finds himself with arguments of equal force for both parts of a contradiction, and thus is unable to prefer one to the other. In both cases, the fact that the dialectician cannot in fact form an opinion does not mean that the problem itself precludes an opinion: there is in fact the possibility of finding an argument (probable, of course) that would eventually decide the controversy, although always with the fear of the opposite being the case. Un-dialectical, on the other hand, are those problems for which the spirit does not consider arguments, but rather "some other movement or passion".

The path of the dialectician, then, moves only from doubt to probable arguments. Hence the importance of a further distinction presented by Angelus: a problem can be either determined (*terminatum*), or undetermined (*interminatum*), with the possibility of considering the

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[1] ANGELUS DE CAMERINO, *Sentientia totius libri Topicorum*, ms. Paris, BNF lat. 16126, f. 8ra.

undetermined as "not yet determined" (*nondum terminatum*)[1]. This dynamic dimension to the notion of *problema* implies that, in Angelus' view, in order to analyze a problem one must take into account the whole process involved:

> Postquam Philosophus determinavit de propositione, in parte ista determinat de problemate, circa quod facit duo, quia primo determinat de problemate in se, secundo de quadam eius specie. (...) Circa primum tria facit, nam primo diffinit problema terminatum quod potest dici conclusio, secundo interminatum quod potest dici quaestio, et tertio recapitulat quantum ad istud capitulum (...) Notandum autem quod problema prout est interminatum dicitur a *pro* quod est procul et *blema* lucidum, quia procul a lucido, sed secundum quod terminatum est et est conclusio dicitur a *pro* quod est prope, quia prope lucidum, quia licet prout est conclusum et terminatum sit cognitum non tamen plene et perfecte respectu conclusionis demonstrationis cum sit ex probabilibus.[2]

Angelus' view is interesting for various reasons. First, he distinguishes between problems that have been solved and those that have not. The first he identifies with conclusions, the second with questions. Second, there is the curious etymology suggested for the word *problema*, in which the dynamics of the process is reflected: *problema*, in the case of problems which have not been determined, stands for *procul a lucido*, since the dialectician seems far away from the light of the solution[3].

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[1] ANGELUS DE CAMERINO, *Sententia totius libri Topicorum*, ms. Paris, BNF lat. 16126, f. 8ra: *Notandum quod licet diffinat problema terminatum seu interminatum aut nondum terminatum, non tamen diffinit propositionem sic*.

[2] ANGELUS DE CAMERINO, *Sententia totius libri Topicorum*, ms. Paris, BNF lat. 16126, f. 7va-b.

[3] This curious etymology is also mentioned by Adenulphus of Anagni in his *Notulae Topicorum* (ca. 1250); cf. ADENULPHUS DE ANAGNI, *Notulae Topicorum*, Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Conv. Soppr. A.2.2840, f. 18vb: *Nota quod problema dicitur a procul et a blema* [*problema* ms.], *quod idem est quod lucidum*. Adenulphus might have been one of the first commentators to propose this etymology, which in his case is introduced in a context where the notion of *problema* is explicitly linked with the act of vision; cf. ADENULPHUS DE ANAGNI, *Notulae Topicorum*, Firenze, BNC, Conv. Soppr. A.2.2840, f. 18va: *Sed visio problematis non est visio firma nec terminata ad alteram partem, sed debilis visio; ideo non potuit problema diffiniri per visionem*

When dealing with a problem that has been determined, however, *problema* stands for *prope lucidum*, because the dialectician has moved nearer to the light. The last remark is also of interest: no matter how far or near to the truth the dialectician is, he won't be able to reach that light in all its intensity, since, as a dialectician, he is always dealing with probable arguments.

The interest of the medieval discussion on neutral problems, then, lies in its capacity to bring forward one of the key elements already present in Aristotle's *Topics*, namely, the fact that dialectic is, more than anything else, a method or an exercise. And whereas its alleged universality does indeed have its limits (as was already seen in the previous section), it is not the outcome, but rather its use of arguments from probable premises that defines an inquiry as dialectical. The neutral problem functions as a test-case: it is the application of probable arguments in an inquiry viewed as a process that defines it as dialectical, regardless of whether or not there is an actual closure. In the following section, the analysis of diverse attempts at a taxonomy of dialectical problems will help determine whether this process is, more particularly, a

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simpliciter, sed per visionem debilem, que imponitur per hoc quod est speculatio. The etymology will reappear in the 15th century, in the very popular commentary by Johannes Versor, cf. JOHANNES VERSOR, *Quaestiones super libros Topicorum*, I, 2, ed. H. QUENTELL, Cologne 1497 (s/f): *Et dicitur problema a procul et blema, quod est lux, quasi procul a luce, quia difficile est videre veritatem illius propositionis; et dicitur problema speculatio, quia sicut res visa in speculo non videtur in sua natura sed in similitudine tantum, ita etiam res visa in problemate solum videtur et cognoscitur per sua exteriora, hoc est per habitudines locales.* Later in the same century, it will be taken up by Erasmus de Wonsidel in Leipzig; cf. ERASMUS WONSIDEL, *Exercitium totius nove logice*, I, 6, ed. J. THANNER, Leipzig 1511, f. 19vb: *Dicitur autem problema a pro quod est procul et blema visio sive lumen quasi procul a visione, eo quod dubiosum est. Sunt autem problemata duplitia. Quedam enim sunt neutra de quibus ad neutram partem possumus opinari. Et hoc vel propter arduitatem ad neutram partem habemus rationes ut est istud utrum mundus sit eternus vel non. Vel quia ad utramque partem sunt rationes eque efficaces.* For Erasmus, however, the problem of the eternity of the world falls among the ones for which there are no arguments whatsoever. Luther's critic, Johannes Eck, also mentions this etymology in his *Dialectica*, criticisig its improper use of Latin and Greek words to form a new concept; cf. JOHANNES ECK, *Dialectica. In Primum Topicorum*, q. 3, ed. J. MILLER, Augsburg 1517, f. 122rb.

scholarly dispute governed by the rigorous rules developed at medieval universities.
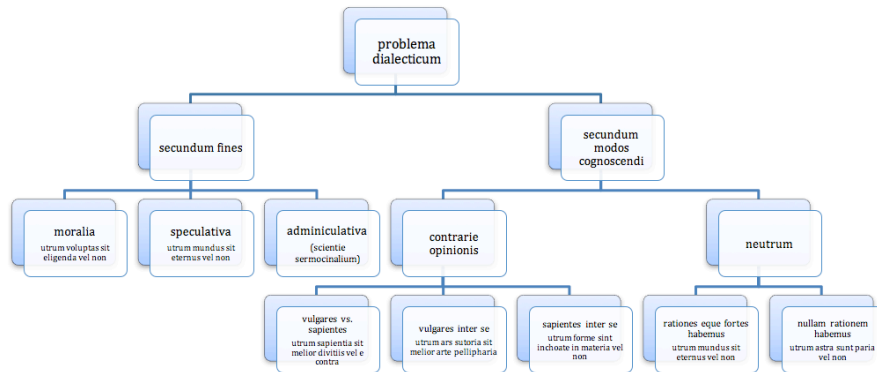
2.2. Dialectical problems: attempts at a taxonomy

In the first half of the 15th century, Johannes Versor (Jean Letourneur) composed one of the most widespread handbooks on Logic, especially popular in Paris and Cologne[1]. When commenting on *Top*. I.11, he offers a thorough explanation of Aristotle's text by offering a taxonomy of dialectical problems:

> Sciendum secundo quod problema dialecticum potest dividi dupliciter. Uno modo per respectum ad diversos fines. Alio modo secundum diversos modos quibus cognoscitur a nobis. Et dividitur primo modo sic in textu[m], quod problematum quedam ordinantur ad electionem vel fugam, ut moralia, que non queruntur propter scire tantum sed propter bene operari, ut utrum voluptas sit eligenda vel non. Alia queruntur propter scire tantum, ut naturalia et talia que sunt in scientiis speculativis realibus, ut utrum mundus sit eternus vel non. Alia sunt que non queruntur propter se tantum, sed ut sunt adminiculativa aliis, ut illa que fiunt in scientiis sermocinalibus. Sed secundo modo sumendo divisionem, problema sic in textu dividitur, quia quoddam est de quo neutro modo opinamur quod est problema neutrum. Quod fit dupliciter, vel propter hoc quia nullam habemus rationem ad aliquam partem contradictionis, ut utrum astra sunt paria vel non; vel propter hoc quod habemus rationes eque fortes ad utramque partem contradictionis, ut utrum mundus sit eternus vel non. Alia sunt problemata de quibus habentur contrarie opiniones, quod fit tripliciter. Nam quedam sunt de quibus plurimi contrariantur sapientibus, ut utrum sapientia sit melior divitiis vel econtra. Alia sunt de quibus plurimi contrariantur inter se, scilicet vulgares, ut utrum ars sutoria sit melior arte pellipharia. Alia sunt de quibus sapientes contrariantur inter se, ut utrum forme sint inchoate in materia vel non.[2]

Represented as a diagram, Versor's taxonomy looks like this:

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[1] See N. GREEN-PEDERSEN, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages*, pp. 91; 322-323; 400-401.
[2] JOHANNES VERSOR, *Quaestiones super libros Topicorum*, I, 2, ed. H. QUENTELL, Cologne 1497 (s/f).

problema dialecticum

secundum fines — secundum modos cognoscendi

secundum fines: moralia (utrum voluptas sit eligenda vel non); speculativa (utrum mundus sit eternus vel non); adminiculativa (scientie sermocinalium)

secundum modos cognoscendi: contrarie opinionis; neutrum

contrarie opinionis: vulgares vs. sapientes (utrum sapientia sit melior divitiis vel e contra); vulgares inter se (utrum ars sutoria sit melior arte pellipharia); sapientes inter se (utrum forme sint inchoate in materia vel non)

neutrum: rationes eque fortes habemus (utrum mundus sit eternus vel non); nullam rationem habemus (utrum astra sunt paria vel non)

For Versor, dialectical problems can be considered either according to their end or to their way of being known. Aristotle's description merges both, and so a distinction is needed in order to fully understand the text: according to their ends, problems can be moral, natural (or speculative in general), or instrumental. According to their way of being known, they can be either disputable or neutral. This last case can be of two kinds, a distinction already firmly established in the tradition of commentaries, as was seen in the previous section: we either have too many arguments for both terms of the contradiction, or we have none whatsoever. Those that are disputable, on the other hand, can emerge, as Aristotle states, in three different situations: a disagreement between the wise and the common people, among common people, or among the wise themselves.

Versor's attempt at a taxonomy of dialectical problems, albeit close to Aristotle's text, was not the only one suggested by medieval commentators. Roughly a century earlier, the first rector of the University of Cologne, Hartlevus de Marca, commented on *Top*. I.11 in a very different manner. His commentary on the *Topics*, which may have been composed in Heidelberg, prior to his arrival in Cologne[1], relies in

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[1] For the "migration" of masters from Heidelberg to Cologne (Hartlevus de Marca among them), see J. MIETHKE, "The University of Heidelberg and the Jews: Founding

many ways on Buridan's[1]. However, in the passage considered here, his analysis is of unusual complexity.

Hartlevus' analysis makes its first appeareance in q. 7 on book I, *utrum omne problema et omnis propositio pertineat ad considerationem dialectico*. Before offering his response, Hartlevus presents eight *notanda*. The first three restate the usual distinction between *logica utens* and *docens*, and some other observations regarding the nature of disjunctions. Starting with the fourth *notandum*, however, Hartlevus presents a very complex division of the different kinds of problems, in order to determine which ones are suited to the consideration of the dialectician:

> Quarto nota quod triplicia sunt problemata. Aliquod problema est enuntiatio propositionis per se note in veritate cum suo contradictorio disiunctive, ut utrum omne totum est magis sua parte vel non. Aliud problema est enuntiatio propositionis per se note in falsitate vel impossibilitate cum suo contradictorio, ut <utrum> homo est asinus vel non. Tertium problema est enuntiatio propositionis probabilis cum suo contradictorio, scilicet propositionis de qua intellectus est natus habere assensum cum formidine de opposito, scilicet ut utrum elementa sint mixta vel non. Quinto nota quod problema tertio modo dictum est duplex, nam aliquod est problema probabile quod tamen non potest terminari per humana considerationem, scilicet ut utrum astra sint paria vel non. Aliud est problema quod potest terminari per humanam considerationem, scilicet utrum elementa sint in mixtis vel non. Sexto nota quod problemata terminabilia consideratione humana sint triplicia. Nam aliquod est ethicum quod pertinet ad moralem, scilicet utrum parentibus et legi dissentientibus magis est obediendum parentibus. Aliud est phisicum, scilicet utrum mundus eternus vel non, et sub problemate phisico philosophus comprehendet omne problema scientie speculative, scilicet metaphisice et mathematice. Tertium <est> loicum, scilicet

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and Financing the Needs of a New University", in S. Young (ed.), *Crossing Boundaries at Medieval Universities*, Brill, Leiden 2011, pp. 317-340; J. Miethke, *Studieren an mittelalterlichen Universitäten. Chancen und Risiken*, Leiden 2004, pp. 407-452.

[1] For Hartlevus' knowledge of Buridan's work, cf. Niels J. Green-Pedersen, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages. The Commentaries on Aristotle's and Boethius' 'Topics'*, Philosophia Verlag, Munich 1984, pp. 302; 397.
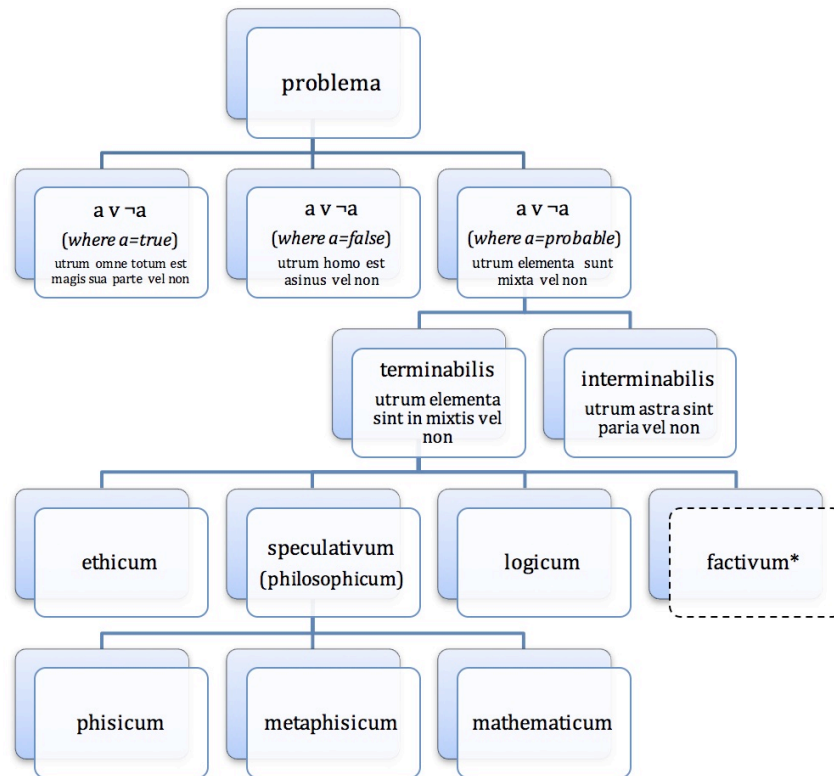
utrum contrariorum est eadem disciplina vel non. Septimo notandum quod dialecticum considerare aliquod problema intelligitur dupliciter. Uno modo tanquam considerabile propinquum; alio modo tamquam considerabile remotum. Pro quo nota quod loica considerat hoc problema tamquam considerabile propinquum cuius ipsa est probativa. Sed considerat hoc tanquam considerabile remotum quando consideratur per propositionem vel eius terminos cuius ipsa est probativa. Octavo nota quod loicam considerare aliquod problema tanquam considerabile propinquum potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo quo ad formam, scilicet quia illa propositio potest ingredi aliquam formam arguendi considerabile per loicam. Alio modo quo ad materiam, scilicet quia loica est illius problematis secundum se probativa.[1]

In q. 9, the threefold division of dialectical problems according to its subject is enriched by the addition of a fourth kind of problem dealing with mechanical arts[2]. Hartlevus' division of dialectical problems, then, can be summarized in the following diagram (merging the distinctions made in qq. 7 and 9)[3]:

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[1] HARTLEVUS DE MARCA, *Quaestiones libri Topicorum*, I, q. 7, ms. Erfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Dep. Erf. CA. 4° 270, f. 85va-b.

[2] See HARTLEVUS DE MARCA, *Quaest. lib. Top.*, I, q. 9, f. 88va: *Septimo est notandum quod quadruplex potest distingui problema nam aliquid est problema morale et hoc dicitur contendere ad electionem vel fugam quia hoc problema proponit propositionem dubiam de agibilibus humanis persequendis vel fugiendis cum suo contradictorio, scilicet utrum fortis debet pocius eligere mortem quam [ms. quod] turpiter fugere. Aliud est problema speculativum et hoc philosophus vocat primo huius problema philosophicum et hoc est contendens ad veritatem et ad scientiam, ut est problema philosophicum et mathematicum. Tertium est problema logicum, scilicet quando pertinet ad logicam docentem de quo est supra dictum, et hoc philosophus dicit esse adminiculans ad veritatem vel ad scientiam quia logica est adminiculan<s aliarum scientiarum>. Quartum est problema factivum quando spectat ad artes factivas que docent facere circa materiam exteriorem, ut sunt ars fabrilis <et> ars sutoria, et istud problema intellexit philosophus in fine diffinitionis cum dixit 'vel aliquod aliud'.*

[3] It is also worth mentioning that the seventh and eighth *notanda* of q. 7 offer another perspective, in which dialectical problems are considered not in themselves, but rather from the point of view of the dialectician: in this case, dialectical problems can be either remote or adjacent and, in this last case, it can be adjacent as regards form or matter. This would entail a different diagram, with the same problems organized in a different manner.

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                              problema

        a v ¬a            a v ¬a              a v ¬a
     (where a=true)    (where a=false)    (where a=probable)
   utrum omne totum est  utrum homo est   utrum elementa  sunt
   magis sua parte vel non  asinus vel non    mixta vel non

                              terminabilis        interminabilis
                           utrum elementa        utrum astra sint
                           sint in mixtis vel      paria vel non
                                non

     ethicum      speculativum      logicum        factivum*
                  (philosophicum)

     phisicum     metaphisicum    mathematicum
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* this fourth division, absent in q. 7, is included in q. 9

The main feature of Hartlevus' commentary on the passage seems to be his desire to find a place for any possible problem that can be presented in dialectical terms. This thorough taxonomy seems to take us back, once again, to the universality of the method proclaimed by Aristotle in the very first lines of the *Topics*. There are three categories, however, whose inclusion is strange, given the fact that they do not seem to belong to the dialectician's interest. One is the known category of undecidable problems (*interminabilia*), such as the problem of the odd or even number of stars in the sky. Hartlevus seems to consider here only those problems for which there are no probable arguments whatsoever, rather

than those that are not decided because of the abundance (*abundantia*) of arguments. The undecidability produced by an equal amount of arguments of equal strength for both terms of the contradiction doesn't seem to find its place here.

But there are two categories that are even more remarkable, and those are the very first two: the enunciation of a contradiction in which one of the parts is a proposition that is evidently true, and the enunciation of a contradiction in which one of the parts is evidently false. At first sight, both categories seem to present the exact same case, since in any contradiction expressed as a disjunction of the form "p ∨ ¬p", if one disjunct is evidently true, the other is necessarily false. Moreover, Aristotle seems to preclude the possibility of producing a problem from propositions that are not disputable (among the wise or the laymen, as we saw above), and there does not seem to be much to dispute in the examples presented here by Hartlevus, namely, "whether the whole is more than its parts or not" and "whether man is an ass or not".

However striking these formulations may sound to us, it is inevitable to think that for a medieval scholar, dialectical problems such as these may bring immediately to mind the familiar formulas of *sophismata* and *obligationes*[1]. Un-Aristotelian as this may seem at first sight, there is a reason for their inclusion in the taxonomy insofar as dialectical training is explicitly mentioned by Aristotle as one of the main uses of the *Topics*. It is true that, when compared to Versor's account, Hartlevus' complicated taxonomy seems to be less attached to the Aristotelian text, but one should bear in mind that a commentary is more than a mere gloss or exposition, especially in the case of a *quaestio*-commentary[2].

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[1] For the connection between *obligationes*, *sophismata* and the tradition of *Topics* commentaries, see M. YRJÖNSUURI, "Aristotle's *Topics* and medieval obligational disputations", *Synthese* 96 (1993), pp. 59-82.
[2] See for instance O. WEIJERS, "La structure des commentaires philosophiques à la Faculté des arts: quelques observations", in G. FIORAVANTI *et al.*, *Il commento*

Strictly speaking, then, Hartlevus is not just offering an explanation of the passage in *Topics* I.11. Rather, it can be said that Hartlevus' commentary (a) deals with a wider network of texts in which Aristotle's *Topics* is merged with its own commentary tradition as a part of a greater whole; and (b) the overall purpose of the commentary is to account for a particular discipline (in the case of the *Topics*, dialectic) and its particular context of application. In other words, Hartlevus' purpose when commenting on the *Topics* is not that of a historian attempting to describe the role of dialectic in 4th-century BC Athens when Aristotle wrote the treatise, but its role in a 14th-century university[1]. The inclusion of problems which, by their formulation, recall the practice of *sophismata* and *obligationes*, only makes sense if his attempt at a taxonomy is motivated by the kind of dialectical problems a scholar at the Arts faculty may face during his training as a dialectician rather than a mere account of the Aristotelian *littera*[2].

The commentary by Heymerico de Campo, itself a part of a larger whole, namely a commentary on the entire *Organon*, offers another example of the importance of the pragmatic dimension in the medieval tradition of *Topics* commentaries. As befits a handbook on Logic, Heymeric proceeds by offering a thorough, albeit brief, exposition of the *littera*, followed by some *notanda* and *dubia*. When dealing with *Top*. I.11, the first *notandum* is of particular interest for our purpose. First,

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filosofico nell'occidente latino (secoli XIII-XV), Brepols (Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale 10), Turnhout 2002, pp. 17-41.

[1] This of course independent of the fact that, in some respects, there are many common features between the intellectual activity in Aristotle's and in Hartlevus' times; cf. S. EBBESEN, D. BLOCH, J. L. FINK, H. HANSEN, A. M. MORA-MÁRQUEZ, *History of Philosophy in Reverse*, pp. 101-108.

[2] This is also C. Lafleur's hypothesis for the preeminence of the *Topics* and the *Sophistici elenchi* in the *Ripoll compendium*; see C. LAFLEUR, "Logic in the *Barcelona Compendium*", p. 95: "even if they were ultimately aiming at the certitude of the demonstrative syllogism, the *Artistae* had to recognise—as did Aristotle himself—the value of dialectic and the ineluctable necessity of the knowledge of sophistry *for the daily practice* of the intellectual life", italics mine.

Heymeric asks if that which is evident to all and that which is unknown to all are worthy of the kind of dialectical doubt described by Aristotle in the *Topics*. The answer, of course, is "no":

> Incidunt dubia, primum est an evidens omnibus et occultum cuilibet sunt dyalectice dubitabilia. [...] Solutio primi: non, quia problema dialeticum, ex hoc quod dyalecticum est, est dubium disputabile inter duos non similiter sue probabilitatis conscios, quia opponens dubitabilis habet evidentiorem noticiam quam respondens, alioquin frustra formaret silogismum fidei et opinionis ad respondentem, ergo si quale dubium fuerit utrique disputantium eque ignotum vel eque notum illud deficeret a forma et fine dubitationis, id est putationis diversorum quorum aliter alterum informat.[1]

Here, Heymeric places dialectical problems explicitly in the context of a scholarly dispute: not only is the dialectical doubt a dispute among two participants (*dubium disputabile inter duos*), but he openly identifies these two as *opponens* and *respondens*: in a way, a dialectical problem is an enactment or performance of doubt, in which *opponens* and *respondens* support opposing parts of a contradiction. Moreover, the situation of the scholarly dispute is by definition asymmetrical: it is not possible for *opponens* and *respondens* to be equally knowledgeable or ignorant of the same conclusion. The *opponens* has in a way the upper hand, which in turn explains why the *Topics* make a distinction between "attack" and "defense" strategies.

3. Conclusion

The cases analyzed and discussed here are only a small sample of a much greater tradition. Needless to say, one shouldn't haste to draw general conclusions based on a few examples. However, I think that the cases chosen are in fact noteworthy for several reasons. In the first place, they address a key passage in Aristotle's *Topics*, dealing with the concept of

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[1] HEYMERICO DE CAMPO, *Compendium Logicae*, ms. UB Basel, F IV 15, f. 100va.

problema. As I tried to show in the first section, *problema* is a key notion in the *Topics* (more so than other notions such as *propositio* or *positio*), in the sense that the dialectical dispute is understood as an opposition between the two poles of a contradiction, decided eventually by means of probable arguments. The dialectical problem is precisely the form under which this opposition presents itself within the realm of dialectic.

In the second place, the cases analyzed here show that, for medieval scholars, the Aristotelian description of a dialectical problem was equated (more or less explicitly, depending on the author and the type of commentary) with the scholarly dispute such as it was carried on medieval universities. Some authors, such as Angelus de Camerino, equate *problema* with the formulation of a *quaestio* beginning with the particle *utrum*. Others, such as Heymeric de Campo, explain the passage in *Top*. I.11 with reference to an *opponens* and a *respondens*. In the case of Hartlevus de Marca, his complex taxonomy of dialectical problems includes some categories that can only be explained in terms of the types of dispute known to him from the scholarly context of the university. Finally, many of the examples offered by medieval commentators when analyzing the different kinds of *problemata* are precisely the kind of issues debated both at the faculty of arts and the faculty of theology in medieval universities. The most quoted example, precisely because it is the one mentioned by Aristotle himself, is the question on the eternity of the world, but it is possible to read in the examples advanced by Albert the Great or Johannes Versor an account of the disputes held by Parisian scholars between the 13th and the 15th centuries[1].

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[1] Compare, for instance, these examples with those advanced by John of Jandun when describing the disputes within the University of Paris in his *De laudibus Parisius*; cf. JOHANNES DE JANDUNO, *Tractatus de laudibus Parisius*, in LE ROUX DE LINCY, L. M. TISSERAND (eds.), *Paris et ses historiens aux XIVe et XV siècles*, Paris 1867, pp. 38-40. See also John of Jandun's description there of dialectical disputes at the faculty of theology in terms of *intellectualia certamina* between an *opponens* and a *respondens* (*unus quidem obicit, alter solvit; unus replicat, alter refellit. Et, ut unico dicam sermone, quidquid in talium perscrutatione problematum unis manu potenti vivificare aut*

Finally, the attention paid by each commentator not only to the text commented on, but also to other commentaries allows us to speak truly of a tradition of commentaries, a collective endeavor aiming not only at the understanding of the Aristotelian text, but also, more importantly, of the subject itself, in this case dialectic[1]. In many respects, it can be said that the aim of the medieval scholars who commented on Aristotle's *Topics* was the understanding of dialectic, for which Aristotle's text offered a privileged tool, rather than the understanding of the text as an end in itself. The heuristic value of the genre of commentary is stressed when read under this perspective.

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fortificare nititur, alter brachio excelso interimere aut debilitare conatur). There is of course a trace of irony in John's description of theologians when compared to his description of the faculty of arts. For this, see G. FERNÁNDEZ WALKER, "Reasons for pleasure and the pleasures of reason: the philosophical background of John of Jandun's *De laudibus Parisius*", *Eadem Utraque Europa* 15 (2014), pp. 15-30.

[1] This approach follows in a way the notion of "conversational community" offered by H. G. Gelber and taken up by C. Grellard; see H. G. GELBER, *It could have been otherwise. Contingency and necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford*, Brill, Leiden 2004, pp. 10-19; C. GRELLARD, *De la certitude volontaire*, pp. 10-13.