
From Wit to Shit: Notes for an “Emotional” Lexicon of Sophistry during the Renaissance

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Abstract: From the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, authors of neo-Latin literature developed an ever-increasing catalogue of disparaging terms aimed at their perceived rivals, the ancient and contemporary sophists. This extensive vocabulary was deployed against the sophists’ perceived attempts to confuse their listeners, misguide their interlocutors, and corrupt classical learning. This vocabulary ranged from philosophical jargon, to straightforward critiques, to directly derogatory sobriquets. In these pages, I seek to tease out the origin, evolution, and adscription of these terms. In addition, I argue that the study of this lexicon can shed light on the role played by sophistries in the culture of disputation, conversation, and intellectual exchange during the Renaissance. Finally, I will clarify some issues related to the evolution of Latin during the sixteenth century.

Keywords: history of communication, history of education, history of derogatory language, humanist latin, humanist-scholastic debate, abusive remarks.

To Roland Béhar

Introduction¹

After the first confrontations of classicists with scholastic philosophers and theologians² at the end of the fourteenth century, humanists never stopped collecting labels from classical and Christian tradition, or coining new ones, to caricaturize scholasticism. Far too frequently, this vocabulary has been read as a manifestation of the humanists’ interest in stressing the gap between themselves and the predominant culture in cathedral schools and universities through the display of their command of Latin and their wit. This view, based upon the fact that such terms were basically abusive remarks, has left aside questions such as how a humanist selected and disseminated certain phrases, labels, and epithets, how they were approved and used by his peers, and under what circumstances they endured. Furthermore, once one of these labels was incorporated into their vocabulary, humanists took it for granted that their fellows could grasp its nuances without further clarification. Because of this, Renaissance scholars, as well as editors and translators of early modern texts, have been commonly misled by such terms; and, contrary to the general understanding, they should be considered more than a mere cabinet of lexical curiosities and their study far from trivial.

Before outlining the history and evolution of some of these words, I need to give one definition and explain two

limitations with regard to my approach. As for the definition, the “emotional” in the title stresses that I do not intend to explore how Renaissance humanists dealt with classical and medieval *insolubilia* and obligations, late-medieval speculative grammar, classifications of arguments, issues of scholastic logic, theology, and so on; but rather, that I aim to appraise how these authors created and developed an ever-increasing lexicon of derogatory labels to refer to scholasticism as a form of sophistry, and how these terms acquired new overtones through their relationship to each other and their signifieds. “Emotional” also alludes to a particular quality of this vocabulary: namely, that it was shaped with the intention of being precise with regard to which aspects of scholasticism it wanted to deride, but, at the same time, was never intended to provide a philosophical criticism of scholasticism as such. Finally, “emotional” denotes the historical evolution of this vocabulary, as anger, verbal violence, and coarseness eventually replaced both elegance and wit.

In line with the general topic of this issue of *Philosophical Readings*, I have limited my exploration of these terms to those which exploited the identification between scholasticism and sophistry. As a second limitation, imposed by the amount of material that must be considered for such a task, and by the fact that the following pages represent a research in progress, I have provided a cursory set of problems which correspond to the main sections below: “What is a sophist?”, “How to fight and defeat a hydra”, “Scholastic disputation *redux*: The *logotheca* of verbal duels”, “The *logothecae* of *minutiae scholasticae*”, and “Sophistry as shit”.

1. What is a sophist?

As researchers on late-medieval education have explained,³ around the middle of the thirteenth century two new concepts, *quaestionista* and *sophista*, started to be used at the University of Oxford with a very precise meaning that went far beyond the traditional attribution of the terms. They were rooted in *quaestio* and *sophisma*, two common terms in cathedral schools and universities across Europe, where they referred to the stages in students’ education and masters’ careers and to the specific roles students and masters were expected to perform within the university.

The Latin origin and evolution of each term is nonetheless quite different. *Quaestio*, on the one hand, already referred to instruction in classical antiquity, and it kept

this meaning during the middle ages until around the twelfth century. At that point, it started to acquire a more refined connotation that included, in the first place, the *lectio*—that is, a master reading and commenting on a text—and, secondly, a direct inquiry addressed to the student concerning exacting passages. This inquiry could only be answered positively and negatively, through the proposition (*propositio*) of arguments *pro et contra*, to find a solution (*determinatio*) to the problems (*dubia*) posed by the master. As this procedure became common in schools and universities, these conundrums, which had their origin in the reading and exposition of particular authoritative texts, were soon gathered into collections of *quaestiones*. As the popularity of such collections increased, the discussion of these puzzling questions increasingly came to replace the *lectio* in classes for advanced students. The collections evolved into several subgenres, among them the *quaestio disputata*—a record of a given disputation or a treatise written following the mode of the *quaestio* itself—widely used in faculties of arts, law, medicine and theology, and the *quodlibeta* (Hamesse 17–48).

Sophisma, on the other hand, did not enjoy such a long tradition as a Latin educational term. Only after its inclusion in medieval instruction did it partially shake off the negative connotations it had carried from classical antiquity onwards.⁴ In medieval universities, *sophismata* referred to statements with twofold implications found in readings of the curriculum. These statements led to discussions on general or abstract issues of grammar, logic, natural philosophy, law, and eventually theology, based on other readings also included in the curriculum. The student was not only expected to have a good knowledge of assigned readings, but also to demonstrate his command of logical reasoning and debate. Like *quaestio*, once transformed into a technical concept *sophisma* evolved to refer either to the statement itself or to the conjunction of the statement and its subsequent discussion. Soon, *sophismata* were gathered into collections and, like *quaestiones*, came to constitute a literary genre (Spade).

By the late thirteenth century, *sophismata* had become one of the premises of the medieval curriculum, from its first steps to the baccalaureate. From the fourteenth century onwards, *sophismata* also became public disputations in which different schools competed: bachelors played the roles of respondents and opponents, and the masters were present as a jury. But the role of *quaestiones* and *sophismata* did not end there. To become *baccalaureus* and then *doctoratus* required proof of the mastery of both techniques. At the University of Paris, this assessment was composed of three long, exacting, and complex exams called *vesperiae*, *aula*, and *resumpta* or *resumptiva*, to which *tentativa* and *magisterium* were eventually added.⁵ These exams were part of the curriculum until certain reforms were made to the course of studies from the sixteenth century onwards. This system was adopted, although with differences, in late-medieval universities all across Europe and lived on during the Renaissance.⁶

Given the complex and excursive nature of these curricula, it is not difficult for a scholar of the Renaissance to find attacks made by humanists against this highly technical approach to disputation, with its exceedingly strict norms and the disregard for the elegance of Latin by mas-

ters and students alike.⁷ However, not all humanists shared a negative opinion of these practices. For instance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who had the chance to attend the *vesperie* of Johannes Laillier, celebrated at the Sorbonne between July 1485 and March 1486, extolled them as follows in his so-called *Oratio de hominis dignitate* [1486]:⁸

Primum quidem ad eos, qui hunc publice disputandi morem calumniantur, multa non sum dicturus, quando haec culpa, si culpa censetur, non solum vobis omnibus, doctores excellentissimi, qui sepius hoc munere non sine summa et laude et gloria functi estis, sed Platonis, sed Aristoteli, sed probatissimis omnium etatum philosophis mecum est communis. Quibus erat certissimum nihil ad consequendam quam querebant veritatis cognitionem sibi esse potius, quam ut essent in disputandi exercitatione frequentissimi. *Sicut enim per gymnasticam corporis vires firmiores fiunt, ita dubio procul in hac quasi litteraria palestra animi vires et fortiores longe et vegetiores evadunt.*

First, to those who slander this practice of disputing publicly, I am not going to say much, except that this crime, if they judge it a crime, is the joint work not only of all you very excellent doctors—who have often discharged this office not without very great praise and glory—but also of Plato and Aristotle and the most upright philosophers of every age, together with me. To them it was most certain that they had nothing better for reaching the knowledge of the truth which they sought than that they be very often in the exercise of disputing. *As through gymnastics the forces of the body are strengthened, so doubtless in this, as it were, literary gymnasium, the forces of the soul become much stronger and more vigorous.*

Over against Pico's intellectual *vigorexia*; we find the derogatory position, predominant among Renaissance humanists. In 1506, twenty years after the *Oratio*, Erasmus himself fled from Paris partly to avoid taking these exams; and yet twenty years later he remembered the practice very well, as is clear from the following statement taken from his *De utilitate colloquiorum* (1526):⁹

Huiusmodi permulta grammaticuli discutunt ex meis colloquiis, quibus sic obmurmurant isti. Sed indecorum est theologum iocari. Saltem hoc mihi concedant apud pueros, quod ipsi permittunt sibi viri apud viros in *vesperiis*, vt vocant rem insulsam insulso vocabulo.

Beginners learn many things of this sort from my *Colloquies*, about which these fellows mutter so. "But for a theologian to crack jokes is unseemly". At least they should grant me the right to do with boys what they, grown men, permit themselves publicly during "*Vespers*"—insipid name for an insipid thing.

It is in fact not far from reality to view Erasmus's defense of the *Colloquia* against their banning by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne as a confrontation between two different ways of understanding education, conversation, dialogue, and dialectics.

2. How to fight and defeat a hydra

As I have already mentioned, however, Erasmus was not, by any means, the first to oppose the medieval academic curriculum and the practice of disputation that it propagated. In *The Sophistic Renaissance*, Eric MacPhail col-

lected a number of passages from the works of Petrarch that are quite illustrative for understanding one of the first opinions on “modern sophistry” made by a fourteenth-century classicist. However, I shall follow a different path here and call attention to this well-known excerpt from Plato’s *Euthydemus* (297c–d):¹⁰

You are running away, Socrates, said Dionysodorus; you refuse to answer./ Yes, and with good reason, I said: for I am weaker than either one of you, so I have no scruple about running away from the two together. You see, I am sadly inferior to Hercules, who was no match for the hydra—that she-professor who was so clever that she sent forth many leads of debate in place of each one that was cut off; nor for another sort of crab-professor from the sea—freshly, I fancy, arrived on shore: and, when the hero was so bothered with its leftward barks and bites, he summoned his nephew Iolaus to the rescue, and he brought him effective relief.

This passage is of interest insofar as it was unknown until the late fifteenth century. In fact, Socrates’s comparison of Euthydemus with the Hydra of Lerna survived—before Ficino recovered and translated Plato’s *Dialogues*—thanks to St. Jerome’s translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicon*,¹¹ where it was found in turn by Giovanni Boccaccio, who made the following comment in the *Genealogies of the Pagan Gods* [ante 1375]:¹²

Eusebius autem in libro temporum de hac Hydra aliter sentire Platonem dicit, quem ait asserere Hydram callidissimum fuisse *Sophistam*, nam *Sophistarum* mos est, nisi quis auertat, adeo *propositiones* suas tradere, ut uno *soluto dubio* multa consurgant. Sed astutus philosophus dimissis *accessoriis* ad *internitionem principalis* conatur, quo remoto, caetera remouentur.

In the *Chronicon*, Eusebius states that Plato had a different interpretation of this Hydra. Plato affirms, he says, that the Hydra is a most skillful *sophist*, as *sophists* are accustomed—unless someone brings them into light—to say their *propositions* in such a way that once a *doubt* is *solved*, many more arise. But the wary philosopher, putting aside *subsidiary* issues, seeks to destroy the *main proposition*, so once it is removed, so are the rest.

This brief second-hand mention and the elaboration made by Boccaccio are enlightening. It is evident from the words he chooses for providing a Euhemeristic interpretation of Socrates’s comparison—and it could not have been otherwise—that the *sophista* he has in mind is the one bred in the art of the *quaestiones* and *sophismata*. Both this brief mention and its contents would be enriched soon.

Only eight years after the death of Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati had already begun one of his most ambitious works, *De laboribus Herculis* (1383–1391). In the ninth chapter of the third book, Salutati provides a much more extensive interpretation of Socrates’s Hydra, partly drawn from medieval sources,¹³ introducing three important ways of looking at the acceptance of “sophist” within a new intellectual paradigm—that of the humanists—and marking a clear difference over against the succinct treatment by Boccaccio. Salutati first approaches the fundamental opposition between the philosopher and the sophist, which, as can be inferred, has nothing to do with Plato’s *Euthydemus*, but rather with the defense of a new art of disputation that is clearly opposed to the culture of

medieval schools and universities. From this point of view, Salutati contrasts his reckoning of education as based on the recovery and study of the classics with the technical scholastic view related to the creation of experts through verbal confrontation.

The second aspect of Salutati’s approach is the distinction between logic, grounded in reasoning, and sophistry, built upon arguments that hide fallacies. The third is the establishment of an art of disputation which contrasts a technical approach to the defense and legitimization of certain ideas with an ethical inclination which includes, paradoxically, the classical definition of rhetoric on the one hand, and the definition of ethics on the other.

Because Boccaccio and Salutati lacked the sources that would have been required for a correct interpretation of what Socrates meant by “sophists”, they were able to establish a fortunate parallel with contemporary affairs and to use the authority of Plato, the master of Aristotle, to attack scholasticism. This interpretation instituted a tradition which identified scholastic sophistries and sophists with the Hydra of Lerna and which would become much richer during the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Furthermore, when Plato’s works began to be exhumed, epitomized, and translated into Latin, this association of sophist and Hydra was not simply discarded in favor of more historically accurate understandings.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Marsilio Ficino—who knew Plato’s works and the deeds of Plato’s sophists extremely well—wrote the following passage in a letter dated 15 September 1489 and entitled *A defense treating medicine, astrology and the life of the cosmos, and also the Magi who greeted the new-born Christ*,¹⁶ calling his circle to defend the publication of his *De vita libri tres* (1480–1489):

Tu vero, Guicciardine, carissime compater, ito nunc, ito alacer, Politianum Herculem accersito. Hercules quondam ubi periculosos certandum foret, vocitabat Iolaum. Tu nunc similiter Herculem. Nosti profecto quot barbara monstra Latium iam devastantia Politianus Hercules invaserit, laceraverit, interemerit; quam acriter expugnet passim, quam tuto propugnet. Hic ergo vel centum hydrae capita nostris liberis minitania statim contundet clava, flammisque comburet.

But you, Guicciardini, dearest comrade, go now, go swiftly, fetch Poliziano, our Hercules. Long ago, when there was to be a particularly dangerous fight, Hercules used to call out for Iolaus; you must now likewise call out for Hercules. You know only too well how many barbarous monsters Poliziano, our Hercules, has attacked, battered and destroyed: monsters ravaging Latium. You know how fiercely he fights on all sides, how sure is his defense. Therefore, he will immediately pound with his club and burn up in flames even the hundred heads of the Hydra which are now threatening our children.

Here, Poliziano is represented as Hercules—a sobriquet as adored by Ficino as it was disliked by Angelo¹⁷—that is, as the champion of the *politiores sive humaniores litterae* against an ever-increasing number of sophists who constantly threatened to spoil the aims and destroy the fruits of the new erudition.

The influence of these allegorical and mythological interpretations of the Hydra, as the monster of mystifying sophistry who had to be defeated in order to impose a new model of learning—a model that would erase the dark

middle ages and pave the way for a new golden age—was not constrained to Italy or humanists. This powerful image spread widely, employed at the beginning of the Reformation not only by Luther himself (from 1509 onwards),¹⁸ but also in H. Eobanus Hessus's representation of Reuchlin as Hercules¹⁹ and in his attacks against Edward Lee,²⁰ and even by Reuchlin himself in his letters to Hermann von Neuenahr the elder.²¹ It appeared also in the widely popular image of Luther as the “Hercules Germanicus”, destined to slash the many-headed monster of the Catholic Hydra.²² The Hydra was deployed to such an extent that Andrea Alciato's words in his *Epistula*—a *declamatio*, in reality—*contra vitam monasticam* (c. 1517–1518),²³ addressed to Bernardus Mattius, a fellow humanist who entered the Franciscan order, seem more than fair some ten years after the comparison became widespread:

Cum enim divinus ille Plato sophisten quendam fuisse Hydram prodidit, vaticinabatur credo et unum aliquem vestrum animo volutabat, cum quo quisquam de suo dogmate disputare ausit. Quotquot argumenta referes, rursus pullulant et mille syllogismis fortiores insurgunt.

For when divine Plato declared, as someone dared to dispute with him about his doctrine, that a certain sophist was a hydra, he was prophesying, I believe, and had in mind one of your people. However many arguments you put, they multiply theirs in return and rise up stronger again with a thousand syllogisms.

3. Sophistry *redux*: the *logotheca* of verbal duels

As the hydra of “new sophistry” had many heads, the war against the “new sophists” had to be fought on several fronts and by diverse methods: the institutions of *studia humanitatis* and academies, the (literary) foundation of a new way of intellectual exchange, new models to approach texts critically, the display of formidable erudition, and the rapid and insistent deployment of this erudition to reveal the lack of accuracy in scholastic Latin or to demolish its philosophical assumptions and methods. But, instead of appraising the brawls, acrimonious confrontations, and decisive exchanges of blows in the cultural, political, and religious arenas, I will focus on the trench warfare, where humanists used *Latinitas* to build up a substantial “arsenal” against scholasticism.

Three ideas should be stressed with regards to the supplies of this arsenal. First, the incorporation of new terms was grounded on the identification of scholastic philosophy as sophistry, which allowed humanists to draw these terms from a wide variety of sources, usually written for purposes other than those of the humanists. Second, the incorporation of new terms, more than simply demonstrating erudition, provided precise concepts with which to attack every purportedly negative aspect of scholasticism. Third, these terms, besides being weapons against scholasticism, were most fundamentally tools intended for domestic consumption, so to speak; as such, they served as feedback of humanists' core ideas on communication, and reinforced their sensibility as classicists. To stress the fact that the re-collection and coinage of these terms went beyond antiquarian accumulation and

was backed up by an idea of order, I have borrowed from Guillaume Budé the term *logotheca*²⁴ to refer to them. Moreover, to introduce this extensive archive of terms succinctly, I have divided the “emotional” labelling of sophistry into three different yet complementary and permeable *logothecae*: one directed at the scholastic practice of disputation as such, another at the qualification of scholastic *sophistae*, and yet another at the labelling of scholastic arguments.

The first group is important because it paves the way for appraising the other two. With terms such as *altercationes*, *argutiae*, *austultationes* [*sic.*], *blateramenta*, *caedes*, *convicia*, *contentiones*, *dedalogiae*, *digladiationes*, *kainophontai*, *lites*, *logomachiai*, *logodaedaliae*, *mataeologiae*, *nauciae*, *nugae*, *pugnae* (*rusticanae*, *verborum*, etc.), *pugillatus*, *rationes* (*logicales*, *metaphysicales*, etc.), *rixae*, *seditiones verborum*, or *tolutiloquentiae*, among many others, humanists stressed three essential aspects of the new sophistry and the disputations held in her name: their violence, their dogmatism, and their irrelevance.²⁵ However, things are not as simple as they may seem.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Ledo), these concepts were not perfectly equivalent; rather, they presented a subtle hierarchy that had the virtue of helping an educated reader reconstruct not just their ramifications for general issues but also the relationships among them. Thus, reading *contentio*—a crucial term for the history of communication thanks to its inclusion in the medieval systems of the sins of the tongue and its leading role in late-medieval and Renaissance ethics of language—a humanist was able to reassemble a full genealogy of the values of communication defended by classical learning—*sapientia*, *sodalitas*, *pluralitas*, and *civilitas*—as opposed to medieval instruction and disquisition, characterized, from their point of view, by its *insipientia*, *superbia*, and *mendacitas*.²⁶

Logomachia, by way of example, was “recovered” by Erasmus from St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (1:4, 2:8, 6:4) and explained in many places, as in *De copia*,²⁷ *Explanatio symboli Apostolorum*,²⁸ and *Ciceronianus*.²⁹ But undoubtedly this Hellenism made its entry in the *logotheca* of sophistic contentiousness thanks to its debut in the following passage of the *Praise of Folly*:³⁰

Nec enim adduci possum, vt credam Paulum, e cuius vnus eruditione licet omneis aestimare, toties damnatum fuisse *quaestiones*, *disceptationes*, *genealogias*, et (vt ipse vocat) *λογομαχίας*, si eas percullisset *argutias*, praesertim cum onnes illius temporis *contentiones pugnaeque rusticanae* fuerint et crassae, si cum magistrorum nostrorum plusquam Chryssippeis *subtilitatibus* conferantur.

Nothing will make me believe that Paul, from whose learning we may judge all the other apostles, would so often have condemned *questions*, *arguments*, *genealogies*, and what he himself called “*battles of words*” if he had been well up in those *niceties*, especially when all the *controversies* and *disagreements* of that time would have been clumsy and unsophisticated affairs in comparison with the more than Chrysippean *subtleties* of the schoolmen of today.

This passage appears in Erasmus's *Folly* just after three extensive lists of sophisticated technicalities, *quaestiones*, and sects, delineating the fields of action for the detrac-

tion of sophistic scholasticism and clearly showing Erasmus’s procedure in providing a fair number of equivalent terms. But what interests us here is that, in bringing back *logomachíai*—the original Pauline term in Greek, which St. Jerome rendered as *contentiones*—Erasmus was not providing a Greek equivalent to a Latin word, but rather expressing where the battle against sophistry was about to be fought—in the study of the three sacred languages, in a new translation of the New Testament, etc.³¹—comparing the confrontation between humanism and scholasticism to the Pauline endeavor to disseminate the evangelical message in its purity against Jewish sects, pseudo-Christians, and mystifiers.

Besides its ability to produce this set of equivalences in an educated reader, the *logotheca* of verbal duels expanded in two more directions. In the first place, as I have said, it established connections with the other two *logothecae* (which insisted on the dogmatism of scholastic explorations and their irrelevance, as we will see below). These links were at times established by simple morphological variations (*nuga*, *nugator*; *logodaedalia*, *logodaedalus*; etc.), but at other times by the creation and expansion of a whole conceptual field (*nuga*: *deliramentum*, *ineptia*, *inquinamentum*, *naucus*, *latratus*, *peripsemata*, *sterquilinium*, etc.). Secondly, the speed with which new terms were able to be incorporated into these *logothecae* raises the question of how this was done; and although the inclusion of a candidate in a blockbuster such as the *Praise of Folly* would not exactly hurt, the key for the success of a new term was its ability both to add something which was lacking in the *logotheca* (as we have seen with *logomachíai*) and to relate with its peers.

This procedure can be seen over and over again. Pauline *kenophóniai* or *kainophóniai*, another concept included in this *logotheca* (although secondary and with very reduced circulation), was presented in Erasmus’s *Annotations on 1 Timothy 6–20*.³² His commentary on this passage not only provides a translation of *κενοφωνίαί* to Latin, but it does so by accompanying it with a whole set of terms which will be related to it both in the *logotheca* of verbal confrontations and in that of *minutiae scholasticae*. Examples abound. Take, for instance, this formulation from the *Colloquiorum formulae* (1518) as applied to Scotists: “All right, he shall be admitted, as long as he leaves at home his sophisticated monsters, his nonsense, sycophancies, arrogance, virulence, sardonic grin, Thrasonical boasts, and self-love”.³³ As a matter of fact, the new labels for the scholastic disputations and controversies became a genre in themselves, going well beyond Erasmus and extending to the practices of the faculties of arts, law, medicine, and theology and their respective professions. A final example can be found in connection with the study and practice of law in Cornelius Agrippa’s *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1531)³⁴:

Quibus tum ad hoc ipsum adsunt procuratores et notarii, quos vocant, tabelliones, quorum injurias et damna, et nequitas et falsifica, omnes patienter ferre oportet, cum omnium fidem et licentiam, ac potestatem apostolica et imperiale autoritate se obtinuisse videntur. Atque inter hos illi sunt praecipui qui norint forum egregie perturbare, miscere lites, confundere causas, supponere testamenta, instrumenta, rescripta, diplomata, tum egregie fallere, decipere et ubi opus est pejerare et falsum

scribere. *Omnia audere*, et construendis *dolis, fraudibus, technis, calumniis, laqueis, captiunculis, insidiis, tricis, ambagibus, circumventionibus, Scyllis et Charibdis* se a nullo vinci patientur.

Among these public notaries are to be reckon’d, whose injuries, falsities, and mischiefs continually by them wrought, all are bound to endure, while they pretend to have their credit, license, and authority from the Apostolike and Imperial power. Among whom they are to be accounted the chiefest, who know best how to trouble the court, perplex causes, counterfeit wills and deeds, to abuse and deceive their clyents, and, if need be, to forswear themselves, venturing at any roguery, rather than be outdone in plotting and contriving cheats, scandals, quirks, tricks, quillets, treacheries, Scylla’s and Charybdis, by any other person whatsoever.

4. The *logothecae* of *minutiae scholasticae*

Together with the derisive terms employed to refer to the medieval and contemporary practice of disputation held in universities (and to scholastic disputation in general), humanists’ re-collection, coinage, and use of labels to express their contempt for old-fashioned grammar teachers, to scorn scholastic sophists, and to attack the arguments and the techniques employed in their disputations soon conformed to two more complementary *logothecae*.

In the attacks on scholastic teachers and philosophers, sometimes irony sufficed. The titles employed in the schools and universities of the time usually included a pinch—sometimes a handful—of scorn, following a tradition started around the middle of the twelfth century. For instance, one of the more popular titles assigned to doctors in theology, *magister noster*, was already employed with irony by Peter Abelard against his master, William of Champeaux,³⁵ and it continued to be used from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century to stress that, as a matter of fact, these *magistri nostri* did not master any discipline at all.³⁶ Other titles employed in the universities of the time, such as *baccalaureatus*, *licenciatus*, *magister*, *doctor* (used most often when accompanied by *angelicus*, *seraphicus*, etc., to refer to authorities) and common designations such as *summulista*, *logicus*, *physicus*, *intrante*,³⁷ *modista*, *logista*, *quaestionista*, *calculator*, *glossator*, *legista*, and *canonista* were used scornfully as well, not only to censure the pride behind these titles and as an attack against what they represented with regard to the institutionalization of philosophy and theology, but also because they were considered to be unclassical barbarisms, coined in a period when the European classical tradition and heritage were lost in darkness.³⁸ The same motivations lay behind the attacks *ad hominem* of the surnames of scholastic philosophers.³⁹ Even such common terms as *dialectica* and *dialecticus* could become derisive when employed by humanists such as Lorenzo Valla.⁴⁰

When irony did not suffice to stress the divide between the cultural, educational, and philosophical traditions of the new sophists and those of the humanists, there were a number of procedures that reinforced it—for instance, contrasts such as *grammatista/grammaticus*;⁴¹ *argutor*, *disputator*, *logiculus*,⁴² *logista*, *nebulus*,⁴³ *occamicus*, *occamista*, *occanista*, *φιλόνεικος*, *philoscotus*,⁴⁴ *pseudodialecticus*, *sc(h)olasticulus*, *sophicaster*, *sortista*

(or *sortistus*)⁴⁵/ *logicus* and *dialecticus*; *morologus*,⁴⁶ *mosorosophus*,⁴⁷ *philomorus*,⁴⁸ *philobarbarus*/ *philosophus*; or *aristotelicotatos*, *magisterculus*, *sententionarius*, *Sorbonicus*, *Sorbonista*, *theologaster*, *theologastrus*, *theologista* *theologus*⁴⁹—but also with characterizations of teachers of grammar, sophists, and philosophers taken from the classical tradition. In this last instance, wrath and pride, common to the first *logotheca*, were depicted and taken to the extreme. But to follow them, I am afraid, would divert us from our main topic.

For the third *logotheca*, which interests us more here, humanists collected and created from c. 1400 to c. 1530 an outstanding set of terms to refer to the arguments employed by scholastic philosophy and to their mnemonic formulas.⁵⁰ The census of the set of terms grew as a result of two main complementary procedures. On the one side, humanists gathered references to ancient dilemmas, fallacies, and paradoxes from classical sources⁵¹ with the aim of linking them to the logical arguments taught in the schools and universities of their time. For instance, in a renowned passage of the *Praise of Folly*⁵²—“and I’ll demonstrate (*docebo*) it, not by the Crocodile’s Syllogism (*crocodrilitis*), or the Heap (*soritis*), or the Horns (*ceratinis*), or any other dialectical subtlety of that kind; no, with what is called sound common sense”—Erasmus mentions terms already explained in classical authorities⁵³ and brought together in Poliziano’s *Miscellanea*.⁵⁴ However, Folly’s allusion cannot be understood as a mere erudite exhumation and repetition of classical *loci*; it needed to be connected with the instruction in logic of her own time. Therefore, there is no doubt that she is bearing in mind the tradition of *insolubilia* in the context of obligational disputations here, a connection that can be easily established once Melanchthon’s treatment of *coacervationes* in his *Compendiaria dialectices ratio* (c. 1520), or Vives’s treatment of *insolubilia*,⁵⁵ is taken into account.⁵⁶ The contrast between the somehow aseptic approach to *sorites* in Lorenzo Valla’s *Retractatio*⁵⁷ and the bitter attack against scholastic sophistries made by late fourteenth- to sixteenth-century scholars—either humanists, like Elio Antonio de Nebrija,⁵⁸ or non-humanists, like Jean Gerson⁵⁹—only makes the antithesis between the emotional or derogatory use of the term and the technical use more clear.⁶⁰ The ludic role played by these terms, most probably motivated by the educated Renaissance reader’s familiarity with them, is evident not only when we observe how humanists played with some of these concepts, but also when we move forward in time and find that Thomas Wilson offers in *The Rule of Reason* (1551) a collection of examples of *crocodilites*, *antistrephon*, *ceratinae*, *asistaton*, *cacosistaton*, *utis*, and *pseudomenos* “to delute the reader”.⁶¹

Besides commenting on classical dilemmas, and in order to provide points of comparison between themselves and scholastic logic, humanists also enlarged the *logotheca* of arguments and reasoning by adapting classical and post-classical vocabulary to add nuances to their attacks. The terms they chose sometimes amplified a traditional acceptance when this was originally very precise; or, conversely, the original terms were transformed into precise terms to attack a certain aspect of sophistry, notwithstanding their more general meaning in classical and post-classical Latin. Such a catalogue would include *ar-*

gutia, *argutiola*, *calculatio*, *captiuncula*, *cavilla*, *cavillatio*, *cautela*, *centaurus*, *chimera*, *commentitia*, *conclusiuncula*, *decipula*, *deliramentum*, *ignavia*, *importunitas*, (*sui[s]setica*) *inania*,⁶² *ineptia*, *ineptiola*, *inextricabilia*, *insania*, *inventiuncula*, *involutrum*, *labyrinthus*, *labyrinthiplexia*, *laqueus*, *latebra*, *logodaedalia*, *lucubrationuncula*, *naenia*, *pedica*, *praestigia* (or *praestygia*), *quisquilia*, *quaestiuncula*, *ratiuncula*, *retia* (us. in plural, *argumentorum*, *argutiarum*, etc.), *spina*, *sphinx*, *superstitio*, *techna*, *tela* *Vulcani*, *tendicula*, *thrasonismus*, *trica*, *trivium*, *vaframentum*, *verborum perplexitas*, and *versutiloquentia*, to mention just a few, but I will concentrate here on *captiuncula*, which will serve as an apt example of how this vocabulary acquired new acceptations.

Captiuncula, as a diminutive of *captio*, appears, as far as I know, only twice in classical Latin: once in Cicero’s *Letters to Atticus* XV. 6 to refer to the political and legal traps suffered by Servius, and again in Aulus Gellius’s *Attic Nights* XVI. II. 8: “Quid autem legis istius propugnatores in illa *captiuncula* facient, in qua haerere eos necessum est, si nihil amplius quam quod interrogati erunt responderint?” where *captiuncula* was translated by Rolfe in his edition for the Loeb Classical Library as “(false) dilemma”. This value of the diminutive, constrained to the perverse exploitation of law and legal procedures, had, as one would expect, an impact on the Latin of fifteenth-century humanists, as for instance in a passage of Cristoforo Landino’s *De vera nobilitate* ([1469–1470] c. 1487),⁶³ wherein he employs it to refer to the practice of lawyers changing a jury’s understanding of a given fact. Consequently, although the term was correctly translated as “fallacies” by Albert Rabil in the following passage, part of the meaning was inevitably lost:

Sin vero tam valida arma, tam humano generi salutaria in bonorum innocentiumque virorum pertinitem convertet, atque avaritia ductus disciplinam suam, operam ac linguam venalem habebit, si mercede victus omnia invertet, si astutia, calliditate, dolo malo, *captiunculis* malitiosisque interpretationibus nigerrima quaeque in candidiora vertere conabitur.

If, on the other hand, he changes such powerful weapons—things so advantageous to the human race—into the ruin of the good and the innocent and, led by avarice, puts up for sale his teaching, work, and language; if, overcome by desire for gain, he turns everything on his head and with adroitness, artifice, and evil deceit attempts to change the blackest things into the whitest by *fallacies* and crafty interpretations...

This was not the only acceptance of *captiuncula* for Landino, however, as he uses it in the *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (c. 1474) to refer to the uses of scholastic philosophy;⁶⁴ so it would be useful to ask ourselves when exactly it came to refer to philosophical sophistry. An answer can only be provisional: the first instances I have found in the Quattrocento with this meaning are Lorenzo Valla’s *Repastinatio* (1447–1455),⁶⁵ the *Encomium of St Thomas* (1457),⁶⁶ and Leon Battista Alberti’s *Momus* (1450).⁶⁷ So, it would be possible to affirm that around the middle of the fifteenth century *captiuncula* had been incorporated into the vocabulary of the humanists to deride “sophistic” arguments. But the process of transformation of *captiuncula* does not end there. Just a decade later, the term appears with a new acceptance which hints at

the relation of *captiuncula* with *captio*. At the same time, this new acceptance is in line with medieval use, that is, to designate the quasi-magical power of sophistry to catch the attention and mystify the listener, as happens in Giovanni Pontano’s *Charon* (c. 1469).⁶⁸ This idea is also reflected in Marsilio Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* or *De amore* (1469),⁶⁹ wherein after presenting the lemma *incantator fascinatoreque, potens, veneficus atque sophista*, he writes the following passage:

Sophistam Plato in *Sophiste* dialogo ambitiosum et subdolum definit disputatorem, qui *captiuncularum* versutiis falsum pro vero nobis ostendit cogitque eos qui secum disputant sibimet in sermonibus contradicite.

A sophist Plato defines, in the dialogue [the *Sophists*], as an ambitious and crafty debater who, by the subtleties of *sophistries*, shows us the false for the true, and forces those who dispute with him to contradict themselves in their speeches.

Interestingly enough, in later works both Pontano and Ficino abandoned this reference to magic, and used *captiuncula* according to its new acceptance as “sophistical” tricks, or a more general “deception”.⁷⁰ Therefore, we can affirm that at the end of the fifteenth century, *captiuncula* was used as a part of the vocabulary that referred to scholastic “sophistries”.⁷¹ Antonio de Ferrariis uses the term to mark a clear distinction between two kinds of philosophy,⁷² one focused on disputation and linguistic tricks (*captiunculae*), the other on the Stoic tradition, which teaches that forgetting both material things and passions leads to a good and a happy life—the term is related therefore to the concept of philosophical *persona* which Christopher Celenza (2014, 149–150) discussed in a recent essay. Interestingly, the passage is also a reformulation of Salutati’s *De laboribus Herculis*:

Salutati	De Ferrariis
Huic igitur, sicut oportet, intentus reprehendit duos esse disputandi modos, unum veris et existentibus rationibus, alium sophisticis et apparentibus, ut, nisi discatur uterque, aut haberi philosophia nequeat aut inventa nullo modo defendi.	Pater illi optimus philosophus fuit et medicus, qui in illum simul cum anima philosophiam quoque infudit, non eam quae in <i>captiunculis</i> disputationibusque, sed quae in bene beateque vivendo versatur et in contemnendis humanis rebus, hoc est, in coercendis affectibus.
Therefore, the one who attends in a fitting way to this perceives that there are two manners of debating, one with true and manifest reasons, the other with sophistical and apparent ones, so that, unless he learns both, either he will not be able to acquire philosophy or else, having found it, there will be no way to defend it.	That one’s father was a most excellent philosopher and physician, who also infused philosophy into him together with the soul; not that philosophy which meditates on logical quirks and disputations, but that which meditates on good and fulfilled living, and on despising human matters, that is, on controlling the affections.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, most humanists would have agreed that *captiuncula* in its classical meaning had been displaced by its value as a technical term—a technical jibe, if you wish—to refer to the arguments used in scholastic disputation and, more precisely, to its practice in universities.⁷³ So extensive was this updated use that Agostino Nifo felt the need to include a new term in the *logotheca* devoted to sophists: *captiunculator*.⁷⁴

5. Scholastic sophists and sophistries as shit

To do justice to the title of this article, and to the process of degradation of scholastic sophistry in the *logothecae* of the humanists, these pages that opened upon the thirteenth century, when *quaestiones* and *sophismata* were considered wit, need now to be closed with these practices’ eventual comparison to excretion and, more particularly, to excrement, which happens to be much more frequent than expected.

Although there are comparisons of scholastic logic with dirt, rubbish, and even dunghills as early as the twelfth century,⁷⁵ it was only between the 1510s and 1530s that humanists developed freely into this commonplace. Several factors explain this. In the first place, humanism’s achievements had become widespread thanks to the popularity of some of its representatives, the role of the printing press in disseminating the materials they created, and the clear impact of classical learning in the curricula of many universities across Europe. Secondly, even though scholasticism was far from exhausted in higher education, students arrived at colleges with a body of knowledge much nearer to the *litterae humaniores* than that of previous generations, especially outside Italy; moreover, traditional bastions of scholasticism such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris had modified—or were close to modifying—their curricula, and humanists were appointed as teachers and tutors on a regular basis. It seems feasible that these changes led to a hastening decline in the ability to identify the nuances of the *logothecae* created and developed by scholars who were, if not dead, at least in their forties or fifties. Thirdly, when wit descends to scatology, it is probably a good sign that the possibilities of playing with and elaborating on an idea have come to an end.

From this point of view, it will not come as a surprise that Erasmus, following in the steps of Petrarch⁷⁶ and Bartholomaeus Coloniensis⁷⁷ (among many others), was one of the most active contributors to the *logothecae* of scholastic mystifications, nor that he played with comparing (sophistic) scholasticism to rot, excrement, and so forth from time to time—a game which soon attracted the attention of a considerable number of followers, imitators,⁷⁸ and “emulators”.⁷⁹ A well-known example is his use in the *Parabola* of the analogy of rotten food, sprouting from rotten brains,⁸⁰ when speaking of the literature of the Scotists⁸¹:

Vt cibi male olentes non videntur male olere his qui ederint, ita *spurcae Scotistarum* et *Sophistarum litterae* cum alios melioribus imbutos literis vehementer offendant ac nauseam moveant, eos qui *nugas* istiusmodi imbiberunt, nihil offendunt, imo bellae videntur et elegantes.

Food which smells unpleasant seems to have no smell to those who have eaten it. The *filthy literature* of *Scotists* and *sophisters* is like that: it gives great offence to others, who have had a more liberal education, and makes them feel sick, but to men soaked in that sort of *rubbish* it gives no offence and even seems to show neatness and elegance.

It was Erasmus also who provided, when vividly describing his life in the Collège de Montaigu, the link between university life and dirt. In 1532, the comparison of medieval textbooks and glosses with excrement had become widespread, as can be seen in this passage on Accursius's glosses to the *Pandectas* in Rabelais's *Pantagruel*:⁸²

Ainsi vint à Bourges où estudia bien long temps et profitta beacoup en la faculté des loix. Et disoit aulcunes fois que les livres des loix luy sembloient une belle robbe d'or, triumpante et précieuse à merveilles, qui feust brodée de merde: "Car (disoit il) au monde n'y a livres tant beaulx, tant aornés, tant élégans comme sont les textes des Pandectes: mais la broderie d'iceulx, c'est assavoir la glose de Accurse, est tant salle, tan infâme et punaise, que ce n'est que ordure et villenie".

So he came to Bourges, where he studied quite a long time, and learned a lot in the law school; and sometimes he used to say that the law books seemed to him a beautiful golden gown that was bordered with shit. "For", he said, "there are no books in the world so beautiful, so ornate, so elegant, as are the texts of the Pandects; but their border, to wit, the gloss by Accursius, is so foul, unspeakable, and smelly, that it's nothing but sewage and sludge".

Around two decades later, in a wonderful passage from his *Hieroglyphica* (1556),⁸³ Piero Valeriano animates his explanation of *nugae* and *cavillae* with the following image of a sophist as a pig romping in its own excrement:

Et ut, quod initio dicere coeperamus, prosequamur, sacerdotes illi cum nihil aeque abhorrent quam inanes sophistarum nugae et cavillosas verborum argutias argumentorumque decipulas in naturae viribus indagandis, eiusmodi notae hominem per suis hieroglyphicum significabant. Eodem intellectu apud Hebraeos suillam abstinere praeceptum ait Philo, admonitosque nos ea divina lege ut sophistas evitarem, per evitabilem huiusmodi animalis impuritatem. Illi enim acutissimis tantum acuratissimisque rerum distinctionibus, quod per bifidam animalis unguam interpretantur, quasi luto inhaesitantes, ita illis adhaerescunt, ut inde nunquam avelli possint, sed ad extremam usque senectutem ibidem computrescunt, nam et porci nihil illustre, nihil purum, nihil limpidum amant, sed turbida tantum spissa et sordida et faeculenta sectantur, inque his praecipuam statuunt voluptatem.

And to go ahead with what we started to say at the beginning: because there was nothing more abhorrent to those priests than the empty trivialities of sophists, quibbling nimbleness of words, and logical traps when investigating the forces of nature, they indicated this type of man by means of the hieroglyphic of a pig. Philo affirms that the commandment among the Hebrews to abstain from swine-flesh was understood in the same way; and that, by this divine law, through the avoidable impurity of such an animal we are admonished to avoid sophists. For they, by their so sharply pointed and highly elaborate distinctions about things, which they explain by means of a cloven-hoofed animal, are as it were caked in mud, and they stick to those things so much that later they can never scrape it off, but stink of it all the way to extreme old age. For pigs also love nothing bright, nothing clean, nothing transparent, but run after only what is muddy,

thick, foul, and mucky, and their principal pleasure is in these things.

6. Conclusion

With some highly valuable exceptions,⁸⁴ the history of verbal violence, derision, and contempt during the Renaissance as yet lacks a study which accounts for how this vocabulary was inspired, learned, and driven. From the starting point of a simple image—the identification of sophistry with the Hydra of Lerna—and its reinterpretation in the fourteenth century, I have sought to explain schematically the dramatic multiplication of derogatory terms against scholastic sophistry during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Poetic images aside, my hypothesis can be summarized in three main points.

First, the thriving of this vocabulary cannot be explained by increasing tensions between scholasticism and humanism—a less-than-accurate historiographical commonplace—but was in line, rather, with the evolution, maturity, and partial decadence of the Latin of the humanists. With this in mind, we ought to be able to identify discrete patterns of linguistic evolution in which this word-stock was able to prosper. In pursuit of such a pattern, I have borrowed from Guillaume Budé the concept of the *logotheca*, which allowed me to explain two complementary facts. First, I showed that in the evolution of this vocabulary, the survival and eventual success of a new term depended upon its relations with its likely peers. This was most often done through the new term's inclusion in lists of correlatives and through the exemplification its unique contribution to that list.

Secondly, for clarity's sake and due to the volume of terms considered, I have approached this vocabulary by sorting it out in three separate yet permeable *logothecae*: (1) terms that highlighted the opposition between the communicative and intellectual aims of humanism and those of scholasticism, (2) terms that referred to the agents and guardians of scholastic sophistries, and (3) terms that referred contemptuously to the arguments and "tricks" employed in scholastic debate.

In addition, given the permanent need to find new and effective derogatory terms and the fact that Latin was an artificial language in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I have outlined the predictable consequences of carrying this process to an extreme. In this spirit, I have chosen to close my exposition with two complementary expressions of contempt: humanists' attacks *ad hominem* against scholastic thinkers and the comparison of scholastic sophistry with shit. It was certainly not by chance that Europe's doctrinal schism and the shift from creative derision to an outbreak of coarseness went hand in hand. My aim in these pages has been to offer an alternative to scholarly accounts explaining the trajectories of this early modern vocabulary with recourse to political or intergroup animosities between humanists and scholastics. Instead, we ought to examine closely (and indeed at greater length) the institutional and formal characteristics that drove the evolution of these derisive repertoires "from within."

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Folly (MacPhail 2006, 73), can be traced back at least to a known expression by Coluccio Salutati: “moderni sophiste”, *Epistolario* III. 15. A Roberto Guidi conte di Battifolle (Salutati 1891, 179). On Salutati’s passage, see the comments by Ullman, 85, Lawn, 107–108, and Fubini, 18.

³ The first part of this section is a synthesis of Fletcher 1967, 417–454; Becker, 23–25; Weijers 1987, 180–182 and 1988, 44–45; Fletcher 1988, 50; Lawn, 39–65; Maierù, 100–103 and 121–141, esp. 130–134; Weijers 2002, 79–80; Teeuwen s. v., 120–121; and Périgot, 25 and 102–107.

⁴ For the attacks on *sophismata* and *sophistae* from the twelfth century onwards, see Lawn, 101–126, esp. 104–107.

⁵ Koch, 160–168; Farge, 26–28; Weijers 1987, 407–424; Teeuwen, 315–317; and Weijers 2009, 49, 87–92, 196–198, 247, 249 and 253.

⁶ Schwinges, 232–234; Müller, 343–345; Grendler, 152–157, 174–175, 175n106, 283–285, 298–299, 308, 318, 358, and 384–385; Davies, 119–128; etc.

⁷ Garin’s essay, “Per una cultura nuova: la polemica contro i ‘Barbari’” (Garin 1969, 137–177), still offers a balanced approach to the problem. See also his “I filosofi italiani del Quattrocento”, Garin 2009, 156.

⁸ Pico della Mirandola, 1965, 19 and 2014, 76. Further examples of humanists—mainly Salutati and Vergerio—praising the medieval system of disputation in Gilbert, 206–208 and 217–218.

⁹ Erasmus, ASD I. 3: 751; CWE 40: 1108.

¹⁰ Plato, 469, 471.

¹¹ Eusebius, 91: “Hercules consummat certamina, Antheum interficit, Ilium uastat. Dicitur autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solum palaestrae artis certaminum quae in terra exercentur scientissimus erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuuari. *Hydrum autem callidissimum fuisse sofistriam adserit Plato*” (“Hercules finishes his labors, slays Antaeus, devastates Ilium. Antaeus, however, is said to be the son of the earth, because he was most versed in the art of wrestling in single matches that are staged on the earth, and on that account was seen to be aided by the earth as his mother. *But Plato asserts that a Hydra was (just) a most cunning sophistry*”), my italics. It should be noted that Jerome himself identifies heresies with the Hydra several times: *Contra Vigilantium* I. 355 (Jerome of Strido 2009, 400); *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* III. 1. 119 (Jerome of Strido 2008, 202); *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem prophetam libri XIV*. Prologus and book VI (Jerome of Strido 2005, 4 and 374); and *Commentariorum in Michaeam prophetam* II. [Praef.] (Jerome of Strido 2000, 840). According to Isidore of Seville (246), this comparison started with Ambrose of Milan’s *De fide* I. 4. On the fortune of this comparison between the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries, see Girardi 399–400.

¹² G. Boccaccio (1532, 326 and 1951, II, 640), *Genealogiae deorum gentium libri XIII*.1.

¹³ Boethius (2005, 121), *Consolatio Philosophiae* IV. Prose 6. 3; Bernardus Silvestris VI [287–288], 69; and Wheatley IV. 10, attributed to Thomas Aquinas during the middle ages.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Cristoforo Landino, *De vera nobilitate* [1469–1470, c. 1487] 1970, 110; Rabil, 257: “[...] sed si in altum et ad divina eleuetur, tunc illarum amore raptis animis nostris funditus perit omnis terrenarum rerum libido. Neque vos cancrum, qui pedem Herculis aduersus hydram validissime pugnantis mordicus apprehendit, ullo modo contemnatis. *Est enim animi torpor cancer, qui magno persaepe viros doctrinam per hydram, id enim est per dialecticas subtilissimas inquisitiones inquirientes saepe defatigat*; sed illum vir magno animo et qui nullo labore succumbat, calce terit, idest perseverantia exsuperat” (“But if our minds are lifted up on high to divine things and seized by the love of those things, all desire for earthly things completely perishes. You should not in any way scorn the crab who, with his teeth, seizes the foot of Hercules while he is fighting fiercely against the Hydra. *The crab is sluggishness of mind, which very often wearies great people seeking learning through the Hydra*, that is, *searching through the most subtle dialectics*; but one with a great mind who does not give way under any labor grinds him under his heel, that is, overcomes through perseverance”); Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses* [c. 1474] 1980b, 235; Bartolomeo Sacchi, *De falso et vero bono* [ante 1480] 1999, 25 and 111; Niccolò Perotti, *Cornu copia* [1478, princeps 1489] 1994, I. V. 61, 89: “Plato *Hydrum acutissimam sofistriam scribit fuisse*, cuius mos erat cauillari et quaestiones ita proponere, ut uno soluto dubio multa renascerentur. Ego inde datum huic fabulae locum existimo, quid anguim genus, sub quo hydra continetur, omnium fertilissimum sit, et nisi incendiis semina exurerentur, non esset fecunditati eorum resistere” (“Plato writes that the Hydra was a cunning sophist whose habit was to criticize and to put questions in such a way that, when one doubt was resolved, many more would arise. I think what gave rise to this fable is that the genus of serpents to which Hydra belongs is the most fertile of all, and unless its offspring are burned out with fire, it is impossible to

Notes

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Eric MacPhail for his commentaries on this text. All the remaining mistakes and omissions are my own.

² Whom Eric MacPhail (2011, 52) called “new sophists” in a brilliant and seminal book. The term, made famous by Erasmus in the *Praise of*

stand against their fecundity”); Lodovico Lazzarelli, *Crater Hermetis* [c. 1492–1494] 2005, 15.1, 212–213; Hernando Alonso de Herrera, *Disputatio adversus Aristoteles Aristotelicosque sequaces* [ante 1517] 2004, 252–253; etc. For the commonplace of the Hydra as multiplication of errors, see, e.g., Biondo Flavio’s *De verbis romanae locutionis Blondi ad Leonardum Aretinum* XXV. 104 (Tavoni, 214), Marcus Musurus’s introduction to Aristophanes (Manutius, 276–277), and Erasmus’s (*ASD* II. 1: 338–340; *CWE* 31: 238) *Adagia* I. III. 27. *Lerna malorum*.

¹⁵ Ficino had already translated, with a summary, *Euthydemus* in 1484 (Plut. LXXXII 6. Mbr. s. XV), soon thereafter came the renderings by Cornarius and Serranus. On the transmission of these early translations, see Hankins 1990, 331–332, 334, 340 and 1990b, 683, 726, 741, 778, 810, 813. A translation of the summary of *Euthydemus* into English can be found in Ficino 2006, 74–80. Although Erasmus (*ASD* II. 1: 516; *CWE* 31: 420) already quoted *Euthydemus* 297c–d freed from this tradition in *Adagia* I. V. 39. *Ne Hercules quidem adversus duos*, another equally influential work, Alciato’s *Emblems*, incorporated from the 1546 edition (fol. 15r) onwards the emblem ‘XII certamina Herculis,’ which gave new life to the image of the Hydra as sophistry. Compare Achille Bocchi 2015, III. XCII, 446–447, and Pierio Valeriano 1678, XVI. 36–37, 200.

¹⁶ Ficino 2009, appendix B, 41. The Latin text, with an alternative translation, in Ficino 1998, 400.

¹⁷ Poliziano 1526, fols. 103v–104r, also collected in Kristeller 1937b, 278 (LXXI.3). A translation into English can be found in Ficino 2009, appendix F, 47. Further data on Poliziano as Hercules in Batkin, 108–114.

¹⁸ *WA* 8: 48, *WA* 9: 29 (Murphy 64), etc.

¹⁹ *Eobani Hessi de Capnioni eulogium* [c. 1514]: “That subduer of monsters, Jupiter’s son, is renowned all over the world in recognition of his heroic deeds. Reuchlin’s glory is not inferior to his. He has vanquished monsters no less savage than the Hydra and the other beasts. Nobody asks what kind of monsters they are — unless you, cowl, perhaps don’t recognize yourself anymore”, Eobanus Hessus 2012, 49–51. See also Mutianus Rufus’s addition and gloss to the poem (dated November 1, 1514): “Hactenus imposituit ficta gravitate Catonis, / non poterit populo nunc dare verba Magus. / Debita Capnioni laus inviolata manebit, / sed tua quam simul gloria, Barde, jacet. / Ceu Nemesis subito tetigisset sidere linguam, / infans perpetuo non blaterator eris. Habes igitur Hesium et Rufum. Accipe glossam. Jove natus, i. e., Hercules alexiacus, Musagetes, Melampygnus, monstrorum domitor. Subito sidere, i. e., apoplexia. Cetera sunt cognitissima” (“So far he deceived the people with the feigned seriousness of Cato, / The magician will not not be able to speak to them. / The praise owed to Capnio [i.e., Reuchlin] will remain inviolate, / but your glory that you feign, Bard, lies prostrate. / Just as if Nemesis had touched [your] tongue with sudden stars / you would not henceforth be a babbling infant. There you have Hesus and Rufus. Here is the gloss. *Jove natus*, i.e., *Hercules alexiacus*, *Musagetes*, *Melampygnus*, a tamer of monsters. *Subito sidere*, i.e., apoplexy. The rest are very well known”), Mutianus Rufus, 497–498.

²⁰ *In Eduardum Leeum Epigrammata* [1520], Eobanus Hessus 2016, 140–143, 160–161, and 164–165.

²¹ Reuchlin 2013, 51, 75, and 238. See also Reuchlin’s *De arte cabalistica* II 2010, 230, and his letters to Jakob Questenberg (Augustsburg, April 25 1514) 2007, 52, and to Girolamo Ricci (Stuttgart, August 4 1516), 2007, 298

²² Warburg, 568 and 570; Seidel Menchi, 80–86 and 94; and Whitford, 27. Still, leading anti-Lutherans, such as Eck (1979, 274, 404, and 415), Catharinus (87) and Cochlaeus (18), employed “hydra” both against Luther and contemporary heresies following Ambrose and Jerome, see above n11.

²³ Alciato 2014, 34–35.

²⁴ The word is a *rara avis* coined by Budé to describe Erasmus’s *Adagia* in a letter (Paris, 19 May 1517) to Cuthbert Tunstall: “[...] certe quum Iliadem [vt ita loquar] illam leporum Graecorum iuxta Latinorum lego, quae *Paroemiae* vocantur, nunc *logothecam Mineruae* videre mihi videor; nunc Mercurii salinum, quem Logium appellant, arte sane eximia fabrefactum, et in quo tamen ipso materia cum opificio certet, vnde sales candidissimos oratoria comicaque facundia ad vsus diceriorum sumat [...]” (“when I look at this *Iliad*, so to call it, of elegance in Greek and Latin that he [Erasmus] calls his *Proverbs* [*Paroemia*], I seem to see Minerva’s own arsenal of language [*logothecam Mineruae*]. Or again, it is Mercury’s own standing salt-cellar—Mercury the god of eloquence—a masterpiece of craftsmanship in which, even so, the material vies with the making, from which those who would be eloquent or amusing can help themselves to purest Attic salt when they need to make an effect”), Allen, *Opus epistolarum* II, 566; *CWE* 4: 357–358, my italics.

²⁵ For later examples, and as a proof of the success of this identification, see Isidoro da Chiari’s *Adhortatio ad concordiam* ([1540] 2008, 44) and Annibal Caro’s ([1558] 1912, 128) *Apologia degli academici di Banchi di Roma contra messer Lodovico Castelvetro—Rimenata del Buratto*: “E come? Con chiarire il mondo che voi siete un sofistuzzo, un fantasticuzzo, uno arrabbiatello, che con tanta vanità, con tanta impertinenza e con tanta ostentazione di voi, procurate il biasimo degli altri e la vostra vergogna?” and *ibid.*—*Mattaccini*: “— Un sofista — dicono — un filosofastro, uno spiritocco, corrompitore della verità, della buona creanza e delle buone lettere; un furioso, un empio, un nimico di Dio e degli uomini, ardisce di gar queste cose? Vuol che la sua dottrina, la quale è vana e falsa e pestifera, sia di tutti tenuta per buona [...]”.

²⁶ See Petrarch 2006, I. 4. 521, 138–140: “Ex quibus omnibus, fratres, piis esse debet *has ventosas et frivolas disputationes*, quibus non Cristi veritas, sed vulgi favor queritur, atque omnem seu *vanam inquisitionem rerum imperscrutabilium*, seu maxime miraculorum concupiscentiam pervicacie et curiositatis esse, non fidei” (“From all of this, brothers, the pious ought to be convinced that these are *windy and frivolous disputations* by which, not the truth of Christ, but the favour of the crowd is sought, and all either *vain investigation of things beyond the possibility of examination*, or lust especially for miracles is the sign of obstinacy and curiosity, not of faith”), the translation into English in Trinkaus I, 39, my italics; Petrarch 2014b, XII. 2. 123–124, 390: “[Pythagoras] sapientem dicere, quo cognomine primi illi septem usi erant, erubesceret, primus omnium nominis huius inventor, philosophum se respondit, hoc est nondum sapientem, sed sapientie amatorem; quod tunc nomen humillimum, brevi postea vehementer intumuit, nunc et tumidum et inane est, his qui illud profitentur non iam sapientiam, sed *ostentationem et ventosas contentiones amantibus*” (“[Pythagoras], because he was embarrassed that they called him ‘Sage’, that is, wise man, the name used for those famous first Seven, responded that he was a ‘philosopher’—he was the first man to coin this term—, meaning not so much a wise man as a lover of wisdom. A name that was then most humble soon afterward grew extremely swollen, and is now puffed up and vain; those who profess it are now not *lovers of wisdom but of showiness and windy arguments*”); Salutati (1891, 178–179), *Epistulae* III. XV (to Roberto Guidi, 16 August 1374): “[Petrarch] in philosophiam [...], omnium scientiarum et artium imperatrix ac magistra, quantum excessit! Non dico in hac, quam *moderni sophiste ventosa iactatione inani et impudente garrulitate mirantur in scolis*; sed in ea, que animos excolit, virtutes edificat, vitorum sordes eluit, rerumque omnium, omissis *disputationum* ambagibus, veritatem elucida. Gaudeant siquidem illa priori, quos *indissolubilia*, ut aiunt, *argumenta* multo conflata labore reperire delectat, quos *scolastice palestre gloria movet* hanc autem posteriore nos merite veneremur et totis animi viribus amplectamur” (“How greatly did [Petrarch] excel in philosophy, the empress and mistress of all sciences and arts! I am not speaking of this *modern, sophisticated, windy, boastful, empty philosophy of impudent chatter that is admired in the schools*; but that which—leaving aside the evasiveness of disputations—develops minds, builds up virtues, purifies low vices, and brings to light the truth of all things. So then, let them rejoice in the first kind [of philosophy] with its so-called *indestructible arguments* brought together with much labour, and *the glory of the scholastic arena moves them*: let them rejoice in it, but we will venerate as worthy the second kind and embrace it with our whole heart”); Salutati 1985, 63 and 70; etc.

²⁷ “Porro Graeca Latinis in loco intermixta non mediocrem addunt gratiam. In loco adhibentur, vel cum Graeca vox est significantior, vt *λογωμαχία* pro ‘contentione’ siue ‘rixa’” (“Not a little charm is added by the judicious mingling of Greek forms with the Latin. This can be when the Greek word is more expressive, like *λογωμαχία* [battle of words] for ‘dispute’ or ‘quarrel’), *ASD* I. 6: I. XI, 50, ll. 460–462; *CWE* 24: 317.

²⁸ *ASD* V. 1: 290, ll. 488–490.

²⁹ *ASD* I. 2: 626, ll. 20–21.

³⁰ *ASD* IV. 3: 154; *CWE* 28: 128.

³¹ A good example of the use of the term under these premises can be found in Reuchlin’s *Defensio... contra calumniatores suos Colonienses* [1513] 1999, 241–243; see also his letter to Jakob Lemp (Stuttgart, August 1 1512; 2003, 322), where he amplifies the list of equivalents with “*λογωσομαχίας*” and “*μικρόλογον σοφίαν*”, taken from Gregory of Nazianzus, among others. Once the situation changed, the term normally lost its ability to provide the set of equivalences that motivated its inclusion in the census of derisory terms, as can be seen in Melanchthon’s *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum libri duo* [1550]: “*Quaestio* haec sit: *An virtus sit finis hominis, an vero voluptas?* Aristoteles inquit: actionem virtutis finem hominis esse. Nos cum dicimus, virtutem finem esse, non intelligamus ociosum habitum, sed Aristotelis sententiam retineamus, etiamsi brevitas causa, tantum virtutem nominamus, ut et Cicero loquitur. Removeantur ergo *λογωμαχίαι* et plane statuamus, falsam esse sen-

tentiam Epicuri, qui contendit, voluptatem finem esse. Rectius autem in Philosophia dici. Virtutum esse finem hominis, id est, recte faciendum esse, etiamsi dolores et detrimenta sequantur” (“Here is the *question*: is virtue the end of man or is it, in fact, pleasure? Aristotle says that virtuous activity is man’s end. When I say that virtue is the end, I do not mean an inactive disposition; rather, I support Aristotle’s opinion, even if, for the sake of brevity, I refer to it simply as virtue, in the manner of Cicero. Let us be done, therefore, with *logomachiai* and clearly establish that Epicurus’s opinion is false. He contends that pleasure is our end. It is stated more accurately in philosophy, however, that man’s end is virtue, that is, doing what is right even if pain and loss are the consequences”), quoted from Melanchthon 1553, 11 and Turmeda *et al.*, 112, my italics.

³² “*Vocum novitates*. *Κενοφωνίας*, id est ‘*vocum inanitates*’. Ambrosius et interpres legis videntur *καινοφωνίας*. Quanquam Graeca scholia per ε legunt. Nec enim hic agit de novandis vocibus, sed de *disputationibus supervacaneis*. Ex interpretatione Chrysostomi non liquet quid legerit. Theophylactus legit et interpretatur *κενοφωνίας*, id est *ματαιολογίας*, non dissimulans tamen Chrysostomum videri legisse *καινοφωνίας* per αι diphthongum. Addit ‘*videri*’ quod quemadmodum diximus, ex illius enarratione non liquet quid legerit. Falsi nominis. *Ψευδωνόμου*, quasi dicas ‘*falso nominatae scientiae*’. Nec enim est scientia vbi fides non est. Et haec omnia mire quadrant in hos quosdam *spinosos theologistas*. Non enim de omnibus loquor et fortassis nulli futuri sunt. Et apte dixit □ντιθέσεις, ‘*oppositiones*’, quod *omnibus* de rebus *inter istos* mira sit *digladiatio*” (“*Vocum novitates* [‘newness of voices’]. *Kenophonias*, that is, ‘emptiness of voices’. Ambrose and the translator appear to have read *kainophonias*, although the Greek glosses give an ‘epsilon’. For this is not dealing with new voices but with unnecessary voices. From Chrysostom’s translation it is not clear what his reading was. Theophylact reads and interprets it as *kenophonias*, that is, *mataiologias*, while not hiding the fact that Chrysostom appears to have read it as *kainophonias* with the diphthong *ai*. He adds ‘appears to’ because, as we said, it is not evident from his commentary what his reading was. *Falsi nominis* [‘of a false name’]. *Pseudonumou*, as if you were to say, ‘of falsely-named knowledge’. For there is no knowledge where there is no faith. And all these things fit amazingly well with certain of these *thorny theologists*. For I do not speak of all of them, and possibly not all will be such. And he aptly said *antitheseis*, ‘confrontations’, for among these *men every topic is a marvellously fierce combat*”), *ASD* VI. 10: 118.

³³ “Age admittetur, modo domi relinquat *gryphos sophisticos*, *mat[ae]ologias*, *sycphantias*, *supercilium*, *virulentias*, *risum Sardonium*, *glorias Thrasonicas*, *philautiam*”, *ASD* I. 3: 90n40–45. The passage was soon removed from the *Colloquia*, but Erasmus commented it again in his *Apologia qua respondet duabus invectivis Eduardi Lei*, from where the translation into English has been drawn, *ASD* IX. 4: 59; *CWE* 72: 50.

³⁴ Agrippa von Nettesheim 1531, ch. XCIV. *De arte notariatus et pro-cumtoria* and 1676, 325.

³⁵ Abaelardus 57, 59, 64, 67, 82, etc.

³⁶ Boccaccio, *Letters* XXIV [1374] 1992, 734; Salutati, *Letters* X. XV [to Pellegrino Zambecari, April 23, 1398] 1896, 290; Gerson, *Letters* 3 [to Pierre d’Ailly, April 1, 1400] 1960, 25–28; Salutati 1985, 48–49; etc.; Erasmus’s *Encomium Moriae* (*ASD* IV. 3: 158–160; *CWE* 27: 130–131), *Opus epistolarum* (Allen I. 145: 105; I. 337; II. 608, 100, II. 345–347; III. 628: 21, II. 10–19), *De recta Latini Graecique pronuntiatione* (*ASD* I. 4: 26–27), *Responsio ad annotationes Eduardi Lei* (*ASD* IX. 4: 266–269), etc. The formula “magistri nostri” is sufficiently defined in the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* I. 1: “Et intelligit bene facta sua, et habet multos discipulos, parvos et magnos, senes cum iunioribus, et cum magna maturitate dixit, et tenuit quod dicendum est ‘*nostermagistrandus*’, quod sit una dictio, quia ‘*magistrare*’ significat ‘*magistrum facere*’, et ‘*baccalauriare*’, ‘*baccalaurium facere*’, et ‘*doctorare*’, ‘*doctorem facere*’. Et hinc veniunt isti termini ‘*magistrandus*, ‘*baccalauriandus*, et ‘*doctorandus*.’ Sed quia doctores in sacra theologia non dicuntur doctores, sed propter humilitatem et etiam sanctitatem, et propter differentiam nominantur seu appellantur *magistri nostri*, quia stant in fide catholica in loco domini nostri Iesu Christi qui est fons vitae, sed Christus fuit nostrorum omnium magister; ergo ipsi appellantur ‘*magistri nostri*’, quia habent nos instruere in via veritatis, et deus est veritas, quapropter merito vocantur ‘*magistri nostri*’, quia omnes nos scilicet Christiani debemus et tenemur audire praedicationem eorum, et nullus debet dicere contra eos, ex quo sunt omnium nostrum *magistri*” (“He [Warmsemel] knoweth his business right well, and hath many pupils, high and low, young and old; and, speaking with ripeness of knowledge, he held that we should say ‘*nostermagistrandus*’—in one word—because ‘*magistrare*’ signifies to make Master, and ‘*baccalauriare*’ to make Bachelor, and ‘*doctorare*’ to make Doctor (whence come the technical terms ‘*magistrand*’, ‘*baccalauriand*,

and ‘*doctorand*’). Now Doctors in Divinity are not styled ‘*Doctors*’, but on account of their humility and sanctity, and by way of distinction, are named and styled ‘*Magistri Nostri*’, because in the Catholic Faith they stand in the room of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fount of life, and the ‘*Magister*’ of us all: wherefore are they styled ‘*Magistri Nostri*’ because it is for them to instruct us in the way of truth—and God is truth”), Von Hutten 2004, 131 (the translation into English has been drawn from Von Hutten 1909, 292) and *ibid.* II. 43; see also Becker, 85–89, 92, 95, 104–106, 107–117, and 135–138.

³⁷ For the derogatory use of these four terms, see Ong, 138–139 and De-faux, 39, 45n7, and 141.

³⁸ Bausi, 177–184. See also the list of terms collected by Nizolio 1956, I, 19–20: “Si prius tamen oraverimus Lectores, ut nobis ignoscant, nec vitio vertant, si quando inter refutando barbaros, barbaris aut parum latinis vocabulis utemur, qualis sunt exempli gratia, *ens*, *essentia*, *essentialis*, *entitas*, *quiditas*, *accidentalitas*, *potentialitas*, *praedicatio*, *praedicatum*, *praedicamentum*, *praedicamentalis*, *univocum*, *aequivocum*, *univocam univocans*, *univocum univocatum*, *aequivocum aequivocans*, *aequivocum aequivocatum*, *realis*, *substantialis*, *intentionalis*, *principale*, *principaliter*, *secundario*, *Metaphysica*, *metaphysicalis*, *Logica*, *logicalis*, *mentalis*, *sermocinalis*, *orationalis*, *logice*, *metaphysice*, *realiter*, *intentionaliter*, *consequenter*, *infinite*, *universalizare*, et alia quamplurima huiusmodi plusquam barbara, a *Pseudophilosophis* prorsus inaniter inventa, et temere in Philosophiam introducta” (“If we nevertheless pleaded previously with the readers to indulge us and not cast blame if we ever use, while refuting the barbarians, barbaric or hardly-Latin words, as for example: *ens*, *essentia*, *essentialis*, *entitas*, *quiditas*, *accidentalitas*, *potentialitas*, *praedicatio*, *praedicatum*, *praedicamentum*, *praedicamentalis*, *univocum*, *aequivocum*, *univocam univocans*, *univocum univocatum*, *aequivocum aequivocans*, *aequivocum aequivocatum*, *realis*, *substantialis*, *intentionalis*, *principale*, *principaliter*, *secundario*, *Metaphysica*, *metaphysicalis*, *Logica*, *logicalis*, *mentalis*, *sermocinalis*, *orationalis*, *logice*, *metaphysice*, *realiter*, *intentionaliter*, *consequenter*, *infinite*, *universalizare*, and many others of this sort that are more than barbarous, entirely and inanely invented by *pseudophilosophers* and rashly introduced into philosophy”), my italics.

³⁹ See Bruni 1994, I. 25, 247 and 1987, 69: “Quid autem de dialectica, quae una ars ad disputandum pernecessaria est? An ea florens regnum obtinet, neque hoc ignorantiae bello calamitatem ullam perpessa est? Minime vero; nam etiam illa barbaria, quae trans oceanum habitat, in illam impetum fecit. At quae gentes, dii boni! Quorum etiam nomina perhorresco: *Farabrich*, *Buser*, *Occam*, *alique eiusmodi*, *qui omnes mihi videntur a Rhadamantis cohorte traxisse cognomina*” (“What about dialectic, an art very necessary to disputation? Does it possess a flourishing realm, and has it endured no calamity in this war of ignorance? Not at all, for it has been assaulted even by that barbarism which dwells across the ocean. What peoples! I shudder even at their names: *Ferabrich*, *Buser*, *Occam*, and others of this sort, all of whom seem to have drawn their names from the throng of Rhadamanthus”), my italics.

⁴⁰ See Copenhaver’s and Nauta’s “Introduction” to Valla 2012b, xi–xii. The attacks on *dyaletici/dyaleticali* appear many times in Petrarch 2016, I. 10. 2–6, 40–43; 2004, I. 7, 100–109; 2014a, III. 47, 270; 2009, V. 2. 63–66, 44–47; etc.

⁴¹ *Grammaticus* referred to a deep knowledge of *Latinitas* in the first place and familiarity with classical antiquity in all its aspects. *Litteratus* and *litterator* is, in this context, nothing more than a variant of the same concept inherited from Suetonius. For the acceptations and uses of both terms, see Rico, 52–54; Poliziano 1986, 102–103 and 2010, 40–41, 92–93 and 140–141; and Cummings, 249–270. It should be stressed that, despite the success in the use of this opposition, and that Erasmus was one of his most ardent defenders—he liked to call himself a *grammaticus*—this did not mean that this use would not strike some of them back. See, for instance, Estüñiga’s attack against the humanist of Rotterdam in the handwritten version of *Erasmii Roterodami Blasphemiae ac impietates* (c. 1522): “Immo tu es complorandus, *grammatista* superbissime ac lamentis luctuosus omnino prosequendus, qui christianae modestiae prorsus immemor tanta verborum insolentia ac procacitate in omnem christianorum gradum ac ordinem aperte debaccharis” (“But you, most arrogant *grammatista*, ought to be bewailed and accompanied with sorrowful tears, who, recklessly heedless of Christian modesty, openly rave against every rank and order of Christian with such insolent speech and impudence”), *ASD* VI. 7: 307n849–858.

⁴² *Logiculus* stems from the famous textbook of Paolo Veneto, the *Parva logica*. See Pomponazzi’s *Quaestio de speciebus intelligibilibus et intellectu speculativo* [c. 1504] 1970, 207: “Et est simili illi quod dicunt *sophistae* et *logiculi* quod nomen et significat sua significata et significat

seipsum” (“And it is similar to what the *sophists* and *logicians* say, that the name signifies its signifieds and signifies itself”), my italics.

⁴³ *Nebulus* or *nebulonicus* were much to the liking of Thomas More, see by way of example his *Responsio ad Lutherum* II. 27: “nec aliud in ore gestare, quam sentinas, cloacas, latrinas, merdas, stercora, faciant quod uolent alij, nos ex tempore capiemus consilium, uelimus ne sic bacchantem ex eius tractare uirtutibus et coloribus suis depingere: an furiosum fraterculum et *latrinarium nebulonem*, cum suis furijs et furoribus, cum suis merdis et stercoribus, cacantem cacatumque relinquere” (“and to carry nothing in his mouth but bilge-water, sewers, privies, filth and dung, then let the other do what they will; we will take timely counsel, whether we wish to deal with the fellow thus ranting according to his virtues and to paint with his colors, or to leave this mad friarlet and *privy-minded rascal* with his ragings and ravings, with his filth and dung, shitting and beshitted”), More 682–683, my italics. See also below: “Scholastic sophists and sophistries as shit”.

⁴⁴ See Mutianus Rufus’s (1885, 658, 665) letter to Erasmus (Gotha, c. March 1523): “Quorsum tendat temeritas et peruersa ostentatio non video. Non obsunt cameli et *philoscoti*...” (“...where their headstrong folly and their perverse desire to shine will end, I do not know. The Camels and the *Scotophiles* are no obstacle...”); also collected in Allen, *Opus epistolarum* V. 1425: 409; the translation is taken from *CWE* 10: 191. There is a wordplay (Duns) *Scotus*/ σκότος (‘darkness’ in Greek) here, see Erasmus 2011, 327n335.

⁴⁵ *Sortista* stems from ‘Sortes’, that is, ‘Socrates’ abbreviated in medieval syllogisms. It is a fairly uncommon term, but it can be found in Pomponazzi’s *Expositio libelli de substantia orbis* [1507] 1966, 63.

⁴⁶ On *morologus*, far less common than *morologia*, see Perotti 1995, I. X. 114, 63: “Et *morologi* dicuntur qui in sermone morosi, hoc est, molesti, sunt. Vnde et sermones huiusmodi dicuntur *morologi*. Plautus: ‘Nec molestum esse nec sermonibus morologis uti’” (“And those who are fussy, that is, affected, in their speech they call *morologi*. Thus words of this sort are also called *morologi*. Plautus: Neither be affected nor use *morologi* words”). Erasmus translates μωρολογία as *stultiloquium*, another term with a long tradition in the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of *Eph.* 5:4, *ASD* VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XI, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

⁴⁷ On *morosophus*—a term taken from Luc., *Alex.* 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the *Praise of Folly*, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius *Stellatus* 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre* or Gulielmus Gnapheus’s play, *Morosophus* (1531).

⁴⁸ Budé sigs. p4r, p7v, q8r, and r1v.

⁴⁹ For the term *theologaster* (or *theologastrus*), see Erasmus’s *Adagia* 870. *Elephantus non capit murem* (*ASD* II. 2: 388–390) and *Apologia contra Sanctium Carranzam* (*ASD* IX. 8: Ioannis 20. *Dominus meus et Deus meus*, 34) and Melancthon 1834, 286–326. The vocable was introduced to French very soon thanks to the anonymous *Farce des théologastres* [1523–1525], Des Périers’s *Cymbalum mundi* [1537], and Viret’s *Cosmographie infernale* [1552]. For the term *theologista*, see Reuchlin’s *Defensio contra calumniatores suos Colonienses* [1513]: “[...] not to mention myself being unjustly attacked by the Cologne ‘theologists’ [...]. I cannot call my Cologne slanderers theologians; they are false theologians... and I shall call them from now on by a term of reproach ‘theologists’ because I do not want to anger anyone in the saintly assembly of true theologians at other universities”, Rummel 2002, document 4, 103. See also the following words in the anonymous pamphlet entitled *Conciliabulum theologistarum* [c. 1521]: “Eck. [...] I was unsuccessful because that man [Luther] denies everything and cannot be bothered with syllogisms [*non curat syllogismos*]. As soon as I produce a neat argument and have come up with a conclusion according [*consequentiam*] to Frisesomorum or Berbelin or Braca [*mnemonic words for types of syllogisms*, see below n. 50] he throws out the conclusion and the whole argument [*negat conclusionem ad totum argumentum*] and says that these are fantasies [*fantasiae*] and snares [*tendiculae*] laid by men who have no business with theology [*in theologia non habent locum*]. And he wants us to cite the gospel or Paul or a text from Holy Writ instead of syllogisms [...] Arnold. [...] There you are wrapped up in your wonderful speculations [*in illis speculabilibus et in mirabilibus super vos*] [...]. And you know nothing of this world, except perhaps as far as avarice and envy goes, because according to the proverb ‘Every theologian is S-upercilious [*superbus*], A-varicious [*avarus*], and L-ivid [*libidus*] with envy’ (and you may add ‘with a T-aste for luxury [*luxuriosus*]’), according to the etymology of the word SALT, as is written: ‘You are the SALT of the earth’”, Rummel 1993, 59 and 61. On

the meaning of the coupling *philosophus/ philosophante* (or *philosophaster*) there is not agreement in early modern sources.

⁵⁰ Students were expected to learn by heart the valid categorical syllogisms of the three figures through the following mnemonic formulas: “Barbara, Celarent, Darii, Ferio, Baralipton./ Celantes, Dabitis, Fapesmo, Frisesomorum./ Cesare, Camestres, Festino, Baroco, Darapti./ Felapton, Disamis, Datisi, Bocardo, Ferison”, as a consequence they were collected in the main medieval manuals of logic, such as Petrus Hispanus, *Summule logicales*, Buridan’s *Summulae de dialectica*, Ockham’s *Summa logicae*, and Paolo Veneto’s *Logica parua*, among many others. As examples of their derogatory use, see Trapezuntius sig. b4v; Melancthon 1854, 738; Ramus (Ong, 45–47); etc. Therefore, J.C. Scalliger’s (374) complaint about these jokes is fairly understandable.

⁵¹ An early example of this procedure can be found already in Petrarch 2014a, II. 51. *Dyogenes cynicus*. 2, 160.

⁵² *ASD* I. 3: 92: “Docebo autem non crocodilitis aut soritis, ceratinis aut aliis id genus dialectorum argutiis sed pingui, quod aiunt, Minerua rem digito propemodum ostendam”, *CWE* 27: 96–97.

⁵³ On *crocodilites* and *ceratinis*, see Quint., *Inst.* I. X. 5 and Luc., *Vit. Auct.* 22. On *sorites*, Cic., *De div.* II. 11; *Acad.* II. 49, 92–95; *Fin.* IV. 29–31; *ND.* II. 165, III. 43; and D.L. VII. 44. 82–83.

⁵⁴ Poliziano 1489, ch. 44–45, sigs. i1v–i2v. Compare also Lefèvre d’Étaples’s preface to the *Libri logicorum* [1501/1503] (Lefèvre d’Étaples 88–89) with the prologue to his *Introductiones logicales* [1496] (*ibid.* 39), and see Renaudet 274–276.

⁵⁵ Vives 1979, 140–143.

⁵⁶ Melancthon 1854, 747–748, and see Ashworth 2008, 631–632.

⁵⁷ Jardine, 161–162 and Nauta, 252–255; cf. Ashworth 2008, 631–632.

⁵⁸ Rico, 63n77.

⁵⁹ Gerson, *Contra curiositatem studentium* 1962, 233, 239–240 and 242–244. On the influence of Gerson on the *Praise of Folly*, see De Vogel, 106; Rummel 1995, 35–39; and my notes to Erasmus 2014, 103n6–104.1, 212n6b, 215n8–216.1, 216n6, 220n3 and 235n11–236.4.

⁶⁰ See an extreme example of the former in Bèze’s *Epitaphs*. 13. In *Ceratinum, pseudomonachum*: “Flete cucullati fratres: iacet ille sepultus./ Ille cucullatae religionis honos./ Ridite, o reliqui; risu dignissima res est:/ Haec sunt perpetuis funera digna iocis./ Quippe huius quondam mendacibus omnia fucis/ *Perdere, sola diu cura laborque fuit.*/ *At dum cuncta tegit, dum fraudibus omnia velat.*/ Mors simulatorem non simulata rapit” (*Cératin, a Pseudomonk*: “Come weep, hooded brothers; the glory of your hooded religion has died and gone away. The rest of you, laugh; oh yes, it is a very laughable matter. This is a death worthy of endless jokes. *You see, once he gave all his effort and attention to wrecking everything by his crooked guile. But though he feigned everything, though he concealed everything in deception, the death that took that faker was no fake*”), De Bèze, 126–127, my italics.

⁶¹ Wilson fols. 85v–88v, and Howell, 28.

⁶² *Suisetica* stands for Richard Swineshead (†1354), also known as ‘Calculator’. For the attacks against the *calculatores* and their fortune during the *Quattrocento* and the early *Cinquecento*, see Dionisotti, 219–253; Valcke 1985, 43–56 and 1992, 275–284; and Raimondi 1995, 53–94 and 2000, 311–358.

⁶³ Landino 1970, 89; Rabil, 242.

⁶⁴ Landino 1980, 208: “Neque rursus *levium futillumque rerum* est quaerenda doctrina, veluti qui in *dialecticorum* superfluis *captiunculis* ac vanis *amphibologiis* aut *inanibus fabellis* omne paene tempus terunt” (“Again, neither should one seek for the knowledge of *light and empty matters*; meaning, he who wastes nearly all his time in the unnecessary *logical quirks of the dialecticians*, and in empty words of *double meaning or inane little fables*”), my italics.

⁶⁵ Valla 2012, II. 2. 9, 224–225: “Sed hos duos posteriores modos, ne dialecticos nimium onerare videamur, rhetoricae relinquamus. Secundum modum nisi admittant, dialectici caveant ne dicam ideo hunc eos nolle admittere quia *non ita est ad captiunculas opportunus*” (“However, lest I seem to put too great a burden on the dialecticians, let me leave the last two ways to rhetoric. If they do not allow the second way, the dialecticians should take care lest I claim that their reason for not wanting to allow it is that *it does not lend itself to sophisms*”).

⁶⁶ Valla 2014, 308–309: “Id quod etiam visum est theologis graecis, Basillio, Gregorio, Ioanni Chrysostomo ac ceteris eius aetatis, qui neque *dialecticorum captiunculas* neque metaphysicas ambages neque *modorum significandi nugas* in quaestionibus sacris admiscendas putaverunt, ac ne in philosophia quidem suarum disputationum fundamenta iecerunt” (“Such also seemed to be the case to the Greek theologians Basil, Gregory, John Chrysostom, and the others of that age. They did not think that the *sophisms of dialectics*, the obscurities of metaphysics, or the *trifles of the modes of signifying* should be mixed in with sacred

questions. Nor did they even lay the foundations of their disputations in philosophy”).

⁶⁷ Alberti 306–309: “Referam quae non a philosopho—nam vestra omnis ratio nisi in argutiis et *verborum captiunculis* versatur—sed a pictore quodam memini audivisse. Is quidem lineamentis contemplandis plus vidit solus quam vos omnes philosophi caelo commensurando et disquirendo. Adsis animo: audies rem rarissimam” (“I will tell you what I remember hearing, not from a philosopher—for all your reasoning revolves only around subtleties and *verbal quibbles*—but from a certain painter. By himself this man saw more while looking at lines, than all you philosophers do when you’re measuring and investigating heavens. Pay attention: you’ll hear something that is very rare indeed”).

⁶⁸ Pontano 2012, 36–39: “Nimis ridiculus es qui id arbitrare; in asinum mene illos *captiunculis* suis versuros quasi Apuleium amatorio poculo, que ego vix agnovi cum hac iter faceret?” (“Do you imagine that they might transform me with their *snares*, like Apuleius changed by the love potion, whom I hardly recognized when he came this way?”)

⁶⁹ I quote from Jayne’s second revised edition and translation (Ficino 1985, 6.10, 126); Allen 1989, 24–28 offers a commentary on the passage and on sophistry as incantation. The primitive version of the Epistle to Banco can be found in Kristeller 1937a, VII. a. 3, 39: “Nam profitentur quod nesciunt, et solis preterea prestigiis quibusdam sive artificiosis *captiunculis* velut *aranearum telis* confidunt, nec eorum adhuc ullus repertus est, cuius memoria ex improviso fecunda promptaque fuerit. Itaque cave ne dum ad cacumen pervenire contendis, cum ipsis ramis quos comprehenderis decidas” (“For they profess what they are ignorant of, and only rely on certain tricks or skillful *logical quirks*, *spiders’ webs* if you will; up to now we have found not one of them who can think on his feet with a fertile and ready memory. And so be careful that, when striving to reach the summit, you do not fall down along with the very branches you take hold of”), my italics.

⁷⁰ Pontano 2002, 114: “Quod si *captationem* ipsam duplicem fecerimus, et eorum quos cupiditas habendi trahit et quos popularis aurae atque ambitionis studium, ut alteri pecuniae, alteri popularis aurae captatores dicantur, fortasse non male distribuisse iudicabimur, quando etiam sunt qui inter loquendum disserendumque etiam verba capent, qui quidem ipsi dicantur captiosi et fraus ipsa *captiuncula*” (“So if we should make *captatio* to consist of two kinds—of those whom acquisitive greed moves, and of those moved by popular favour and the zeal of ambition—, so that both would be called *captatores*, one moved by money, the other by popular acclaim: we will not be judged to have made a poor distinction if there are also those who, in the midst of speaking and discussing, ‘capture’ words too, who indeed would themselves be called *captiosi*, and whose fraud would be called *captiuncula*”), my italics. Ficino 2000, XXV. 16A, 234–235: “Legibus Plato conqueritur, atque infamiam adversus legitimos philosophos Socratem praesertim hinc exortam in *Apologia* testatur. Tria haec incurrit vitia adolescentibus cavillator. Qui ut primum *captiunculas* attingit admodum congratulatur, tamquam thesaurum sapientiae nactus, laetitiaque exultat ac gestit et *argumentatiunculas* omnes prompte pertentat, tum gyro multa retorquens in unum, tum unum in multitudinem explicans et evolvens, ubi superbia et procacitas statim exoritur” (“In the *Laws*, Plato complains bitterly about this impiety [deny God’s Providence] and in the *Apology* he attests to the infamy that befell legitimate philosophers, particularly Socrates, from it. The adolescent quibbler falls into three vices. As soon as he stumbles on *verbal paradox*, he congratulates himself as if he’d come upon a treasure-house of wisdom and exults and throws his arms around with delight and promptly assays every *paradoxical argument*, now twisting the many round and round into one, now unfolding and untwisting the one into the many”). See also Ficino 2005, 136–137.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Merula IV, fol. 73v: “Sed pro dolor, religiosi postea viri [...] ad civilia certamina animos applicarunt; alii ut longius a conspectu tot malorum et seditioinum procella se subducerent, in tranquillissimo portu trans Alpes *philosophantes* non tam speculationi altissimarum rerum quam *frivolis quaestionibus* et *captiunculis* quibusdam vacabant. Quanto conducibilius fuisset [...]” (“But alas, afterwards religious men [...] set their minds to civic struggles; others, in order to remove themselves further from the sight of the tempest of so many evils and seditions, idled away their time in a most quiet harbour across the Alps, *philosophisers* not so much in speculation concerning the highest matters as in *frivolous questions* and certain *logical quirks*. How much more expedient would it have been...”), my italics. In February 29th, 1520, in a letter to Pirckheimer, Reuchlin (2013, 321) uses *captiuncula*, according to its original meaning, to refer to legal sophistries.

⁷² De Ferrariis XXV, 149–150.

⁷³ See Clichtove’s *Commentary* [1502] on Lefèvre’s *Paraphrases of the Eight Books of Aristotle’s Physics* (Lefèvre d’Étaples 10); Eck, *Briefwechsel* 2 (to Matthias Ackermann, June 3, 1506); Erasmus. “Vita

Hieronymi”. *Erasmii opuscula* 178, *CWE* 61: 52; Id. *Enarration on the first Psalm. Bonus vir*, *ASD* V. 2: 54, *CWE* 63: 32; J.L. Vives. “De causis corruptorum artium” 1783b, 201–202; and Agrippa von Nettesheim 1531, ch. XCIV, quoted above.

⁷⁴ Nifo, 40–41. See Murdoch, 177.

⁷⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* VII. 12; Id. *Metalogicon* II. 6; etc.

⁷⁶ Petrarch 2003, *Contra medicum* II. 100, 79–78: “I say that your color, smell, and taste come from the stuff to which you are exposed—*shit*” (“Ab obiectis inquam *stercoribus* et colorem et odorem traxeris et saporem”); Petrarch 2003, *Contra eum qui maledixit Italiae* 99, 454–455: “But our little Gaul loves Greek titles; and although he may have no Greek or Latin learning, he thinks he is someone great when he *belches forth* the word ‘Physics’ or *spits out* ‘Metaphysics’” (“At Galliculus titulos Grecos amat, et quamvis scientiam forte nec Greecam habeat nec Latinam, magnum se aliquid credit, dum ‘Phisicam’ *ructat*, ‘Metaphisicam’ *spuit*”), my italics.

⁷⁷ Bartholomaeus Coloniensis was one of Erasmus’s teachers in Deventer and much admired by him; see his *Epigrammata* (1497), especially those against Zoilus (Coloniensis 5. 1–7, 30–35). Further examples on his influence on Erasmus in Ijsewijn 233 and 271–273.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Van Dorp’s *Oratio in laudem omnium artium* (31); Reuchlin’s (1999, 368) wordplay *Asinus aureus/Asinus stercorarius* in his *Defensio contra calumniatores suos Colonienses*, written originally in 1513; Beatus Rhenanus’s (410) description of the new sophists as “foda barbarie;” Von Hutten’s (1862b, 435–436) attack against Arnold Tungern in *Triumphus Doctoris Reuchlini*, written originally in 1517; Eck’s *Briefwechsel* 41 (to Joachim Vadian, March 18, 1517); Ps-Pirckheimer’s (Pirckheimer, 68–69) *Eccius dedolatus*, written originally in 1520: “Friends. Gracious! He threw up a red beret! Surgeon. He was made doctor of canon law. You see now how violently all these things abused his stomach? Friends. We do, ad it’s no wonder he took sick. The wonder’s more how he could live! Surgeon. I arrived in the nick of the time. But now the force of the medicine is descending to the lower regions. Did you hear? He voided something. Friends. You mean he emptied his bowels! Whew! What a stench! Did he discharge bile? Surgeon. Those are the indulgences that that slanderer Hochstraten excreted in his cacology [...] And these are the sweet-smelling niceties of the *magistri nostri*! But with his chest exposed now, the skin must be removed. My word! What tetter, what psora, or rather ulceration, or, in fact, cancer itself!...” (“Amici. Pape, quin rubeum eiecit Biretum. Chirurgus. Iuris Canonici doctoratus. Videtis nunc, quam vehementer haec omnia stomachum oppresserunt? Amici. Cernimus, et haud mirum si aegrotaverit, magis mirandum quo pacto vivere poterit. Chirurgus. In tempore adveni, sed nunc medicinae vis ad inferiora descendit: audistis? Iam oletum fecit. Amici. Quin concacavit. Hui, quantus foetor! Num bilem egressit? Chirurgus. Indulgentiae sunt, quas iam pridem σοκοφάντης ille Hochstratus in cacologia sua permerdavit [...]. Et haec Magistrorum Nostrorum suave olentes sunt mundiciae. Sed iam aperto pectore pellem detrahere est necesse. Hui, quae vitiligio, quae psora, imo gangraena, seu potius cancer ipse”), Von Hutten 1860, 540; and, of course, Luther’s (1989, 727, 731, also 732 and 733) *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany* [1523], together with his *Contra XXXII articulos Lovaniensium theologistarum* [1545] §30–31, *WA*, 54: 427, just to give two examples. Catholic humanists rapidly used these terms against early reformers; see, for instance, the following passage of More’s (1969, 60–61) *Responsio ad Lutherum*: “Illi igitur abeunt, alius alio, quo quemque tulit animus: et se pero omnia plaustra, uehricula, cymbas, thermas, ganea, tonstrinas, tabernas, lustra, pistrina, latrinas, lupanaria diffundunt: illic observant sedulo, atque in tabellas referunt, quicquid aut auriga sordide, aut seruus uerniliter, aut portior improbe, aut parasitus scurriliter, aut meretrix petulanter, aut leno turpiter, aut balneator spurce, aut cactor obsceno loquutus sit. Atque haec quum aliquot fecissent menses: tum demum quicquid undecunq̄ue collegissent, conuitorum, iurgiorum, et scurrilium scommatum, petulantiae spurciciae, sordium, luti, caeni, stercorum, omnem hanc colluuiem in foedissimam cloacam Lutheri pectus infartiant. Quam ille totam, in libellum istum suum conuitorum per os illud impurum uelut comesam merdam reuomuit. Inde tibi lector aceruus ille spurcissimorum latratuum, quibus solis stultissimus libellus impletur...” (“There they diligently observe and set down in their notebooks whatever a coachman spoke ribaldly, or a servant insolently, or a porter lewdly, or a parasite jeeringly, or a whore wantonly, or a pimp indecently, or a bath-keeper filthily, or a shitter obscenely. After hunting for several months, then, finally, all that they had collected from any place whatever, railings, brawlings, scurrilous scoffs, wantonness, obscenities, dirt, filth, muck, shit, all this sewage they stuff into the most foul sewer of Luther’s breast. All this he vomited up through that foul mouth into that railers’ book of his, like de-

voured dung. From there, reader, you receive that accumulated mass of indecent brawlings, with which alone the utterly foolish book is filled”).

⁷⁹ See Erasmus’s *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni* [1523]: “Fortasse sic me volebat Huttenus scribere: ‘spurcissima latrina, tun’ audes viros heroas tuis merdosis libellis aspergere?’ Forsitan sic decebat scribere Huttenum, at non decebat Erasmus” (“Hutten would perhaps have wanted me to address Hoogstraten in this fashion: ‘You filthy cesspool, how dare you defile men of heroic stature with your muck-filled books?’ Such a style might be fitting for Hutten, but not for Erasmus”), *ASD* IX. 1, 136; *CWE* 78: 56. Erasmus, as it is known, could be, and actually was, equally harsh when the situation required, see by way of example (there are many more) his *Concio sive Merdardus* [1531]: “Merdardus suas merdosas purulentias effuderit”, *ASD* I. 3: 655.

⁸⁰ “Sed in nostrae tempestatis theologastros quosdam iocari libuit, *quorum cerebellis nihil putidius*, lingua nihil barbarius, ingenio nihil stupidius, doctrina nihil spinosius, moribus nihil asperius, vita nihil fuca-tius, oratione nihil virulentius, *pectore nihil nigrius*” (“I merely wished to make a joke at the expense of a few quasi-theologians of our own day, whose brains are the most addled, tongues the most uncultured, wits the dullest, teachings the thorniest, characters the least attractive, lives the most hypocritical, talk the most slanderous, and hearts the blackest on earth”) Allen, *Opus epistolarum* I. 64: 192–193; *CWE* 1: 138, my italics.

⁸¹ *ASD* I. 5: 316–318; *CWE* 23: 272–273.

⁸² Rabelais 1955, 189 and 1999, ch. IV, 149.

⁸³ Valeriano IX. 5, 100.

⁸⁴ Humanist invectives, for instance, have been thoroughly studied in the following articles and monographs: Mattioli, 127–139; Allen 1986, 417–55; Fabbri, 551–556; Godman, 26–30, 39–51, 54–56, 76–77, 82–100, 253–260, etc.; Laureys, 9–30; Rao; Helmuth, 259–293; and Rizzi, 145–158.