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**Anonymus Cantabrigiensis. Commentarium in  
Sophisticos elenchos Aristotelis, by Sten Ebbesen (ed.)**

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*Anonymi Cantabrigiensis commentarium in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2019.

#### PROLEGOMENA

**BACKGROUND.** In hindsight, it is not surprising that the exegesis of Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* developed into one of the most substantial corpus of the Latin commentary tradition. To make a long story short, in its customary capacity as the art of arts and the science of sciences, mediaeval logic was primarily concerned with discerning the true from the false in arguments as they occur in natural, ordinary speech as opposed to the more formalised parlance later logicians will resort to. It makes perfect sense then that mediaeval logicians paid special attention to everything liable to disrupt sound reasoning thus preventing us from speaking the truth. Indeed, they were second to none and better than most at exposing and elucidating arguments' flaws and shortcomings. After all, as John Buridan – faithful to a long and illustrious tradition – aptly put it, « rooting out errors » is logic's first order of business <sup>1</sup>. As early as the 1140s, Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* provided the most fertile ground for such keen interest in fallacies ; which, in turn, explains etc.

**RELEVANCE.** This much is uncontroversial or, at any rate, can withstand any amount of scrutiny we care to throw at it. Courtesy – first and foremost – of Sten Ebbesen, whose long-standing interest in mediaeval writings on bad arguments has turned the Byzantine and Latin aftermath of Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* into well-charted territory – by all standards. As it happened, Anonymus Cantabrigiensis has played no small part in shaping this picture. As a matter of fact, time and again over the last forty years or so, quotes and insights from the anonymous work have kept showing up in Sten Ebbesen's editions and studies : since he first discovered the commentary in the late 1970s and brought it to the general attention, Sten Ebbesen has routinely drawn on the Anonymus as an early witness of the circulation of Aristotelian logical works and related texts, as a convenient illustration of major trends and distinctive features of the Latin literature on fallacies, as well as a sensible interpreter in his own right <sup>2</sup>.

#### OPUS

**READERSHIP.** Not only Anonymus Cantabrigiensis has been on Sten Ebbesen's radar from the beginning, but the commentary itself has circulated freely amongst his pupils and colleagues as early as August 2009 – it being, in all likelihood, the main if not the only reason why it took him about ten years to see it through the press <sup>3</sup>. Good things come to those who wait and all, the final result – a complete edition of the extant text (p. 53-376), preceded by a lengthy introduction (p. 9-50) and followed by an *index locorum* (p. 377-380) and an *index verborum* (p. 381-407) – is everything one can expect from a veteran editor of logical texts and a fine connoisseur of the commentary tradition.

**INTRODUCTION.** Sten Ebbesen's edition features a substantial introduction, which tackles both doctrinal and philological issues, in that order. A thorough survey of the early Latin commentaries on the *Sophistici elenchi* is conducted first. The Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' place within this tradition is discussed next. New internal and old anecdotal evidence is carefully weighed and, on account of the former being fully available for the first time, Sten Ebbesen's conclusions are quite different from those he previously reached, most notably in the pioneer essay on the origins of British logic, namely Ebbesen 1985. Anonymus Cantabrigiensis is still depicted as a conservative, old-school logician, but he is no longer hailed as a late twelfth-century Englishman having

<sup>1</sup>. « <Logica> habet enim unam partem sophisticam quae est extirpativa falsarum rationum [it belongs to logic to eradicate errors] » (*Iohannis Buridani summulae logicales*, Prooemium, 7.11-12) or so we read at the very beginning of Buridan's handbook of logic, where the elimination of false arguments provides the main ground for the commander metaphor John Buridan was fond of.

<sup>2</sup>. A perfunctory background check will have to suffice for our present purposes. In addition to contributing a number of fragments to Sten Ebbesen's "Alexander" collection (Ebbesen 1981a, III p. 145, 149, 194, 244, 246, 259 with the additional item in Ebbesen 1990, p. 115), Anonymus Cantabrigiensis figures prominently in his reconstruction of the late XIIth and early XIIIth century Latin reception of Aristotle's *Prior* and, most notably, *Posterior Analytics* (cf. respectively Ebbesen 2010, p. 99 and Ebbesen 2015, p. 17). Besides exemplifying both borrowings from traditional logical doctrine (e.g. the distinction between a syllogism's matter and its form, as recalled in Ebbesen 1981b, p. 6) and Latin innovations (like the « cause of appearance » vs the « cause of deficiency » device applied to the analysis of arguments, as expounded in Ebbesen 1987, p. 116), Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' views are studied for themselves in connection with topics as diverse as context-sensitive arguments (Ebbesen 2011), ill-formed sentences (Ebbesen 1981c, p. 95-96) and issues with Aristotle's typology of disputations (Ebbesen 2017).

<sup>3</sup>. It is only fair to mention as a matter of record that Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' is neither the first nor the only commentary Sten Ebbesen has virtually edited and generously made available to people in or with links to the Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy (Ebbesen 1991). A provisional list of these in-all-but-name editions should include at least five more items in Ebbesen 1993's catalogue, that is : Anonymus Laudianus [SE24], Anonymus Marcianus [SE45], Anonymus e Musaeo 33 [SE39], John of Felmingham [SE79] and Anonymus G&C 668 [SE83].

taught for a while somewhere between Paris and Rouen before shipping back to England with his precious library. In fact, rather than one of the forefathers of the British logical tradition – as initially suggested by Sten Ebbesen himself showcasing the OXYNAT hypothesis (where, as one may recall, « “OX” stands for Oxford, “NAT” for native, “Y” for y ») – what we are looking at now is a learned Parisian master well past his novice days who has been there and done that long enough to bring into the next century a sound knowledge of the old Paris sects and a repeated involvement in lecturing on Aristotle’s work on fallacies. Nostalgic readers might wonder whether the ancestral hero Sten Ebbesen had conjured back in the day deserved to fall into oblivion without further adieu ; be it as it may, no one will fault the portrait which has replaced it for lacking in depth and accuracy, for Sten Ebbesen paints it down to the last detail through a comprehensive assessment of Anonymus Cantabrigiensis’ familiarity with the Latin translations of the Aristotelian corpus and his late ancient and byzantine commentators (a puzzling echo of Zeno’s paradoxes against motion, as discussed in *Physics* VI 2 and 9, adds a little mystery to an otherwise conventional, albeit extensive, acquaintance with the usual sources), as well as a meticulous comparison between Anonymus Cantabrigiensis’ views, on one hand, and the positions he was cognizant with from the time he was himself a young student on (as far as scholarly allegiances go, a residual affiliation to the « nominal » school is Sten Ebbesen’s educated guess), on the other hand.

TEXT. The commentary survives in one codex only – Cambridge, St John’s College D.12 (C) – which Sten Ebbesen describes from all sides and angles (C’s history, fabric and layout, contents, etc.) relying on his own expert observation and the advice of fellow palaeographers Anne Grondeux, Dominique Poirel and Rodney Thomson. Insofar as emendation is the only way out of trouble when dealing with the oddities and flaws of a text which has been handed down in a single manuscript, Sten Ebbesen singles out confusing features of C’s handwriting, orthographic and morphological habits of C’s scribe, his proclivity to misread, omit and slip in any way, nature and extent of the textual corruptions such misgivings lead to as well as the soundness of the many and varied corrections they brought about on the fly or as an afterthought. And this is where Sten Ebbesen’s consummate craftsmanship as a specialist of Aristotelian commentaries and logical texts stands out. As a case in point, one only has to refer to the way he has dealt with one the most common and yet trickiest features of the family of texts the anonymous commentary belongs to, namely the fact that C’s text is extensively abbreviated – many abbreviations being, needless to say, virtually undistinguishable and, for the same reason, open to more than one interpretation :

« Anyone not familiar with the abbreviation system of the time may find many of my emendations implausibly far-fetched, but I have, in fact, refrained from emending if I could find no paleographically plausible path from my assumed original text to the one actually found in C » (p. 41).

As Sten Ebbesen’s maxim makes it plain, neither ingenuity nor expedience – let alone whim and imagination – should guide editors caught between the conflicting imperatives of either following a single manuscript’s readings to a fault or changing the facts of the text to fit the best sense one can squeeze out of it. Restoration (through the painstaking process of tracing back an error to its most probable cause) should be the editor’s guiding star and the « paleographically plausible path » out of the text’s conundrums what keeps him honest at every turn. Sten Ebbesen being Sten Ebbesen, the question whether he has followed his own advice is a rhetorical one, as demonstrated by a hundred footnotes where the evidence is presented and occasionally spelled out for the edification of laymen and specialists alike <sup>4</sup>.

#### AUCTOR

A GLIMPSE INTO ANONYMUS C MIND : WEIRD QUESTIONS AND ASTUTE ANSWERS. As every teacher will tell you, there are no dumb questions, only dumb answers. While being no exception, « How come that Aristotle quoted Vergil’s and Horace’s verses as examples of his fallacy of accent ? » has nonetheless an odd ring to it ... Moreover, the issue is not likely to shed much light on anything relevant or important either by itself or by proxy (except maybe for the identification of Boethius as the culprit) : after all, it is not so much the translations that advertised themselves as something else or looked mighty suspicious that got Latin commentators into any trouble worth mentioning. Still, some of them took Aristotle’s baffling knowledge of Latin poets seriously enough to challenge the authenticity of the work that confronted them with the fun fact in the first place. In the words of the early Parisian glossae, which De Rijk 1962, I, p. 83 convincingly dated around the mid-twelfth century :

<sup>4</sup>. A most typical example is 323.11, note 5 where – as Sten Ebbesen explains in the « Introduction », p. 41 – it is not so much the first honest mistake (a « q<sup>3</sup> » read as a tironian note, that is as if it were an abbreviation for « contra » rather than for « qua ») that got C into trouble, but the fix to cover the problem up (the accusative form « argumentatione-m » added to match the « contra »). This prompted Sten Ebbesen’s emendation « *si praesumpserit*, i.e. *si noverit qua argumentatione debeat uti interrogans* » of the transmitted text « *si praesumpserit*, i.e. *si noverit contra argumentationem debeat uti interrogans* ».

[T01] *Anonymi glosae in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, I, 326.1-4 : « notandum est quod quidam ob hoc dicunt quod Aristotelem non fecisse Elenchos, quia non exempla graecorum, sed latinorum in Elenchis apposuit. Nam si ipse Elenchos fecisset, graecorum exempla praetenderet [note that, for this reason, some claim that Aristotle did not write the *Elenchi*, for Latin examples are offered here rather than Greek ones. Now, if Aristotle had written the *Elenchi* himself, he would have relied on Greek examples] ».

It goes without saying that the suspicion had no sooner been voiced than the author made short work of it :

[T02] *Anonymi glosae in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, I, 326.4-8 : « sed dicimus ipsos mentiri, quia Boethius, qui hoc opus de graeco in latino transtulit, exempla latinorum, et non graecorum, dedit, ideo scilicet quia, veluti voces apud Latinos et Graecos sunt diversae, sic et ipsarum accidentia, id est accentus quibus ipsae voces modulantur [but we maintain that they are wrong, for it was Boethius, who translated the book from Greek into Latin, that used Latin examples instead of Greek ones and he did so because just as Latin words are different from Greek ones, their features are different as well, as in this instance the accents through which words are spoken in verse and measure] ».

The explanation soon became the standard story, as attested time and again :

[T03] *Anonymi parisiensis compendium sophisticorum elenchorum*, 84.23-28 : « orationum autem in quibus secundum accentum est causa deceptionis duo exempla ab Aristotele ponuntur, unum Horatii, alterum Vergilii. Unde quidam sunt qui coniectant hoc opus non esse Aristotelis, cum illi multo tempore posteriores fuissent illo tempore. Quibus dicendum est quod Latinus interpres necessitate coactus est, vel obscuritate Graecorum vel difficultate, ponere Latina exempla [Aristotle gives two examples of sentences where the deception arises because of the accent : the first example is from Horace, the second from Vergil. For this reason, some have speculated that the work is not by Aristotle, insofar as Horace and Vergil lived long after Aristotle's time. We have to retort that the Latin translator was forced to turn to Latin examples either because of the obscurity of the Greek examples themselves or because of their complexity] ».

[T04] *Anonymi Aurelianensis I commentarium in sophisticos elenchos*, 123.26-33 : « propter haec exempla non videtur liber iste compositus ab Aristotele, nam primum exemplum ab Horatio, secundum scriptum est a Vergilio, quorum uterque posterior fuit Aristotele. De primo dici potest exemplo quoniam non sumptum est a Vergilio, sed ab Homero quem imitatur Vergilius in opere suo; sed non hoc de exemplo secundo dici potest; dicendum ergo est quod ideo Latina ponit exempla quia Graeca de verbo translata non idem ostenderent [because of these examples, it seems that the work is not Aristotle's. In fact, the first example is from Horace, whereas Vergil authored the second one and both lived after Aristotle. Concerning Vergil's example, one may argue that it is not his but Homer's, whom he copied in his works. The same cannot be said of the other example ; therefore one has to acknowledge that <the translator> settled for a Latin example because a literal translation of the Greek one would not have been an illustration of the same <fallacy>] ».

[T05] *Anonymi SF quaestiones super Sophisticos Elenchos*, quaestio 73, 168.20-21 : « exempla quae in hoc libro ponuntur non sunt Aristotelis, sed sunt Vergilii et Horatii, et posita sunt a translatoribus [the examples in the book are not Aristotle's but Vergil's and Horace's. It was the translators that put them there] ».

[T06] *Aegidii romani expositio super libros elenchorum*, 14rb 5-7 : « exempla hic posita ut communiter dicitur non sunt Aristotelis sed translator ea posuit. Quod ideo fecit, quia exempla forte posita ab Aristotele non errant convenientia nostrae linguae [as it is commonly acknowledged, those examples are not Aristotle's but they were put forward by the translator. And he did so because as they stand Aristotle's examples do not present at all the same problem in our tongue] ».

What of Anonymus C ? what did he have to say about Vergil's and Horace's verses occurring as tokens of fallacies of accent even though – as forcefully pointed out in [T03] and [T04] – neither were around at the time Aristotle wrote the *Sophistical Refutations* ?

[T07] *Anonymi Cantabrigiensis commentarium in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, 146.16-24 : « ex hiis exemplis a Latinis sumptis volunt quidam convincere hunc librum <non> ab Aristotele Graeco compositum esse. Sed forsitan Latini nostri Graecos imitantes multa dicta a Graecis in Latinum sermonem transtulerunt, unde non est mirum si in Vergilio et Horatio inveniantur aliqui versus in Latinum translati et in Graecis <sup>†</sup>uno<sup>†</sup> ab Aristotele positi. Vel potest verisimilius dici quod translator huius operis commoda nostrae doctrinae a nostris auctoribus sumpsit exempla, forsitan enim exempla ab Aristotele posita si transferrentur ambiguitatem non reciperent [because these examples have been borrowed from Latin authors, some want to persuade us that Aristotle did not write this book in Greek. Though, it may be that our Latin authors, who were imitators of the Greek, translated into Latin a lot of what these happened to say. As a result, it is not surprising that one come across in Vergil and Horace some verses used by Aristotle and translated into Latin. Alternatively, and more plausibly, it may be held that the translator of Aristotle's work picked up from our authors a few convenient examples illustrating our matter. In fact, it may well be that, if translated, Aristotle's examples lose their ambiguity] ».

While there is probably no way around the crux « <sup>†</sup>uno<sup>†</sup> » in 146.20 – reading « im<m>o » instead of « uno » would not help us much anyway) ; on account of [T03]'s « coniectant », one just might be tempted to favour « conicere » over « convincere » (and accept Sten Ebbesen's alternative emendation instead, that is « conicere »). Be that as it may, the overall meaning of Anonymus C's solution is clear either way : besides stating the obvious (« vel potest verisimilius dici quod etc. »), he got a bit inventive and, along with the right explanation, he came up with the brilliant suggestion ([T04] had done only half the job and got the Vergil Homeric appropriation wrong) that there is nothing wrong to begin with ! Insofar as « Latini nostri » often borrowed from their Greek predecessors, it would not come as a surprise that the disputed examples are the same because the same verses have simply been picked up twice. Se non è vero, è molto ben trovato.

## EPILEGOMENA.

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE OF FALLACIES STUDIES. Bad arguments have never been in short supply. The scholarly interest they have elicited in recent years, on the other hand, is quite exceptional. Fallacies studies have become a well established and flourishing field of argumentation theory (“critical thinking” being one of the umbrella labels under which the subject is often advertised). That being said, with so few exceptions as to make little or no difference, the ever-growing number of papers, book-chapters, book-length studies, reviews special issues and even handbooks on the matter – which are easily counted by the hundreds – suffer from a peculiar lack of interest in Mediaeval theory and practice of argumentation which is – arguably – the most creative stage in the whole history of fallacy theories. The standard story is that after Aristotle got it off to a great start, the discipline became dormant until Richard Whately first and John Stuart Mill soon afterwards revived it in spectacular fashion<sup>5</sup>. This picture, of course, is misleading and deserves to be dismissed or, better still, replaced with a new narrative which brings to bear the full resources of mediaeval treatment of fallacies, possibly across more than one mediaeval tradition.

Sten Ebbesen’s reliable edition and in-depth study of Anonymus C’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Sophistici elenchi* are a giant leap in the right direction. Others will likely follow in his footsteps. Should their work turn out to be even only half as good as his, then we are in for a major turnaround in a field which could certainly use one right now.

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<sup>5</sup>. The Aristotle through either Richard Whately or John Stuart Mill gap’s narrative requires little comment here. A few antiquarians go back a little further and are particularly fond – and rightly so – of Locke’s naming inventiveness (cf., e.g., Mura 2010) and Port Royal’s distinction between « scientific » and « everyday » fallacies (cf., e.g., Dufour 2019), but their innocence of premodern literature remains intact – as J. Woods has most egregiously demonstrated : « put bluntly, there is no deep theory of fallacious inference to be found in Aristotle. Although over the centuries fallacies have remained part of the project of logic, this lack of theoretical depth has persisted, albeit with some rare exceptions. Although there was much logical sophistication in the Middle Ages, mediaeval logicians made comparatively little headway with the fallacies. John Locke (1690), etc. » (Woods 2010, p. 164).

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