

Logic Pedagogy in the Middle Ages, or Why Were the Medievals Teaching Their Students Logic?

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XXVth ESMLS, Nunspeet, NL,
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A caveat!

- Work in progress!
- ... had hoped to be a lot further on that I actually am...

The originating question (1)

What can we learn about the pedagogy of logic
in the Middle Ages from reading textbooks?

The originating question (2)

- ① ... from reading *logic* textbooks?
- ② ... from reading *other* textbooks?

Where this question came from

- Logic textbooks: All the “it should be noted that. . .” or “some might say. . .” examples, which, while sometimes directed at other authors, often hint at classroom interactions
- Other textbooks: The widespread use of obligational vocabulary outside of treatises on *obligationes* or even on logic.

Why I am interested in this question

- Not much work on modern logic pedagogy — a big gap!
- Is there anything from medieval logic pedagogy that we can learn to fill this gap?

Previous work on the pedagogy of medieval logic (1)

Julie Brumberg-Chaumont has done a lot of work recently that emphasises what she calls the “logicized practices of knowledge” that developed in the 13th century through the widespread teaching of logic at and before university-level:

- “The Rise of Logical Skills and the Thirteenth-Century Origins of the ‘Logical Man’,” *Logical Skills*, Springer 2021.
- “Disputational Practices of Science During the Thirteenth Century,” *Revisiting Medieval Dialectics*, Springer 2025.

Previous work on the pedagogy of medieval logic (2)

And Alex Novikoff has emphasised the importance of disputations in medieval pedagogy:

- “Toward a Cultural History of Scholastic Disputation,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (2012).

There is also work that charts who and what was taught where and when.

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But the question of what we can learn about *how* logic was taught from looking at textbooks is still one that has not been much pursued.

The experience of writing a logic textbook for teaching logic

- Identify key terms/concepts.
- Define them.
- Give examples of them.
- Put them into application/practice.

Simple! Clear! Elegant!

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This is both my own experience, and also a structure we can see in many medieval textbooks.

When things go wrong. . .

- No textbook survives contact with the classroom.
- Students misunderstand things in remarkably varied and complicated ways!
- Textbooks are revised to respond to those misunderstandings.
- Definitions are tweaked, new examples are given, side digressions are made.

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Not so clear, more complex, kinda clunky.

Let's look at some examples

- “It should be noted that,” “we should note,” “I note,” etc.
- “You might ask. . . I reply.”

“It should be noted that” / *Et notandum quod*

- *Why* should we note this?
- A signal that what follows is addressing some type of objection:
 - ▶ Sometimes an objection from another philosopher/logician/view,
 - ▶ sometimes an objection from a student?

Examples: Marsilius of Inghen's *Properties of Terms* (1)

- “It should be noted that a term is said to stand disjunctively when in the term there is descent to all its *supposita* by way of a disjunctive proposition” (p. 57, Bos’s edition and trans.)
- “It should be noted that, when defining material supposition, as in all other definitions, I have always said ‘of which thing, or things, is verified through the copula of the proposition’” (p. 61).

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- “It should be noted that, when defining material supposition, as in all other definitions, I have always said ‘of which thing, or things, is verified through the copula of the proposition’” (p. 61). **Used as a means of introducing three *dubia* concerning the definition.**

Examples: Marsilius of Inghen's *Properties of Terms* (2)

- “It should be noted that, when a term stands for some thing, it is not necessary for the term to be verified in the same case as the thing, but it is verified in the nominative case by means of the pronoun indicating the thing” (p. 61)

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- “It should be noted that, when a term stands for some thing, it is not necessary for the term to be verified in the same case as the thing, but it is verified in the nominative case by means of the pronoun indicating the thing” (p. 61) **Forestalling a potential objection?**

Examples: John Dumbleton, *Summa Logica*

- “It should be noted that a term signifies in two ways, viz in a complex or simple way” (2.1)
- “It should be noted that we grasp a proposition in two ways. First, not hvaing towards it an act of doubting or of believing or of being uncertain, but only grasping it insofar as it signifies in a certain way. . . In the second way, we understand complexes insofar as things are or are not” (18.1.2)

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Introducing disambiguation.

Examples: Ralph Strode's *Treatise on Consequences*

- “It is to be noted, however, that not everything possible can be true in its exact signification. For something is possible which is not consistently true signifying only as it does primarily, such as these propositions: ‘No proposition exists’, or ‘no proposition is negative’; or ‘no proposition is categorical, or universal’” (1.2.16)

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Used to highlight edge cases that students might not be aware of.

Examples: Jean Buridan's *Treatise on Suppositions* (1)

- “We should also note that when the distributive sign is put at the beginning of a proposition, it can be distinguished with respect to composition and division” (p. 249, Klima trans.).
- “Note also that supposition is not called ‘personal’ because it is for persons, nor is it called ‘material’ because it is for matter. . . but this is how logicians have become accustomed to use these names, and this they were allowed to do, for names are significant *ad placitum*” (p. 253).

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Examples: Jean Buridan's *Treatise on Suppositions* (2)

- “Note also that if the proposition is hypothetical, then a negation occurring in the first categorical has no effect on the second categorical, unless it is prefixed to the whole proposition, so that it is understood to impinge upon the whole hypothetical. . . but then there arises a query. . .” (p. 270). **Highlighting an important point in order to forestall objections.**

“Some might ask. . .” / “And if you ask. . . I reply. . .”

- *Why* should we note this?
- A signal that what follows is addressing some type of objection:
 - ▶ Sometimes an objection from another philosopher/logician/view,
 - ▶ sometimes an objection from a student?

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- “I say that this syllogism is valid: ‘Every horse a man is seeing; the horse of the king is a horse; therefore the horse of the king a man is seeing’. And **if you ask**: ‘What is the subject of the major premise?’, **I reply** that the word ‘man’ here is the subject, and the predicate is ‘seeing [a] horse’... Therefore **I note that** according to grammar it is sometimes permitted that the predicate is placed before the subject” (Klima trans., p. 245).

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Responding to student query by providing extra context.

Examples: Jean Buridan's *Treatise on Suppositions* (2)

- “We should also note that some might ask whether it is the composite or the divided sense that is properly expressed by ‘Every man or (a) donkey runs’, that is to say, whether the only the term ‘man’ or the whole subject is distributed. And I say that we have to respond differently, in accordance with different manners of speaking and writing. For if immediately after ‘man’ there is a sign of division, namely, a pause or a period, then the proposition will be called divided, and only ‘man’ will be distributed, but if not, then it will be called ‘composite,’ and the whole subject will be distributed” (p. 250).

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Combining both techniques!

Concluding thoughts

- Other places to look:
 - ▶ Non-logical, non-philosophical textbooks (law, medicine, etc.)
 - ▶ *Exercitia* genre!

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 - ▶ Non-logical, non-philosophical textbooks (law, medicine, etc.)
 - ▶ *Exercitia* genre!
- Is this actually a useful exercise? Is it interesting?
- If we look at non-logical but philosophical textbooks, will we learn anything more than “they used obligational terminology and disputational techniques”?