The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric

The Aristotelian Tradition

Marta Spranzi

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The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric. The Aristotelian Tradition
by Marta Spranzi

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The Aristotelian Tradition

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For Thomas, Martin and Samuel.
May they make the best of whatever
has been handed down to them.

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INTRODUCTION

Dialectic and the notion of tradition

> The past does not pull back but presses forward. (Hannah Arendt 1977: 10)

> Through the confrontation over some topic, the one uses his reasons to strike the opinions of the other, not unlike the iron to the stone or the stone to the iron. This occurs through dispute, and although the sought truth will not spring out openly and entirely, we shall inevitably witness some of its sparks, because truth by its nature always shines. (Sperone Speroni 1740: 283–284)

This work is situated at the crossroads of two sets of preoccupations: on the one side a curiosity for the nature and workings of a tradition of thought, and on the other, a concern about the nature and purpose of knowledge reached through dialectical discussions, i.e. through the normatively structured exchange of questions and answers between qualified debaters. Aristotle's *Topics* – an early and at times rather cryptic work – lies precisely at this junction and has set the stage for future thinking about the relationship between structured debates and knowledge: as Aristotle himself states in the *Topics*, "being of the nature of an examination, [dialectic] along the path to the principles of all methods of inquiry" (101b3–4). How and why dialectic achieves its stated aim is by no means easy to determine, though, and Aristotle's answer is quite nuanced. Aristotle's text, I shall argue, contains the germs for the development of two different types of dialectic, which I call "disputational" and "aporetic" respectively: the former, and more important in my view, consists of a rule-bound and asymmetric debate between two interlocutors, a questioner and an answerer; the latter consists of an open-ended examination of different views and does not necessarily involve more than one thinker. Concerning the relationship between dialectic and knowledge, then, I will show that in the first book of the *Topics* Aristotle explores several possibilities and provides important indications as to the directions in which different answers to this question may be sought. Coupled with other passages from the eighth book of the *Topics* and from the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle offers us a multifarious, albeit sketchy, vision of the way in which dialectic can have epistemic significance. As a matter of historical luck, however, we don't have to restrict ourselves to Aristotle's text in order to understand what dialectic is and how it works. The *Topics* has initiated a long tradition of thought, before enjoying a true *renaissance* in 16th-century Padua and being resurrected by several contemporary authors working in the field of argumentation theory. This book is devoted precisely to reconstructing the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic as it is described in the *Topics* with respect to a specific issue: its cognitive and epistemological function.

Given the intrinsic looseness and the potential limitless extension of a tradition of thought, the task will certainly appear unattainable to the reader, and too open-ended to be credible at all. In fact, the authors to whom I will devote my attention are quite few in number, although they are linked by an invisible thread. The inquiry into the art of debate will lead me from Aristotle's development of Plato's use of Socratic methodology in the *Topics* (Chapter 1) to Cicero's discussion *in utramque partem* (Chapter 2), and from Boethius' analysis of topical inferences to Medieval disputations (Chapter 3). The largest part of the book, however, is devoted to several crucial developments in the understanding of dialectic which took place in the Renaissance. At that time, the Humanist philosopher Rudolph Agricola, one of the founders of the "new dialectic" movement, first theorized the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric and set the stage for a more thorough Aristotelian approach (Chapter 4). In the first half of the 16th century, the Aristotelian philosopher Agostino Nifo recovered what he believed to be the true meaning of Aristotle's *Topics* – as opposed to Medieval interpretations – by drawing on the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes which had been newly translated into Latin (Chapter 5). Finally, in the second half of the 16th century, the relationship between dialectic and dialogue was developed in the context of various literary theories on the dialogue form which, quite surprisingly, were centered around Aristotle's *Topics*. The analysis of Carlo Sigonio's treatise on the dialogue form, the most accomplished of the genre, will complete the reconstruction of Renaissance developments (Chapter 6). Although dialectic was certainly used after the Renaissance, especially during the scientific revolution (Galileo is the most famous example),[1] and its importance was often acknowledged (Leibniz is a good case in point),[2] reference to Aristotle's own understanding of this elusive and multifarious art all but vanished. Dialectic became a generic and flexible tool of argumentation rather than an object of study in its own right. After several centuries of oblivion, Aristotle's notion of dialectic is variously referred to and discussed again in contemporary argumentation theory: the complex relationship between dialectic and rhetoric, its sister discipline, comes again to the fore. In the last chapter, I shall discuss these recent developments in the light of the Aristotelian tradition and I shall examine the epistemological considerations to which they are connected.

These choices may appear to some as overly selective at best, and quite arbitrary at worse. In order to justify my selection of the specific developments in the tradition of dialectic that will be included in the book, I owe the reader a description of my understanding of the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic and the criteria I relied upon to define the range of potentially relevant authors. Firstly, I shall consider those authors who explicitly reflected on the nature and purpose of the art of dialectic, as opposed to those who described and discussed the technical aspects if its application. Therefore, I shall concentrate on those passages, and commentaries to them, where these second-order issues are discussed, most notably certain passages from Books I and VIII of Aristotle's *Topics*, as well as a few related passages from two of his other works, the *Rhetoric* and the *Sophistical Refutations*. This particular focus also accounts for a seeming paradox for a book devoted to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*: the reader will find very little about the 'topoi', the argumentation forms which are the technical tools by which dialectical arguments are constructed and the purpose of dialectic is carried out. Despite their intrinsic importance, I do not consider a close analysis Books II–VII of Aristotle's *Topics* – the books where the 'topoi' are described and discussed – as relevant to my project. Such a radical exclusion may also be justified by the fact that the first and the eighth books of the *Topics* were sometimes treated separately from the rest of the work: they were either considered as a general introduction to one of the possible uses of logic as a whole, i.e. debate (Averroes), or as a minor application of dialectical syllogisms (Albert the Great). Even outstanding contemporary scholars of Aristotle's *Topics* have dealt separately with one or the other of these two components of Aristotle's work. Robin Smith (1997) has translated – and commented on – Books I and VIII, while Paul Slomkowski (1997) has written a very thorough study of Books II to VII. By the same token, commentators who exclusively concentrated on Aristotle's description of the 'topoi' will not be considered as part of the tradition I reconstruct; an important *corpus* of texts using Aristotle's 'topoi' to construct a juridical logic of proof in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance· will thus be disregarded.[3] This approach equally excludes authors who used a dialectical methodology (or what we could regard as such) without explicitly reflecting on it. I am referring here to a long and distinguished tradition of philosophical and scientific dialogues: dialogical forms of writing are clearly based on the assumption that debate is important as a means of advancing knowledge. However, such writings do not have as their main purpose that of analyzing that connection explicitly. In other words, using a Medieval terminology, I shall focus on 'dialectica docens' rather than on 'dialectica utens'.

Secondly, and more importantly, I shall deal with authors who understand dialectic as the art of debate and/or of reasoning *in utramque partem*, with a view to advancing knowledge. This choice is in tune with what I believe – and I shall try to show – was the meaning of dialectic for Aristotle himself, and rules out other Renaissance contributions to dialectic, like Ramus' or Melanchton's, as important as they might be in their own right. This is also the reason why I shall approach Medieval developments as an “interlude”: dialectical arguments were understood then as either a lower form of probabilistic monological reasoning, or, alternatively, the art of sophistic or purely pedagogical debate, as in the ‘suppositio’ theory. On the other hand, I shall emphasize the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric which appears to be crucial for understanding the connection between dialectic and knowledge, because of the subtle difference between persuading an adversary and obtaining his assent in a dialectical debate. This theme runs through the whole tradition of dialectic, from Aristotle himself to Cicero, and from Agricola and other Renaissance writers to argumentation theorists like Chaïm Perelman and Douglas Walton.

Thirdly, and lastly, I shall give a central place to Aristotle’s founding text as the main reference for identifying the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic. This may seem a tautology, but it is not: I shall privilege authors who explicitly refer to, or use, Aristotle’s text to inform their own view of dialectic either as the art of debate or in its relationship with rhetoric, over those authors who developed these issues quite independently of Aristotle. A few exceptions will be allowed: Renaissance commentaries to Cicero’s *Topica* contribute to the understanding of some crucial dialectical notions such as “invention” and James Freeman (2005) offers a detailed discussion of the presumptive nature of dialectical premises, which indirectly sheds light on Aristotle’s ‘endoxa’. Taken together, these three criteria allow us to follow through time the idea explicitly developed for the first time in Aristotle’s *Topics*, namely that dialectic – as distinguished from both rhetoric and scientific demonstration – is an important tool for enriching and improving knowledge. The chosen authors all provide some insight into the reasons why this is so, as well as into the conditions which dialectic must satisfy in order to accomplish its task; I hope that their achievement will appear at the end of the book as a communal enterprise.

The long tradition of dialectic initiated by the *Topics* considerably enriches our understanding of Aristotle’s own analysis, and retrospectively manages to give his short, and at times cryptic statements, more intelligibility and breadth. Taking into account the tradition initiated by Aristotle’s own text to some degree makes the issue of “what Aristotle really meant” a moot point: insofar as later developments realize and exhibit the intellectual potential inherent in the *Topics*, we can consider that it is the tradition as a whole which provides answers and insight into the meaning and workings of dialectic. This is the approach that I have taken here. Owing to the tightly knit character of a tradition of thought, our interpretation of Aristotle’s own text and the commentators’ readings cannot be dissociated. Thanks to the particular connection that a later author establishes with the founding text(s) of the tradition he considers himself engaged in, the historian may legitimately draw on the tradition’s developments in order to reconstruct its meaning. As Bob Sharples has remarked in the introduction to a collective volume on Aristotelian commentators, “the question whether a particular position is Aristotelian or not cannot be separated from – and so may contribute to the debate concerning – the interpretation of Aristotle himself ” (2001: 2). In other words, a commentator claiming to be Aristotelian has to be taken seriously even if his position is not identical with what we understand to be Aristotle’s own position. Conversely, by reading a tradition’s founding text – in our case Aristotle’s *Topics* – as an open text, namely by emphasizing the issues it raises and the ambiguities it contains rather than what may appear as its uncontroversial conclusions, historians may be enlightened by later developments in their exegetical work. Thus, looking at the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic redistributes, so to speak, the burden of the correct interpretation over a considerable number of interpretations. Thus the important question is not: “What did Aristotle really mean by dialectic?”, but rather: “How can we make sense of what Aristotle wrote in the light of the interpreters who considered his text as the founding reference of their own reflections and claimed to perpetuate its tradition?”.

This may appear as a purely retrospective and whiggish reading of Aristotle’s text, based on the point of view of those much later thinkers who claimed to interpret him and above all to carry his inquiries forward. Indeed, which interpreters should we choose as reliable?[4] And why would they, as opposed to us, possess the key to Aristotle’s work? Clearly, if the interpretative tradition is used to give us direct hints as to the correct interpretation of Aristotle’s text so as to support a particular reading against another, it is useless at best, and disingenuous at worst. Nevertheless, the history of an interpretative tradition does provide us with indications about the richness and ambiguities of Aristotle’s original text; we can then read it as embodying the conditions of possibility for the varying interpretations which have been given to it throughout history. This approach has the advantage of enriching the text by adding a temporal dimension to the structural ones. We can then hope that, by reading Aristotle’s text not only as a position statement but also as a source of interesting developments, we can construct an interpretation which is both plausible and rich at the same time. In my own reconstruction of the tradition of dialectic, I shall give special attention to its Renaissance developments, since they mark its highest accomplishment as well as its virtual endpoint.

Contrary to the view common today, which emphasizes the socio-political components of a culture as the determining factor in identifying a tradition and in fostering intellectual and conceptual change, I shall stress the importance of the written text as the basic moving force of a tradition of thought. For, unlike ever-changing socio-political relationships, a written text possesses the power of straddling worlds, uniting radically different cultures spanning over eighteen centuries, from the Greek polis through the Roman empire to the dominion of the

"Barbarians", and from new Medieval empires to the Renaissance states. Boethius dramatically sensed that amidst the crumbling of empires and the destruction of familiar ways of living, amidst the establishment of a new religion and of radically new authorities, only the written word (the 'littera') had the power to endure. He wrote: "The present age does not weaken the power of the written word; even time itself, which wears all things out, only increases and strengthens its authority" (*In Ciceronis Topica*: 1041). However, besides being a source of linguistic and conceptual relationships, a text is also a material object. As such, it partakes in all the historical contingencies which beset human artifacts, from buildings to institutions. This is why the history of a tradition, such as that initiated by Aristotle's *Topics*, depends on the conditions which affect the physical transmission of the text and its availability; to that extent, a tradition of thought is an unpredictable living object. Thus, a history which may appear so closely knit as to look like the inevitable outcome of some kind of necessity, may be, at least partly, the result of chance historical events. The tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* would not be the same if other Greek commentaries besides that of Alexander of Aphrodisias had survived the high Middle Ages, if Aristotle's Greek text had been known before the 13th century, if Padua had not been the active intellectual center it was and if Alexander's and Averroes' commentaries had not been translated into Latin at the beginning of the 16th century.

This approach to the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic will appear as more justifiable if one considers the nature and the inner workings of a tradition of thought. A tradition of thought can be identified with a series of historical and cultural events endowed with a strong conceptual and temporal continuity. In this diachronic sense,[5] a tradition is often linked to the transmission of, and explicit reference to, a central founding text which serves as its source and provides the thread around which the tradition develops and evolves. However, an individual author's inscription into a tradition does not solely consist in a return to the sources. Rather, it derives chiefly from reinterpretation, which proceeds through a series of direct commentaries or other forms of indirect reference and capitalizes on the text's ambiguities, inner inconsistencies, weak points and subtle distinctions. Moreover, even though an interpretation amounts to a clarification of key passages of the original text, the commentary does in fact achieve much more than its declared – and intended – task. In fact, by picking out certain passages as deserving further discussion, the commentator rearranges the internal hierarchy and the priorities in the text. By focusing on these key passages, he establishes them as the center of attention and, by clarifying them, he carries the inquiry one step further; he thereby enriches the tradition by adding new vocabulary and eliciting novel associations with terms belonging to another author's work. Thus, a particular question can slowly evolve by only seemingly continuing to exist. And, much in the same way as nature gives rise to a new species by natural selection, commentators unwittingly contribute to the creation of new forms of thinking by picking out certain terms, passages and points, and allowing them to develop by using various techniques of exegesis (such as association, division, equation, translation and comparison of concepts and terms). This mechanism of transmission and creation is even more spectacular when it occurs across languages and cultures, and terms literally require translation in order to fit a new intellectual environment, as well as the changing preoccupation of a new age. Thus, for example, different translations of the Aristotelian term 'endoxa' from Cicero to Perelman underline its different associations with the reputable, the probable and the reasonable in turn, and allow Aristotle's text to raise new questions and suggest novel developments.

However, a tradition is not identical with the content of what is transmitted and also includes the manner and modalities of its acceptance. Thus, as Alisdair MacIntyre writes, "a tradition is more than a coherent movement of thought. It is such a movement in the course of which those engaging in such movement become aware of it and of its direction and in self-aware fashion attempt to engage in its debates and to carry its enquiries forward" (1988: 326). In this sense, a tradition becomes a resource for each individual's new way of conceptualizing the issues and a tool of creative achievement. Also, the sources of the tradition themselves are continuously refashioned through the process of transmission itself (Mali 1989: 159). Commentaries as a particular *genre* of philosophical writing have recently attracted scholarly attention;[6] they are considered not only as the main vehicle for the transmission of a text and the set of questions it contains, and hence for the perpetuation of a tradition, but also as a instrument for its enrichment through the addition of new references and meanings. A commentary typically exhibits a multiplication of authors and layers of understanding, which can itself be viewed as having an important heuristic function: "The plurality of cited voices invites the dialogue between the ancient authors and modern readers that is essential to each subsequent generation's understanding of a classical text – and that can even release a reader's creativity" (Shuttleworth Kraus 2002: 22). Contrary to our common intuitions, a living tradition includes change; indeed it can be characterized as a "structured potential for change" (Shils 1981: 145).

At each important step, a tradition exists by being appropriated by individual authors and by becoming part of their own conceptions – or pre-conceptions – of knowledge and reality. In this respect, there is an important analogy between a tradition of thought, as I have defined it, and a written commentary as a literary form: as the authors of a commentary aim at identifying and dealing with a single timeless question by seemingly explicating an ancient historical text, so authors working within a tradition refer back to a founding text, not for historical reasons but in order to answer a novel question. Commentaries, writes a scholar of late antiquity, “tend to be an impersonal product” and they “play down the intermediary contributions, while looking backward to the past in order to search for (or to reconstruct) a timeless truth, held to be definitively contained in the foundational texts of the school” (Fazzo 2004: 7).

Given this conception of what a tradition is and how it develops, its historical reconstruction cannot be reduced to a static chronological narrative of all the works referring directly to a single founding text – in our case Aristotle’s *Topics*. Rather, reconstructing a living tradition of thought involves unearthing the thread linking different and distant authors, taking into account the specific reasons why each author refers to the tradition, and the particular way in which he does so. Thus, this approach is both more partisan, more selective and less chronological than other historical analyses. It is more partisan insofar as it highlights those elements within the tradition which were referred to, and used by, later authors in order to initiate further developments. Scholastic developments, for example, have been considered by Renaissance authors as a negative backdrop against which they could and should develop a new notion of dialectic, which they considered to be in the continuity of ancient Greek and Latin approaches. For this reason their writings are not crucial in our reconstruction of the tradition.

Moreover, even though a tradition of thought is a continuous process of transmission and modification, its reconstruction cannot be exhaustive. Like the geological evidence for the history of a species, the discovery and understanding of just few significant moments in the history of a tradition can provide sufficient hints for reconstructing its main development. Thus, reconstructing a tradition of thought is a selective enterprise insofar as it takes into account the way in which each author considers his own past. This is equally true reflectively: my own particular viewpoint – the meaning and purpose of dialectic with respect to knowledge and its relationship with demonstration and rhetoric – determines the extension and the content on the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic. A tradition of thought is a constantly moving target, so to speak. Finally, the reconstruction of a tradition is less chronological than other historical approaches: authors like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes, whose work on dialectic became influential in the Renaissance, will figure later in the narrative. Insofar as they provided a major source of inspiration for Nifo’s commentary on the *Topics*, I will evoke their respective approaches to dialectic in the chapter devoted to Renaissance Aristotelianism.

Aside from its historical interest, the analysis of the tradition of dialectic has allowed me to single out a particular kind of dialectic, which I call “disputational” dialectic, and to explore its connection with the acquisition and justification of knowledge. The tradition of Aristotle’s *Topics* provides a historically based model for what Nicholas Rescher calls a “dialectical mode of inquiry” (1977: 44). This kind of inquiry is different from both rhetorical persuasion and scientific demonstration, and has two main characteristics. Firstly, it is realized through a rule-bound exchange of questions and answers, and thus requires more than one participant. Although dialectical reasoning requires the assent of an opponent, it is not the art of achieving consensus, but the art of turning dissent into a critical instrument for advancing knowledge. In this respect, dialectic is crucially different from rhetoric, with which it is often associated. Secondly, dialectical reasoning is particularly suited to subjects which still give rise to controversy and where the research is still open. This sets dialectic apart from scientific demonstration, which is concerned either with establishing scientific statements beyond all doubt or, in a more deflationary vein, with systematizing and teaching already established views. The latter reading of the Aristotelian 'apodeixis' was first given by Jonathan Barnes, one of the major scholars of Aristotle's theory of scientific knowledge. He concluded that "the theory of demonstrative science was never meant to guide or formalize scientific research: it is concerned exclusively with the teaching of facts already won; it does not describe how scientists do, or ought to, acquire knowledge; it offers a formal model of how teachers should present and impart knowledge" (1975: 77). Although this may not have been Barnes' main intent, and his reading remains controversial, by loosening the privileged connection between scientific research and demonstration, his views indirectly enhance the epistemological role of dialectic, as a means both of acquiring new knowledge and of justifying it to others. However, understanding how and why dialectic can carry out this important epistemic function is not an easy task. As we shall see, Aristotle's dialectic has been associated with a variety of roles: it has been considered in turn as a means for justifying conclusions by showing their conformity with widely accepted beliefs, and for justifying the first principles of the sciences by deducing them from reputable premises.[7] According to a less ambitious reading, it simply serves to set the stage for serious inquiry by creating common ground,[8] enhancing understanding[9] or exercising the minds.

For my part, I would like to show that dialectic is linked to "invention" in the Renaissance sense of the word. This term refers both to finding and ordering arguments in order to prove a given statement and – in a stronger sense – to finding out the truth itself: justification and discovery are intimately intertwined, and both are tightly connected to the practice of arguing. In its justification function, dialectic is first and foremost the art of proving a statement by means of an exchange of questions and answers. Dialectic proves a thesis not *simpliciter*, but to a qualified opponent and through that opponent, by forcing him to assent to a set of suitably warranted premises which will necessarily entail the conclusion. The assent of the opponent is a reasoned assent, insofar as it presupposes that all possible objections to a given premise have been overcome. A dialectical reasoning therefore yields well-tested and justified conclusions, which are nonetheless provisional, and open to revision. They have the additional advantage of being acceptable to well-qualified partners in the ongoing debate. Thus, despite the fact that the link between dialectic and truth is often discussed in the tradition, Aristotelian dialectic opens the way for a more realistic view of knowledge. As a contemporary interpreter writes:

> We must, in getting to grips with the Aristotelian conception of science (and dialectic too), get away from the superficial modern picture of a science involving simply the pursuit of truth, the end-product of which will be the systematic setting out of the body of knowledge in question. The picture is a superficial one even for modern science, since it is important not only that the truth should be arrived at but that it should be recognized as such by the scientific community. (Hamlyn 1990: 475)

CHAPTER 1

Aristotle and the art of dialectic

Dialectic enjoys a persistent presence in the Greek world. The term 'dialektikē' comes from the verb 'dialegein' – literally to talk across. The term, however, has a wide range of meanings which, according to Liddel & Scott's Greek–English Lexicon, include "to select", "to examine", and "to converse with". As a technical philosophical term, its origins can be traced back to the *reductio ad absurdum* of Zeno of Elea;[10] this, at least, is what Aristotle wrote in the *Sophist* – now lost – according to Diogenes Laertius (VIII 57). Dialectic can also be associated with the Socratic method and the tradition of the 'dissoi logoi' (manuals of *pro* and *contra* argumentation). As for the Sophists, they used the verb 'antilegein' (to speak against), rather than 'dialegein', to designate their practice of refuting their opponent's thesis while trying to establish their own. In so doing, they employed all possible rhetorical means of persuasion, even fallacious arguments. The first philosopher to consciously use the word 'dialektikē', however, was Plato. In the *Republic*, he described dialectic as being composed of two distinct moments: the first consists in relying on hypotheses in order to ascend to "that which requires no assumption and is the starting point of all"; the second consists in proceeding downwards to the conclusions by "moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas" (511 B).[11] It would seem, therefore, that according to Plato, dialectic was a practice that, by working through provisional premises, can attain a higher kind of knowledge, which can then be tested through some sort of Socratic criticism.[12] These two elements of dialectic, ascending towards the truth and critically discussing any thesis, provide the background for Aristotle's discussion of the art of dialectic, as we shall see, and were later developed by the Stoics and the Academic Skeptics. Whereas the Stoics built upon the first aspect of dialectic and defined it as the science of "correctly discussing subjects by question and answer ('dialegein')" and "of statements true, false, and neither true nor false" (DL VII 42), the skeptical Academics only practiced a critical form of dialectic, using Socratic 'elenchos' in the case of Arcesilaus and 'disputationes in utramque partem' in the case of Carneades.

Aristotle, for his part, maintains that everybody naturally does what the art of dialectic teaches one to do in a more technical way, "for all, up to a certain point, endeavor to criticize ('exetazein') or uphold ('hypechein') an argument" (Rhet. I 1,1). Besides associating dialectic to a natural form of discourse, in the

Topics Aristotle undertakes to describe dialectic as a well-codified form of oral disputation reminiscent of both Socrates' elenctic interrogations and the discussions that had taken place in Plato's Academy.[13] In this work, he strives to capture, analyze and evaluate different aspects of dialectic as it had been practiced before him: the *Topics* was the first, and has remained the only systematic treatise on dialectic, which, abstracting from practical examples, attempts to define and discuss dialectical rules, presuppositions and ends. In this "work of unstable balance" (Brunschwig 1967: LIV), Aristotle skillfully navigates between science, sophistry and rhetoric, in an attempt to carve out an epistemically significant role for rule-bound exchanges between a questioner and an answerer. For all these reasons, Aristotle's treatise on dialectic, the *Topics* – together with the *Sophistical Refutations* and the *Rhetoric* – provides a useful starting point for understanding this powerful Greek art. The *Sophistical refutations* can appropriately, and usefully, be considered as a complement to the *Topics*: they deal with arguments which appear to be real refutations but are not, for they aim exclusively at prevailing on an opponent using all available means.[14] Moreover, we find important references to dialectic in the *Rhetoric*,[15] which opens with the enigmatic statement: "Rhetoric is a counterpart ('antistrophos') to dialectic". According to Brunschwig, this indicates a strong analogical relation: "Rhetoric is to public discourse (…) what dialectic is to private, conversational and dialogical discourse" (1994: 59). Indeed, despite their different styles (historical, the *Rhetoric*, and theoretical, the *Topics*), both treatises describe ways of improving common discoursive practices. The analogy, however, is more formal than substantial. As we shall see, the fact that dialectic, unlike rhetoric, is implemented through an exchange of questions and answers, has far-reaching consequences upon the respective purposes of dialectic and rhetoric.[16]

Aristotle associated dialectic with a variety of tasks, foremost among them the attainment of some kind of knowledge. Nonetheless, it is not immediately clear how and to what extent dialectic "lies along the path to the principles of all methods of inquiry ('pros tas apason tōn methodōn archas hodon echei')" (101b4), eventually allowing us to get closer to the truth, if not to reach it. Whatever the answer to this question, however, Aristotle maintains that dialectic performs its role by virtue of being a "kind of examination ('exetastikē')" (101b3).[17] But, again, one could ask whether, and if so how, dialectic as a particular technique of examination relates to that precious kind of knowledge which we call demonstrative knowledge, the Greek 'apodeixis'. This question is all the more interesting since doubts about the strict identification of 'apodeixis' with the syllogisms of the *Analytics* have been raised. Barnes has been the first to focus on this issue in an important article, where he argued that we should "take seriously the possibility of an early Apodeictic, unhampered by bonds of necessity and universality".[18] It seems necessary, therefore, to take up the challenging task of delving into the epistemic and cognitive value of dialectic, over and above the less controversial technical aspects of the *Topics*.[19]

Rarely has an Aristotelian work been interpreted in so many and widely differing ways as the *Topics*. Scholars have viewed Aristotle's dialectic as a means of testing, persuading, producing perplexity, attaining justified conclusions and providing necessary and/or sufficient knowledge of a given question. As the editor of a recent collection of essays writes, Aristotle's dialectic has even been taken to be "the complete antithesis of philosophy (…). At the other extreme, there are commentators who argue that Aristotelian dialectic is the only way to achieve first principles" (Sim 1999: IX–X). However, even among contemporary Aristotelian scholars who have affirmed the important epistemic function of dialectic, opinions differ widely. Bolton has argued that a dialectical argument provides the justification for a particular claim because it allows us to derive it from "the most empirically well justified information that as a group we have up to now" (1990: 235). According to Bolton, dialectic embodies "a coherence theory of justification for claims and beliefs since it takes a claim to be justified just in case it is, in an appropriate way, consistent with, or implied by certain standing noted or accredited beliefs" (1990: 190). Other interpreters, including J. D. G. Evans, have identified the value of dialectic with the more modest but equally valuable role of clearing the way to knowledge by testing and eliminating various candidates to real knowledge.[20] Others, most notably Terence Irwin, have seen the role of dialectic as that of supplementing scientific demonstration with its indemonstrable principles,[21] thus identifying dialectic with a discipline whose epistemological function far outweighs that described in the *Analytics*. Still others (Hamlyn 1990; Smith 1999a) consider dialectic not as a tool for justifying our knowledge of first principles, but as a useful contribution to their understanding and acceptance.[22] According to Hamlyn, dialectic helps us "to produce some insight (*nous*, intuition) as to the truths from which demonstration can possibly start" (1990: 474 and 476).

For my part, I would like to argue that Aristotle does not have a unique answer to the question of the relationship between dialectic and knowledge. More specifically, I shall maintain that it is possible to identify in the *Topics* two different though related kinds of dialectic, which have a different cognitive significance: I shall call the first "aporetic" dialectic because of its connection with the aporetic method described at the beginning of *Metaphysics B* (995a22–36), and the second "disputational" dialectic, because of its association with a method of debating through question and answer: the former can be practiced alone, the latter requires two interlocutors. The Aristotelian discussion has set the stage for further developments: the former kind of dialectic has been developed by Cicero and by humanists like Valla and Agricola, and the latter by Alexander of Aphrodisias and early Renaissance Aristotelian commentators like Agostino Nifo.[23] As growing attention has been given to the epistemological value of dialectic, critics have tended to assimilate the two kinds of dialectic and to reduce "disputational" dialectic to "aporetic" dialectic. Bolton (1990: 198), for example, takes too seriously the idea expressed by Aristotle (163b4) that one can practice dialectic alone, and therefore underestimates the importance of the questioner-answerer exchange.[24] Distinguishing them, however, is useful inasmuch as it allows us to appreciate their respective roles, both in Aristotle and in the history of thought.

1.1 Dialectic and the aporetic method

1.1.1 What dialectic is and how it works

In the *Rhetoric* (I 4.6), Aristotle calls dialectic an "art" ('technē') or alternatively, a "science of words ('epistēmē logōn')" as opposed to a "science of a particular subject ('hypokeimenōn tinōn pragmatōn')". Each of these two characterizations sheds light on a different aspect of dialectic. "Art" refers to the union between the practical and intellectual faculties of men (NE 1140a1–23), and consists of a general judgment derived from the repetition of similar experiences ('empeiriai') (Met. 981a6–8). Science ('epistēmē') is also derived from experience, but deals with things that cannot be otherwise and that can be demonstrated (NE 1134b14–36). Like science, art implies the knowledge of causes (Met. 981a24–29). Thus, like rhetoric, dialectic is an art insofar as it fulfils its function in a rational and systematic way, as opposed to a casual and disordered way (Rhet. 1 2), and uses reasoning ('logos') as its major tool; unlike science, it deals with what is contingent. By identifying dialectic with a science of discourse as opposed to a science of things, Aristotle refers to the fact that dialectic is not a science of, and therefore does not provide us with knowledge of, a particular class of things.[25] Indeed, when at the very beginning of the *Rhetoric* Aristotle writes that rhetoric and dialectic "are concerned with matters that are in a manner within the cognizance of all men ('koina') and not confined to any special science" (1354a1–3), he intends that the practice of these two arts presupposes (but does not furnish) knowledge of such common principles as the principle of non-contradiction.[26] In this sense, dialectic as well as rhetoric are "merely faculties ('dynameis') of furnishing ('tou porisai') arguments" (Rhet. 2 7).

Aristotle gives a more precise definition of dialectic in the opening statements of the *Topics* where he characterizes his treatise as follows: "A method ('methodos') by which we shall be able to reason deductively ('syllogizesthai') from reputable opinions ('endoxa') about any problem set before us, and shall ourselves, when sustaining an argument, avoid saying anything self-contradictory" (100a 18–21).

Aristotle suggests in the *Topics* (100a 18) that such a method did not exist before him and that he wants to write a systematic treatise describing the rules and conceptual underpinnings of this widely practiced art.[27] This description of the purpose of the treatise immediately indicates two of the main components of the art of dialectic: syllogisms and reputable opinions ('endoxa').[28] A syllogism is a 'logos', namely a form of reasoning, "in which certain things having been laid down, something other than these things necessarily ('ex ananchēs') results through ('dia') them" (100a25–28). Although the definition of syllogism in the *Topics* is the same as that given in the *Analytics* (Pr. An. 24b19–21), it does not delve into the details of the internal structure of dialectical arguments. In a dialectical context, a syllogism comes to signify any deductive – as opposed to inductive – inference, which is provided with a certain necessity. This necessity, however, is not analyzed in terms of the same subject-predicate structured connections which characterize formal syllogisms. 'Endoxa', on the other hand, are precisely defined as those opinions "which commend themselves to all or to the majority or to the wise – that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them" (100b 22–23). Bolton (1990: 208–209) rightly argues that Aristotle's classification is not casual but establishes a hierarchy among 'endoxa' which are more or less worthy of belief, although he is puzzled by what seems to be a difficulty in Aristotle's classification, namely the case where an 'endoxon' happens to be endorsed by the majority and its opposite by a panel of experts. But, as Brunschwig points out (1967: 248), the conflict does not arise, because Aristotle explicitly says that the opinion of the experts can be considered a valid 'endoxon' *unless* it is in contrast with the opinion of the majority (104a11–12), i.e. if it is not paradoxical. In this sense, we can say with Reeve that "'endoxa' are *deeply* unproblematic beliefs – beliefs to which there is simply no worthwhile opposition of any sort" (1998: 241).

'Endoxa', therefore, are not just any opinions, but opinions which command belief ('pistis') in virtue of their being held by the majority or by certain authoritative groups of people. It is the authority of those who hold these opinions – the majority included –, which makes 'endoxa' suitable premises for dialectical reasoning. This becomes clear if we consider their contrast class, the first principles of the sciences ('archai'), which "command belief through themselves and not through anything else" (100b 18–19) and which for this reason constitute a necessary condition for scientific demonstration ('apodeixis'). 'Endoxa', therefore, are opinions which carry a certain amount of authority. In other words, what allows 'endoxa' to be used as premises in a dialectical reasoning is not simply the fact that they happen to be held by such and such a group of people, but it is the authority which they have acquired *by being held* by such and such a group. This is why one should be wary of translating 'endoxa' with "probabilities" as Latin interpreters (from Cicero onwards) have done, and some contemporary interpreters still do.[29] For, as Brunschwig writes, "the 'endoxal' character of an opinion or an idea is not a property which belongs to it in virtue of its intrinsic content, but rather a property which belongs to it *by fact*, insofar as it has real guarantors".[30] What this implies is that, contrary to a more common interpretation, the epistemic value of 'endoxa' is independent of their relationship to the truth. The truth of 'endoxa' – be it a likely, approximate, empirical, or knower-relative truth – is simply irrelevant to the role they are designed to play. As Brunschwig again claims (2000: 115), it may well be contingently true that 'endoxa' as reputable opinions are also the empirically most justified opinions we have, but "this coincidence does not erase the formal distinction between a statement that we accept because we find out empirically that it is true and a statement which is materially identical to the former, but that we accept for another reason, namely that we hear everybody say that it is true". This has serious epistemological implications for the function and structure of dialectical reasoning itself.

Before focusing on the purpose of dialectic, it is worth going back to Aristotle's original definition of dialectic, and dealing with two important issues. First we should consider the difference between dialectical and demonstrative reasoning. As we have seen, in dialectical reasoning we reason from 'endoxa', whereas in demonstrative reasoning we reason from the first principles of science ('archai'). This is why in the latter case, it is unnecessary to ask the reason why ('to dia ti') we believe them (100b20). As we have seen, "the reason why" we trust 'endoxa' is the fact that they have powerful guarantors. This suffices to make them suitable substitutes for 'archai', at least in the context of dialectical reasoning. Aristotle contrasts dialectical and scientific knowledge in other respects worth noting:

a. Dialectic is not directly concerned with principles which are particular to each science. Rather it deals with each subject – from physics to ethics to logic (105b19–37) – from the point of view of what is common to all of them ('koina'), and therefore in a more generic way (Rhet. 1354a1–3).
b. Scientific demonstration does not need to proceed by question and answer, because its purpose is not "making an examination ('peira')", but rather "showing ('deiknymi')" something; this is why it does not need its premises to be granted by an answerer (SR 171b3–4; see also SR 172a15–20). As we shall see, this is also true for "didactic" dialogues which consist of an exchange between a teacher and a student: here too, the content of the premises is not submitted to the answerer's acceptance, since a student has to acknowledge the scientific knowledge possessed by the teacher.[31] It would seem, therefore, that genuine dialectic is not concerned with achieving or even transmitting science, but with "examining" claims to knowledge (Met. 1004b25–26).

The second consideration pertains to the symmetric character of the definition, which could be rephrased in the following way: dialectic allows us on the one hand to derive a conclusion deductively from 'endoxa' on any subject, and on the other hand to avoid self-contradiction when "sustaining" an argument, i.e. when playing the role of the answerer. The terminology employed clearly underlines the different roles of questioner and answerer. The questioner has the task of deriving a conclusion while the answerer must "sustain ('hypechein')" an argument, i.e. defend himself, and try by all allowable means not to concede those premises which would entail the demonstration of the questioner's thesis and therefore the contradiction of his own thesis. We shall see later what these two distinct roles involve. Here, it suffices to say that the *Topics* is overwhelmingly concerned with the structure of those disputations in which two partners – each holding a thesis which is the contradictory of the one held by the other – contend in an agonistic way and in accordance with their different roles of questioner and answerer.[32] This preoccupation is clearly shown in Book VIII of the *Topics* where Aristotle sets out to advise the contenders on their respective strategies (Book VIII).

A dialectical disputation can thus be described in the following way.[33] A problem is set before two contenders. Each chooses one side of the issue (either *p* or *non-p*). The task of the questioner, who has the more active role of the two, is to build an argument whose conclusion is *p* (or *non-p* as the case may be). In "destructive" dialectic, the questioner tries to refute the answerer's thesis which is thus the focus of the discussion. In "constructive" dialectic, however, it is the questioner who tries to establish a thesis by defending it against the answerer's objections.[34] In order to do so, he will try to establish ('lambanein') one by one a number of "necessary premises" ("those by means of which reasoning proceeds", 155b20–21), which will allow him to reach the desired conclusion ('syllogismos symperasmatos') i.e. to derive *p* (or *non-p*) from the premises. Additional premises will have to be established, either inductively or deductively, in order to force the questioner to assent to each "necessary premise". A premise will be "established" once it has been conceded ('tithēnai', 'omologein') by the answerer, whose task is to prevent the questioner from reaching his conclusion *p* and only incidentally to prove *non-p*, if he succeeds in preventing a derivation of *p*. Although this is the general pattern of a disputation, we shall see that the rules which regulate a good disputation vary depending upon the type of dialectic which is being exercised (e.g. "agonistic", "peirastic", "didactic", etc.).

Among the main components of a dialectical reasoning, therefore, are *premises*, the "from which ('ex hōn')" and *problems*, the "about which ('peri hōn')" of dialectical syllogisms (101b16–17). The content of both premises and problems can be classified according to the four predicables (definition, *proprium*, genus and accident). Formally, premises and problems only differ in the way they are stated: a premise has the form of a simple question ("is *x p*?") whereas a problem has the form of a question expressing an alternative ("is *x p* or *not-p*?").[35] More substantially, the difference between premises and problems lies in their respective function in the course of disputation and in their relation to 'endoxa'. We learn that a dialectical problem has to be the expression of a highly controversial issue (104b1–5). Aristotle writes that a problem must raise a difficulty ('aporia') (104a7) and that "dialectical problems are also those for which there are contrary reasonings ('enantioi syllogismoi'), for they involve a difficulty whether something is or is not, because there are convincing ('pithanous') arguments on each side" (104b12–17). Almost all problems have a "thesis" or "paradox" as their object, namely a conception contrary to common opinion (104b36–37). Nonetheless in I 9, Aristotle himself acknowledges that a problem can be an 'aporia' but does not have to be. Other problems are controversial on account of other reasons: because the wise hold an opinion different from – but not necessarily contrary to – that of the majority; because nobody has an opinion on a given question; or because the question is too vast to be treated with a causal analysis. Also, their "demonstration ('apodeixis')" should not be too readily available or too difficult to attain (105a8).

A dialectical *premise*, on the other hand, has to be not only 'endoxon' in the sense described above, but also that which is as 'endoxon' as possible (161b37; see also SR 183a38 and Post. Anal. 81b18–20). Thus, although formally speaking a premise can be converted into a problem by changing the form of the question, in practice the requirements for being a premise or a problem are very different. This is easily explained if we look at their respective functions in the course of a disputation. A problem is the issue *about* which a conclusion ('symperasma') has to be reached. Therefore a problem should represent a controversial issue: widely held beliefs would put the two contenders in a highly asymmetrical position and would make the questioner's task far too easy. A premise, on the other hand, is put forward precisely with the intent that it should be conceded to by the answerer. This explains why, in order to make the withholding of the assent as hard as possible, premises have to represent beliefs which are as widely held as possible.[36]

After introducing the structure of dialectical reasoning in Chapter I 1, Aristotle establishes in Chapter I 2 of the *Topics* a clear albeit complex link between dialectic and knowledge; this chapter therefore becomes an inescapable reference for every analysis of the epistemic value of dialectic.

1.1.2 The uses of dialectic and its epistemic function

So far, it seems that dialectic is far removed from scientific knowledge on the one hand, and is closely associated with the technical art of disputation on the other. It is tempting to infer that dialectic is concerned with practical disputations in which only opinions, and not real knowledge, are put forward, conceded or rejected, and finally accepted. Nonetheless, this perception is challenged when we move to the second chapter of the first book, where the different ends of dialectic are set forth. Here there is some explicit talk of a serious epistemic function of dialectic, although it is not associated with disputation but with what appears to be a different methodology of inquiry. In the relevant passages (101a25–101b4), Aristotle distinguishes three uses of dialectic: mental training ('gymnasia'), conversation ('enteuxis'), and the "philosophical sciences ('kata philosophian epistēmai')." He adds a further specification of the third use which concerns "the ultimate basis ('ta prōta') of each science ('peri hekastēn epistēmēn')". Aristotle considers mental training to be a self-evident function, since once we have a 'methodos' we are able to argue ('epicherein') (101a29–30).[37] The other three uses are less evident, and deserve to be considered in a more detailed fashion.

The second use, conversation or dialectical encounters with a representative member of common people ('oi polloi'), squares well with the definition of dialectic we have discussed. Here, Aristotle spells out the usefulness of these dialectical conversations, namely that "we shall be able to deal with people on the basis of their own opinions and not those of others" (101a31–32). This will turn out to be crucial "when we shall want to persuade them to give up assertions which will seem to us openly unacceptable" (101a33–34). This use of dialectic reinforces the impression that Socrates' method of inquiry, as it is represented in Plato's Socratic dialogues, looms large in Aristotle's dialectic. Indeed, Socrates set out to refute his opponent's thesis by showing that its negation followed from opinions and beliefs to which his opponent could not but assent to. In this sense the Socratic 'elenchos' is understood in its purifying function.[38]

Regarding the third use of dialectic, "for the philosophical sciences" ('kata philosophian epistēmai'), Aristotle writes: "If we are able to raise difficulties on both sides ('amphotera diaporēsai') we shall more easily discern both truth and falsehood on every point" (101a35–36). Here, Aristotle explicitly describes the epistemic function of dialectic, and this is attested by two of the terms employed, science and truth ('epistēmē' and 'alētheia'). Another term, 'diaporēsai', is reminiscent of the aporetic method briefly described at the beginning of book B of the *Metaphysics* (995a24–995b4),[39] and explained in more details in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1145b2–7): it consists of a critical examination of the most relevant opinions held on a given subject, with a view to resolving the difficulties ('aporiai') they raise.[40] Although Aristotle does not elaborate on this important connection, several critics of the *Topics* have taken it at face value and have tended to read the philosophical function of dialectic as being tightly related to the aporetic method which Aristotle defends and practices in his other works.[41]

This reading of dialectic, however, does not completely fit the general characterization of dialectic given in Chapter I 1. Although a dialectical problem can be an 'aporia' and the aporetic method also uses 'endoxa' as a starting point, dialectic in the aporetic sense does not necessarily involve a direct disputation or an actual dialogue between a questioner and an answerer. It is instead a procedure that enables a researcher faced with an 'aporia' – a state of mind corresponding to the impossibility of advancing induced by "the equality of opposite reasonings" (145b17–18) – to work through ('diaporiein') the 'endoxa' of different people until an opening or a solution ('euporia') is found. This process is a necessary but not sufficient condition for finding a solution, which may also be unforthcoming and is only contingently related to the discussion. It consists of a critical discussion of the presuppositions and/or consequences of two different or opposing common claims, which in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1145b2–7) are called 'endoxa'. According to a common interpretation, Aristotle uses the aporetic method in order to tease out what he considers to be the truth from the most distinguished opinions of others, or from commonly held opinions ('endoxa'), and thus shows that "truth cannot be radically counterintuitive" (Most 1994: 176).[42] In the aporetic method, therefore, 'endoxa' are endowed with a certain degree of intrinsic plausibility, even a measure of truth.

Although several influential interpreters have understandably identified a philosophically significant dialectic with the aporetic method, we may note that the aporetic method differs from the dialectic Aristotle has described at the beginning of the *Topics* as far as both its aim and its practical implementation are concerned. The aim of the aporetic method is a critical but not necessarily exhaustive discussion *of* those 'endoxa' which have caused the 'aporia', whereas the aim of a dialectical disputation is to achieve a definite conclusion ('symperasma') *about* a problem or aporia. Thus, in the aporetic method, the primary objects of discussion are the 'endoxa' themselves, insofar as they are considered as problematic and in need of revision. Also, the problem to which 'endoxa' refer is only the secondary object of the investigation, although it is the underlying subject of the discussion. The primary object of a dialectical disputation, on the contrary, is the problem at hand: 'endoxa' are only the *instruments* of the investigation and their content does not have to be intrinsically plausible or bear any relationship to the truth, as the definition of the term 'endoxa' clearly shows.[43] Accordingly, the aporetic method and dialectic, as it is described in *Topics* I 1, also differ in their argumentative structure. Whereas the first takes the form of a critical – but not necessarily exhaustive –, and relatively open-ended discussion which can be conducted either alone or through a debate, the second is necessarily implemented in a highly structured rule-bound debate between two opponents, and ends with a definite conclusion: either the questioner succeeds in deriving his thesis or he fails to do so.[44]

There is nevertheless an important point of similarity between the aporetic method and dialectic, which justifies to a certain extent the fact that Aristotle hints at the aporetic method while discussing the different purposes of dialectic. Both the aporetic method and dialectic can deal with two sides of an issue, and the fact that they can do so is important for their definition and role. The aporetic method is thus a species of dialectic in the most generic sense of a discipline discussing indifferently any of two opposite claims. We can then identify an aporetic use of the dialectical method, which I shall call "aporetic dialectic". I shall distinguish it from "disputational dialectic", which designates dialectic in the proper sense of the term, namely the art of a rule-bound debate between a questioner and an answerer, which can be practiced either sophistically or for serious purposes. "Aporetic dialectic", on the other hand, is a particular way of implementing the aporetic method through debate where different "endoxal" theses actually held by some philosophers and their opposites are successively taken as the object of a dialectical debate for the purpose of testing whether or not they can stand up to examination. It can also be practiced single-handedly. Aristotle writes that "dialectic and rhetoric alone among the arts prove opposites ('tanantia syllogizesthai')" (Rhet. 1355a12), namely that they deal with both sides of an issue indifferently. However, we may add, "disputational" dialectic "can prove opposites" in a different way from "aporetic" dialectic. Whereas disputational dialectic, as opposed to science, can prove or derive either the affirmative or negative side of a proposition – although it should not, and certainly does not, do both at the same time – aporetic dialectic does – and ought to – deal with or discuss ('diaporēsai') both sides of an issue, without necessarily reaching a definite conclusion. "Aporetic" dialectic is slightly different from the aporetic method which is described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and is used by Aristotle in his works; it highlights the fact that aporetic can be practiced through debate, although it does not have to be. However, the other species of dialectic, disputational dialectic, is the discipline with which the *Topics*, the *Sophistical Refutations* and the *Rhetoric* are for the most part concerned.

The two kinds of dialectic can also – but do not have to – play complementary roles: aporetic dialectic can be both a preparatory step as well as a by-product of disputational dialectic. On the one hand, looking at both sides of an issue by providing arguments *pro* and *contra* a given proposition – i.e. practicing aporetic dialectic – can be useful to prepare the contenders for an actual dialectical disputation (162a39–162b4). On the other hand, "to take or to have taken in at a glance ('synoran') the result of each of two hypotheses is no mean instrument ('organon') for knowledge ('gnōsis') and philosophical wisdom ('kata philosophian phronēsis')" (163b9–12). Indeed, the fact of trying to derive a thesis or its opposite from suitable 'endoxa' which have been conceded to by an opponent in a debate may be an important condition for reaching the truth. It is not sufficient, though, since one also needs "to be naturally gifted ('euphyia')[45] with respect to truth: to be able properly to choose the true and avoid the false" (163b13–15, Smith's translation).[46]

The fourth use of dialectic described by Aristotle adds a layer of complication to the explanation of the relationship between dialectic and knowledge. Aristotle writes in the same chapter:

> Further ('eti de') it [dialectic] is useful in connection with the first principles ('ta prōta') of each science ('epistēmē'): for it is impossible to discuss them [the principles of each science] at all on the basis of the principles peculiar to the science in question, since the principles are primary in relation to everything else, and it is necessary to deal with them through ('dia') the generally accepted opinions ('endoxa') on each point. (101a37–b2)

On a superficial reading, it may appear that dialectic is meant here to play the same role played by 'epagōgē' in the *Posterior Analytics* (II 19), i.e. that of finding or establishing the first principles peculiar to each science ('archai'). Irwin, for example, most famously interprets this passage of the *Topics* as a reference to a "strong dialectic" (1988: 176) – a sort of hyper-aporetic dialectic – which "leads to first principles" (1988: 30), although in a different way with respect to empirical induction.[47] He thus assigns a very strong epistemological role to dialectic, which is similar to the role assigned to dialectic by Plato: "Aristotle retains Plato's belief that dialectic is also a method for reaching positive conclusions; this is why he claims that it has a road towards first principles" (Irwin 1988: 8).[48] If this were the case, however, it is conceivable that Aristotle would have taken up the issue again in some other part of the corpus, which he did not do. Moreover, if we understand this last use of dialectic in such a strong sense, we run against Aristotle's repeated claims that dialectic is not *directly* concerned with principles peculiar to each science but only with "common principles" ('koina'; see SR 170a39–40 and 170b9).[49]

Let us try to give an alternative reading of this fourth use of dialectic for "the first principles of each science". If we confine ourselves to the analysis of the text, it is by no means evident that this last use of dialectic is entirely different from its third use, aporetic dialectic, despite the fact that it is introduced by the preposition "further".[50] Instead, I would like to suggest, the fourth use of dialectic "in connection with the ultimate basis of each science" might well be a further specification of the function of dialectic "for the philosophical sciences", rather than the description of an entirely different use of dialectic.[51] This means that after having discussed several 'endoxa' by taking them successively as dialectical problems and tested them, we will have accomplished an important though indirect step *toward* the discovery of the first principles particular to each science. This is what Aristotle meant when he wrote at the end of the same passage that dialectic, "being of the nature of an examination ('exetastikē') *lies along the path* ('hodon echei')" to the principles (101b3–4). This assertion, however, does not mean that we shall be able to actually discover or in any way justify the first principles of each science in any straightforward way by using aporetic dialectic.[52] Indeed, as Brunschwig (2000: 120) notes in analyzing Aristotle's terms, dialectic is barely "useful" to "discuss" the first principles, namely to say something about them (as opposed to nothing). And Smith explicitly interprets such a preliminary examination of different claims to knowledge as, at most, the refutation of some of them (1997: 54). Connecting the discussion of the first principles to the aporetic method, he writes:

> Rather than serving as a means of *establishing the truth* of first principles, working through the puzzles will have an important effect on our *epistemic sensibilities*. We are naturally inclined to stick with the beliefs we know and reject the beliefs we know not. The realization that our familiar beliefs commit us to inconsistencies is a powerful instrument of doxastic conversion. (1999a: 19, note 11)

We must admit, therefore, that the exact function of the critical discussion of 'endoxa' with respect to the first principles of the sciences is still a matter of speculation and that it is reasonable to agree with Brunschwig, when he writes that "the *Topics* include very little, if not absolutely nothing, by way of illustrating in a precise and concrete way in virtue of what dialectic 'lies along the path ('hodon echei') to the principles of all methods of inquiry" (2000: 129). We may add that although Aristotle does not provide precise answers to this question, he explicitly opens a vast and interesting space for speculation, that Renaissance and modern commentators will exploit in order to stress the important epistemological role of dialectic.

As a preliminary conclusion on the uses of dialectic for knowledge, we can say that Aristotle's fourfold list is not entirely homogeneous as far as the criteria used are concerned. The first two uses – exercises and conversations with others – are linked to a precise technique of disputation through an asymmetric exchange of questions and answers: debating with others (in training or seriously) in order to change their views on the basis of premises expressing beliefs they are likely to assent to. These two uses correspond well to what we have called "disputational" dialectic; here 'endoxa' are the tools of dialectical argument. The third and fourth uses refer to aporetic dialectic and highlight the usefulness of examining opposite common views for securing knowledge, although its exact significance is not spelled out; here 'endoxa' are the primary objects of analysis and not the premises and tools of dialectical arguments.

If this analysis is correct, two questions appear to be crucial, but remain unanswered if we confine ourselves to Aristotle's text: why did Aristotle introduce the aporetic method in the *Topics*, since, as we have seen, it differs in important ways from the description of dialectic as a method for conducting rule-bound debates, which he provides in Books I and VIII of the treatise? One possible answer is that there is a family resemblance between aporetic dialectic and disputational dialectic, which can both be included under the same heading of "generic dialectic" understood as that discipline which can deal indifferently with both sides of an issue.[53] Also, as we have seen, the aporetic method can be practiced through debate; in this sense "aporetic dialectic" can be seen as a particular application of disputational dialectic. A second more important question concerns the epistemic value of dialectic: if it is the third and the fourth uses of dialectic which are explicitly associated with the realm of knowledge ("for the philosophical sciences" and "for the first principles of each science"), and if these uses of dialectic have only an indirect connection with "disputational dialectic", what can we infer from the *Topics* about the relationship between "disputational" dialectic – dialectic properly understood – and knowledge? Although Aristotle does not give a straightforward answer to this question, it seems worthwhile to explore the issue further, and follow the hints that we can find in Aristotle's work, and which have certainly inspired later commentators.

1.2 Disputation and knowledge: "peirastic" and "non-peirastic" dialectic

Having distinguished "aporetic" from "disputational" dialectic, and having examined aporetic dialectic, what can we say about the epistemic function of disputational dialectic? In this section I shall outline the different kinds of disputational dialectic which Aristotle associated with equally different tasks. In particular I shall focus on what Aristotle singled out as "peirastic" dialectic – where 'peira' means both examination and test – which is a likely candidate for a epistemically significant type of disputational dialectic. Indeed, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle uses the term 'peirastikē' to distinguish dialectic from philosophy and sophistry: "Dialectic is merely critical ('peirastikē') where philosophy claims to know, and sophistic is what appears to be philosophy but is not" (1004b25–27). Indeed, "peirastic" dialectic is contrasted with a form of agonistic dialectic in Book VIII of the *Topics*, and with sophistry in the *Sophistical Refutations*; in both cases, Aristotle highlights the cognitive value of peirastic dialectic by distinguishing it from dialectic understood as a game of some sort. I shall analyze these two texts in turn, because "peirastic" dialectic assumes in each of them a different form, namely a destructive one in the *Sophistical Refutations*, where sophisms are examined, and a constructive one in Book VIII of the *Topics*, where serious dialectic is discussed. These different characterizations of peirastic dialectic correspond to the distinction between "constructive dialectical methodology ('kataskeuastikē')" and "destructive dialectical methodology ('anaskeuastikē')" which Aristotle makes at the beginning of Book II of the *Topics* (109a3).[54] In the second part of my analysis I shall look at the internal constraints and underlying assumptions of an epistemically valuable peirastic disputation which will allow us to speak if not of a "dialectical demonstration" – a very Aristotelian oxymoron – at least of a "dialectical proof".[55]

1.2.1 The *Sophistical Refutations*

The passages related to dialectic in the *Sophistical Refutations* are of special importance because here Aristotle wants to distinguish dialectic – and rhetoric, insofar as it partakes of the art of dialectic – from sophistry and eristic,[56] those purely agonistic and, worse still, deceptive practices Aristotle wants to undermine. In this respect, Aristotle shares Socrates' and Plato's misgivings about the Sophists, and tries to defeat them without abandoning the disputational model of dialectic. Thus, far from being a treatise on how to exercise sophistical reasoning, the *Sophistical Refutations* outline strategies both for debunking sophistry and for defending oneself from it when questioned; to that extent, this treatise can be considered as an integral part of Aristotle's treatise specifically devoted to dialectic. We may also suppose that the type of dialectic which helps unveil the Sophist's tricks and to distinguish the appearances of wisdom from real wisdom is necessarily a cognitively valuable art.

The *Sophistical Refutations* opens with a distinction between apparent wisdom and real wisdom (165a22); Aristotle then sets out to distinguish four kinds of arguments used in discussions ('en tō dialegesthai'): didactic, dialectical, "peirastic", and eristic (SR 165a37–b1). He claims that he has treated didactic (or "demonstrative") arguments in the *Analytics* (SR 165b1–12), dialectic and "peirastic" arguments "elsewhere" (presumably in the *Topics*), and that here he will concentrate on "competitive ('agōnistikoi')" and "contentious ('eristikoi')" arguments. Although here "peirastic" arguments are distinguished from "dialectical" arguments, it becomes clear in the course of the treatise that "peirastic" is just another mode of dialectic, whenever dialectic is exercised towards a certain end, namely that of unmasking apparent knowledge. Let us consider the issue in Aristotle's own terms: "Dialectical arguments are those which, starting from 'endoxa', reason to establish a contradiction ('syllogistikoi antifaseōs')" (165b4–5), whereas "peirastic arguments are those which are based on opinions held by the answerer and necessarily known to one who claims to have knowledge ('eidenai tōi prospoiumenōi echein tēn epistēmēn') of the subject involved" (165b5–7). It is clear that dialectical arguments are those which aim at deriving from any suitable 'endoxa' the opposite of the answerer's opinion. As for "peirastic" arguments, they seem to be similar in structure but different in aim: they are intended to refute the opponent's position by using as 'endoxa' the opinions held by someone who "claims to have knowledge", but does not possess it. This interpretation is supported by another passage later in the *Sophistical Refutations*. Here Aristotle writes that "Peirastic is a kind of dialectic ('dialectikē tis') and has in view not the man who knows but the man who is ignorant and pretends to know ('prospoioumenon')" (171b5–6). Notice that the term 'prospoioumenon' also figured in 165b4–5, where Aristotle describes the object of "peirastic". Again, at 171b10, Aristotle points to the fact that dialectic is 'peirastic' when it examines apparent reasoning ('phainomenos syllogismos'). From these passages it is clear that in the *Sophistical Refutations* "peirastic" is a critical function of dialectic applied through disputation ('en tō dialegesthai', 165a37), and that it is a particular kind of refutation ('elenchos') intended to unveil those who pretend (or seem) to know but in fact do not.

On the questioner's side, we can practice peirastic dialectic in order to unmask an answerer who pretends to know by showing that he contradicts himself. It is exactly what the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues does. Indeed, in a rather convoluted passage (183b3–8), Aristotle writes that Socrates did not ask questions in order to derive a conclusion himself (because he professed ignorance), but rather did so in order to unmask the answerer.[57] Alternatively, when "sustaining" an argument from a sophistical attack, i.e. when playing the role of the answerer, the treatise constitutes a method of "defending our thesis" (ibid. 183a6–7), by presumably not conceding those premises which have been derived by sophistical reasoning and which would lead to self-contradiction.[58]

1.2.2 The eighth book of the *Topics*

In the eighth book of the *Topics* – more particularly in Chapter 5 – Aristotle expands on "disputational" dialectic, namely dialectic as an instrument for conducting a question-and-answer exchange on the basis of 'endoxa', and discusses "peirastic" dialectic with a view to setting out strategies for both the questioner and the answerer.[59] As in the *Sophistical Refutations*, it seems difficult to identify "peirastic" dialectic with an aporetic procedure involving the evaluation of different views independently from disputation.[60] On the other hand, it is natural to see a strong connection between the "peirastic" of the *Sophistical Refutation* and the "peirastic" of the *Topics*, despite the different contexts in which this type of dialectic is discussed: the use of dialectic to defeat the sophists in the former, the definition of the respective roles of the disputants in the latter.

According to Aristotle, the respective roles of the questioner and the answerer can be defined, in a general way, as follows:

> The function of the questioner is to direct the discussion in such a way as to make the answerer admit the most paradoxical ('adoxatata') opinions among those which are made necessary by his thesis. The function of the answerer is to make it appear that the impossible or paradoxical character of the opinions which result from the thesis is not his own fault, but is due instead to the thesis. For one may, no doubt, distinguish between the mistake of taking up a wrong thesis to start with, and that of not maintaining it properly after it has been taken up".
>
> (159a18–23; translation mine)

Given that the "thesis" is a "conception contrary to an accepted opinion ('paradoxon')" (104b35), and that it can be identified with the proposition defended by the answerer, the purpose of the questioner is to force the answerer to admit those propositions which are 'paradoxical' with respect to his own thesis, namely those that contradict it. The function of the answerer, on the other hand, is to do all that he can not to admit those paradoxical propositions and hence defend his own thesis. In order to do so, the answerer has to argue his case so effectively that, if the questioner achieves his goal, the fault will lie not with the reasoning of the answer, but with the thesis he defends. In other words, if the questioner succeeds in refuting the answerer, it will be "because of the thesis", namely because the thesis held by the answerer was so weak that is was impossible for the answerer to prevent it from being undermined. This description fits well the "destructive" dialectic mentioned in the *Sophistical Refutations*, namely a situation where the questioner tries to refute the answerer's thesis. But, with a slight change of focus we can see how the same strategy can perfectly fit "constructive" dialectic. Since a dialectical problem always has the form: "is *x p* or *not-p*?", the questioner always maintains the contradictory of the answerer's thesis. Therefore, when this is refuted, the questioner's thesis is established. If this is so, we can see that the best way for a questioner to establish his own thesis is for an answerer to fail to establish his, which in practice is the same as for the latter to fail to refute the questioner's thesis.

Aristotle rephrases his description of peirastic dialectic in the following chapter: "The questioner must by some means or other appear to be producing some effect ('phainesthai ti dei poiein'), while the answerer must appear to be unaffected ('mēden phainesthai paschein')" (159a31–33). Here, however, Aristotle adds a strong qualification of appearance ('phainesthai') to his description of the respective roles of the disputants: in so doing he describes a dialectic practiced for sophistical rather than for philosophical purposes. Surely enough, in the same passage Aristotle tells us that this description does not fit all disputants but only those who are "competing with one another ('agonizomenōn')" (159a31), a term which in the *Sophistical Refutations* (165b11–12) is associated with eristic arguments and with the exercise of sophistry. He contrasts these agonistically-oriented contenders to those who argue "for the sake of examination and inquiry ('charin peiras kai skepseōs')" (159a34).[61] Aristotle adds that for these people no rules have been set out yet which would tell a questioner and an answerer how to exercise their roles "well ('kalōs')". It follows that the description of their tasks given above (159a18–23) is not enough to characterize one who is genuinely seeking knowledge with respect to one who is seeking the *appearance* of knowledge. In the same passage, Aristotle also distinguishes between "agonistic" discussants and "those who teach and learn" (159a27). As he states elsewhere (161a25–27), those who teach have to reason from true premises only and, accordingly, the one who learns always has to concede true premises. In this case, however, the granted premises must express the answerer's real belief "since no one even attempts to teach a lie" (159a29).

Thus, there are three forms of dialectical arguments: agonistic (or sophistical), didactic, and "peirastic" arguments. By contrasting the latter to both sophistical and didactic dialectic, Aristotle tries to define the limits and features of dialectic proper, namely dialectic for the purpose of "examination" and "inquiry". From the passages just quoted, we may speculate that the subtle difference between these kinds of disputational dialectic hinges on the role of the answerer and on the premises which he is, or is not, allowed to grant the questioner in each case. Let us consider the first distinction, that between "didactic" and "peirastic" dialectic. As we have mentioned, in "didactic" dialectic the premises proposed for acceptance must be true, since a teacher would not try to teach lies. This is why this kind of dialectical reasoning can be compared to the apodeictic arguments of the *Analytics* (165b9): didactic dialectic appears as a dialogic implementation of 'apodeixis' which is particularly effective for pedagogical purposes. Indeed, Aristotle contrasts dialectic as it is practiced by someone who imparts knowledge and dialectic as it is practiced by someone who is a simple questioner: "It is clear then that a man who is imparting knowledge, and a mere questioner, do not have the same right to claim an admission ('ouk homoiōs [...] axiōteon tithenai')" (159a13–14). Thus, whereas a teacher has the right to have his 'endoxa' accepted by the student, a dialectician does not have that right. On the contrary, the latter has to accept the rule that the 'endoxical' premises he puts forward can be assented to by the answerer only if he has found no objections to them.

Let us now consider the second distinction, that between "agonistic" and "peirastic" dialectic. A peirastic discussion needs to satisfy certain conditions concerning the premises one is allowed to put forward and the rules for accepting them. Firstly, since "he who reasons well demonstrates ('apodeiknysi') his proposition from more generally accepted ('ex endoxoterōn') and more known ('gnōrimōterōn') premises" (159b8–9),[62] and given that "the less known is to be reached ('perainesthai') through the more known" (159b14–15), if any of the questions asked is not of this kind "the answerer ought not to agree to them" (159b16). In what sense are the premises to be assented to more "known" than the conclusions? Clearly in a dialectical context Aristotle does not mean "more known absolutely", like the first principles of demonstration,[63] but more known to the contenders. Thus, the more known the premises, the more 'endoxa' they are, the likelier they will be accepted by the answerer. In turn, I think that 'gnōrimōterōn' does not represent different requirements from 'endoxoterōn': the fact that the premises are "more known" – not absolutely but to a trustworthy group of the population – is only a specification of the reason why in a dialectical reasoning we need premises which are "more widely accepted" than the conclusions. The obligation according to which the answerer has to concede only premises more known than the conclusion is valid regardless of the kind of theses held by the two contenders, for "those who attempt to reason from premises less generally accepted than the conclusion obviously do not reason properly; therefore such premises should not be conceded to questioners" (160a14–17). Conversely, whenever the questioner reasons properly (kalōs syllogizesthai'), the answerer *has to agree* to well-chosen premises unless he behaves "peevishly ('dyskolanein')"; in the latter case "people make their discussions contentious instead of dialectical" (161a23).

A second way to behave peevishly, i.e. to have a purely agonistic (or contentious) aim in mind, is "to refuse to make an admission ('mē tithenai'), when one has no objection or counterargument to advance" and to act in a such way as to interfere with the reasoning (160b11–12). Among the four ways in which the answerer can prevent the questioner from finishing his argument are objecting to a premise and contructing counterarguments to it; the latter is a more effective strategy, insofar as it shows *why* and not only *that* the premise cannot be accepted. Two additional strategies consist in requesting a modification of the question if it has been poorly asked, and making objections which would take longer to answer than the time allotted (161a1–12). An answerer who follows these rules therefore not only is not a Sophist, but will also be able to prevent a sophistical questioner from achieving his goal.

But what does *following the correct rules* for a disputation, a practical requirement, has to do with the art of "examination and inquiry"? This question will appear even more intriguing once we look at the third requirement for a disputation to be peirastic. Aristotle writes twice that whereas agonistic contenders have different goals (i.e. for each of them to win), "peirastic" contenders have to carry out a "common task ('koinon ergon' (161a22) and a common purpose ('koinon prokeimenon')" (161a38–39): indeed, agonistic contenders cannot pursue a common goal since it is impossible for both of them to win the disputation, and they can bypass the rules of the disputation. Therefore, an easy rendition of the condition for a disputation to be peirastic, is to say that the "common purpose" is simply the *discussion* itself, namely the fact of "carrying out a reasoning in a proper way ('kalōs syllogizesthai')" (160a16).[64] Indeed, at the end of the disputation, regardless of whether there is a winner or not, the two contenders will be also judged with respect to the way in which they have conducted their argumentations, so that one can end up being a good loser, in which case the fault will not be with him but with the thesis. However, the rules which are supposed to distinguish "peirastic" from "agonistic" dialectic, in fact reduce "peirastic" to "good agonistic" and do not account for the connection between "peirastic" and knowledge.

Could it be that the "common task" of the diputants involves something over and above the fact of abiding by certain rules of discussion? And, if this is the case, what is it? In other words, in what respects does "peirastic" dialectic differ from "good agonistic"? And to what extent does the peirastic dialectic described in Book VIII of the *Topics* have a more constructive purpose than the purificational peirastic of the *Sophistical Refutations* which we have assimilated to the Socratic 'elenchos'? If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, might we say that peirastic dialectic, as a kind of disputational dialectic, can provide a proof of sorts for its conclusions? Before we can answer these questions we need to look briefly at the last and important piece of the interpretative puzzle: the 'topoi'.

1.3 The 'topoi' in rhetoric and dialectic

Until now the 'topoi', which constitute the bulk of Aristotle's *Topics* (Books II–VII) and also figure in a few chapters of the *Rhetoric* (II 18–24), have not appeared in the analysis of the role and structure of dialectic. The 'topoi' are an intriguing aspect of Aristotle's dialectic, insofar as Aristotle himself does not define the notion, apart from a relatively uninformative mention in the *Rhetoric*. There he identifies a topic ('topos') with an element ('stoicheion') and writes that "element (or topic) is a head under which ('eis ho') several enthymemes are included" (II 26.1).[65] The nature and role of the 'topoi', however, can be reconstructed by looking at the context in which they appear and the language used in referring to them. For the most part, they are introduced with a simple "from which ('ex hōn')" of the arguments ('logoi') of which they can therefore be considered the sources. But how are the 'topoi' sources of arguments? The literal meaning of the word might give us some insight; it would seem that the term is taken from the rhetoricians' art of memory, where 'topos' is a place where different items can be arranged in an order that will aid in their subsequent recollection. Accordingly, Cicero translates 'topos' by 'sedes argumentorum', i.e. the seat of arguments. Ross, continuing this tradition in modern times, speaks of the 'topoi' as "pigeon holes"

(Aristotle 1958). This rather neutral rendition of the 'topoi', though, does not square easily with their somewhat complex and cognitively more determinate structure. In fact, starting from ancient commentators, such as Theophrastus and Themistius up to modern interpreters, another school of thought sees the 'topoi' as lines of argument and rules of inference (Bird 1962).[66] The interpretations of the function of the 'topoi' differ accordingly: for Greek commentators such as Theophrastus and Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as for Latin authors, 'topoi' serve as tools both for finding arguments i.e. for invention, and for justifying conclusions. Thus, through the 'topoi' dialectic is historically related to the rich notion of invention, which is relevant for understanding the function of both rhetorical and dialectical arguments.

1.3.1 Rhetorical and dialectical invention

'Euresis', the Greek term for 'inventio', is not a common Aristotelian term[67] but later became a commonplace in the Latin tripartition of rhetoric: invention, disposition and enunciation. This tripartition itself, however, is present in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and, what's more, it also appears in the *Topics*. At the beginning of Book VIII of the latter work, Aristotle writes that "he who is about to ask questions must, first of all, choose the 'topon' from which he must make his attack; secondly he must formulate his questions and arrange ('taxis') them one by one; thirdly and lastly, he must go on to address them to another person" (155b4–8). In the next paragraph he continues: "The sources ('topoi') from which to derive have already been stated. We must now deal with arrangement ('taxis') and the framing of questions" (155b16–18). In this passage Aristotle alludes to the fact that he has dealt with 'euresis', what later will be called 'inventio', in Books I to VII of the *Topics* and that he intends to proceed to disposition and enunciation in Book VIII. It is also clear that the first stage has to do with the 'topoi', although he does not explain in what respect the 'topoi' are related to invention.[68] Aristotle refers to this tripartition also in the *Rhetoric*; at the end of Book II, we read: "Now, since there are three things with regard to discourse ('logos') to which special attention should be devoted, let what has been said suffice for examples, maxims, enthymemes and what concerns discursive reasoning ('dianoia') generally, for the sources of a supply of arguments ('hothen de euporēsomen').[69] It only remains to speak of style ('lexis') and arrangement ('taxis')" (II 26.5). Here, the first part of rhetoric is described as including everything that has to do with the sources of "discursive reasoning ('dianoia')". Indeed, the 'topoi' constitute the source of 'dianoia' in two ways: they provide the material for it ('hothen euporēsomen') and a way of teleologically structuring this material so that it can provide a successful solution of the issue.

In this last sense, 'topoi' are blueprints of arguments, or sketchy argument forms. Again, at the beginning of Book III of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle refers to the first part of rhetoric as that which provides "the sources of proofs ('ek tinōn ai pisteis')",[70] and also as that "which gives things themselves their persuasiveness ('ek tinōn echei to pithanon')" (III 1.3). In these passages, therefore, Aristotle stresses the probative character of the arguments described in the first part of rhetoric as well as of their sources, the 'topoi'.

In summary, we can say that the first part of both dialectic and rhetoric consists very generally in describing ways of finding the appropriate arguments and hence also the premises relative to those arguments. This is why it came to be known as 'inventio'. This description, however, does not capture the complexity of interrelated meanings and implications which Aristotle attributed to invention. This concept includes the following aspects: (a) an emphasis on the rationality of dialectic which is common to both rhetoric and philosophy (155b7–8); (b) the way in which this rationality expresses itself in "discursive reasoning ('dianoia')", which includes both rhetorical and dialectical arguments (dialectical syllogisms, enthymemes, maximes);[71] (c) the "sources" ('ex hōn') of these argument forms, namely the 'topoi'; (d) the application of these argument forms to the subject at hand with a view to proving one's case by creating a belief ('pistis') in rhetoric or validating conclusions in dialectic.

1.3.2 The nature and function of the 'topoi'

We can now proceed to examine more closely the nature of the 'topoi' and their function in dialectical and rhetorical invention, which, as we have seen, includes both the arguments themselves and their sources, the 'topoi'. But how exactly are arguments related to the 'topoi'? Since rhetorical 'topoi' are slightly different from, and developed to a lesser degree than dialectical 'topoi', I will deal with the latter first, leaving aside, for the time being, the more controversial issue of rhetorical 'topoi'. We have mentioned that both dialectical premises and problems can be arranged under one of the four predicables (accident, genus, *proprium*, and definition). Accordingly, the 'topoi' in general concern the attribution of a predicate to a subject, in virtue of one of the four predicables.[72]

Let us first see what a topic actually is by looking at two examples. The first is taken from Book II of the *Topics*, where Aristotle deals with the topics of accident. He writes: "One 'topos' is to see whether your opponent has assigned as an accident something which belongs in some other way. (…) For a predicate taken from a genus is never applied to a species in a derived verbal form, but all genera are predicated unequivocally of their species; for ('gar') the species take the name and the description of their genera" (109a34–b7). The second example is taken from Book IV, where Aristotle introduces the topic of genus, which is described as follows:

> Further, you must see whether the genus and the species are not in the same division ('diairesis'), but one is a substance and the other a quality, as, for example, 'snow' and 'swan' are substance , but 'white' is not a substance but a quality; so that 'white' is not the genus of 'snow' or 'swan'. (…) For the genera of relatives are themselves relatives. (…) To put the matter generally, the genus must fall under the same division as the species. (120b36–121a8)

Many of the topics, therefore, consist of both a prescription or a rule (introduced by "see whether… ['ei']") and a law or principle (introduced by "since… ['gar']") and examples are usually given to illustrate the point. This is why, since the times of Theophrastus and Alexander of Aphrodisias, there has been a debate about the real nature of a topic: whether it should be identified with a practical *rule* and a *strategy* for finding the premises of arguments or with a *principle* for justifying inferences. Both of those ancient commentators came down on the side of the principle as the major characterization of what a topic is. However, as Stump points out,[73] the enunciation of the strategy is not invariably followed by the enunciation of the associated principle. And, even when this is the case, the principle is often the expression of a commonsensical rule of thumb rather than a logical principle. The debate is important because the way the nature of a topic is characterized influences the description of its function and role in the dialectical process. If a topic is essentially a rule and a strategy, it will have the function of finding the appropriate premises from which the conclusion sought by the disputants can be derived. If, on the other hand, its law-like character is emphasized, a topic becomes a tool for justifying the inference from the premises to the conclusion. Like Stump, Brunschwig adopts the first approach and describes a topic as a "machine to build premises when we take as a starting point a given conclusion" (1967: XXXIX). This reading squares both with their emphasis on the manual-like character of the *Topics* (Stump 1978: 173) and with the identification of the main function of dialectic with 'inventio'. However, as Brunschwig recognizes, the general principle associated with a topic also provides a necessary connection between the newly-found premise and the conclusion. The 'topoi', therefore, not only provide a way of finding the right premises, but they do so by virtue of the necessary link they establish between the premise and the conclusion and between any two premises of the dialectical reasoning.

In conclusion, we can say that the two functions of a topic are not incompatible: on the contrary, they are strongly connected: a topic can only fulfill its heuristic function if it manages to establish a necessary relationship between the premise and the conclusion. Indeed, Aristotle writes that "the method of dealing with premises ('protaseis') constitutes the whole of this [dialectic] study ('theōria')" (SR 172b7–8). Topics, therefore, serve as "sources ('ex ōn')" of premises as well as of arguments. Nonetheless, whereas in Aristotle's text the inventive and justifying function of the 'topoi' tend to converge, the tradition of dialectic has capitalized on this dual role of dialectic by emphasizing and redefining either invention or justification.

1.4 Conclusions: dialectical reasoning, assent and necessity

At the end of our inquiry into Aristotle's *Topics*, two elements have been singled out as the main characterizing features of dialectical reasoning: 'endoxa', its premises, and its asymmetric disputational structure. Moreover, 'endoxa' as premises expressing "reputable opinions" have emerged as the crucial instrument for ensuring that dialectical reasoning, as a rule-bound debate between a questioner and an answerer, fulfills an important epistemic function. Thus, by focusing on the meaning of 'endoxa' alone, we can rule out several interpretations of the relationship between dialectic and knowledge in Aristotle's thought.

As we have seen, 'endoxa', understood as "reputable opinions" are foremost trustworthy opinions and they carry out their function irrespectively of their truth value: the fact that they may be true, probable or even false is not relevant to their ability to fulfill their assigned function. In other words, they have an external rather than an internal warrant: it is not the content they express that is important for their appreciation, but rather the fact that their content is such that it is believed by those who happen to have epistemic authority in a particular field. Accordingly, their function is to force the assent of the opponent who has to provisionally *accept*, rather than *believe* them, unless he can object to them. It is interesting to compare the translation of 'endoxa' as "reputable opinions" with other possible – and actual – misleading translations, often associated with a particular interpretation of the purpose of dialectical reasoning. The common translation of the term 'endoxa' as "generally accepted opinions" (Loeb translation) makes the opinions of wise men a particular subset of more widely accepted opinions. On the contrary, it is precisely wise men, or a relevant portion of them, who guarantee the acceptability of 'endoxa' by the wider public: "generally accepted opinions" play a role in dialectical reasoning only insofar as they represent the opinions of the experts. A more recent translation of 'endoxa' as "acceptable" opinions (Smith 1997) includes their function, that of being accepted, in the definition itself, and thus potentially – and unduly – enlarges the class of possible 'endoxa' to those opinions which are acceptable for reasons other than that of being held by a trustworthy group of people, for example opinions which are acceptable because they correspond to ancient traditional beliefs.

Accordingly, several interpreters consider that a weak version of the aporetic method is a plausible candidate for explaining the usefulness of dialectic for knowledge: an open-ended discussion *in utramque partem* will allow one either to explore and to test good candidates to knowledge, or to create a common understanding which will facilitate their acceptance (Hamlyn 1990 and Smith 1999a). However, this reading does not depend upon the rule-bound exchange of questions and answers and the related meaning of 'endoxa' as reputable opinions, which constitute the hallmark of dialectical reasoning. Even though it is true that Aristotle mentions the aporetic method as one of the reasons why dialectic is useful for knowledge, such a weak and generic reading of it would not have necessitated the complex and specific machinery Aristotle has carefully constructed and exposed in the *Topics*. Finally, this interpretation tends to stress the rhetorical dimension of dialectic at the expense of its genuinely epistemological value: starting from "acceptable opinions", dialectical reasoning cannot but reach equally acceptable and widely accepted conclusions.

A stronger reading of the purpose of dialectic is equally widespread. As we have seen, in contexts other than the *Topics*, 'endoxa' refer to "phaenomena" – that which appears to be the case – or the "observed facts" of natural philosophy (Owen 1961). Many interpreters identify both kinds of 'endoxa' – the reputable opinions of the *Topics* and the observed facts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* –, and therefore succumb to the temptation of saving the epistemic value of dialectic 'endoxa' (and the seriousness of dialectic as a philosophical enterprise) by interpreting them as well-justified opinions. According to Reeve, for example, "honest" as opposed to "plain" dialectical premises "are true and potentially objects of scientific knowledge"; this is necessary if they have to help debunk the false knowledge of the sophist (1998: 233). Pritzl argues that "Aristotelian 'endoxa' as 'phainomena' have an objective factual character appropriate to this authority" and therefore tend to be true, although "the partial or obscure truth of 'endoxa' requires articulation of explication through a critical process of supplying a 'dioti'" (1999: 75–76). According to Bolton, beliefs expressed in 'endoxa' are "most intelligible to us" insofar as they "bear a special relation to the data of experience" and are thus empirically justified (1999: 98). Insofar as dialectic can help us "find those candidates for first principles which, among other things, to do the best job of explaining the empirically most well-confirmed information that we have now" (1999: 98), and proceeds from what is "most intelligible to us" to what is "most intelligible to nature", it can offer us a "dialectical justification" by deriving a conclusion from empirically validated 'endoxa'. This justification is based upon a coherence theory of truth (ibid.: 190). Irwin (1988) maintains a similar, but even stronger, thesis. He holds that "strong" – as opposed to "weak" – dialectic allows Aristotle to justify the principle of non-contradiction in *Metaphysics* IV by showing that it presupposes beliefs ('endoxa') which are not only common but also essential to all rational thinking.

However, all these approaches suppose that 'endoxa' are significant because of their content which expresses well-justified beliefs. We have shown that this is incompatible with the definition of 'endoxa' as reputable opinions and with their role in dialectical arguments. Moreover, all these readings of Aristotle's dialectic are underdetermined by Aristotle's explicit description of its nature and role; indeed, they depend on a definition of dialectic as aporetic rather than disputational, whereas the latter is the kind of dialectic the *Topics* are mostly concerned with. Also, as we have seen, Aristotle mentions the role of dialectic for knowledge only in Chapter I 2 of the *Topics*, where he either associates it with the aporetic method, or claims that it can be useful for "dealing with the first principles of each science" (101a37–101b2). These uses are described in terms which are too vague to establish a precise and direct connection between the practice of dialectic and either philosophy or the true principles of the sciences. Moreover, he does not mention dialectic in the famous passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1145b2–7) where he associates 'endoxa' with physical phaenomena, and describes the useful epistemological role of working through 'endoxa'. Finally, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle mentions dialectic only to distinguish it from philosophy, and maintain that whereas philosophy "knows", dialectic only consists in a form of examination (1004b22–26). The question which Hamlyn very clearly asks, is thus left unanswered: "How should dialectic proceed if it starts from 'endoxa' but is to result in an intuition of the truth? On what valid basis can mere opinions lead to truth about an objective reality?" (1990: 472).

While it is tempting, for lack of textual evidence, to adopt the weak interpretation of dialectic as a generic and multifarious adjuvant to knowledge, I would like to suggest a more ambitious epistemological reading, which nevertheless differs from the strong approach discussed above. Dialectic, I maintain, does not simply serve to examine preliminary hypotheses, or to prepare the ground for rationally convincing a given audience. Rather, it provides an objective means of assessing the epistemological status of the conclusions of dialectical arguments and of justifying their acceptance. Dialectic performs this role by virtue of its disputational character, and of the fact that the premises of dialectical reasoning are warranted insofar as they express reputable beliefs. Firstly, as we have already seen, the answerer's assent to some suitably warranted premises ('endoxa') put forward by the questioner constitutes the basis for the legitimacy of the conclusion about the problem at hand. This is particularly important, since dialectical premises are not true beyond all doubt, but are in principle open to question. In dialectical reasoning, therefore, the questioner has an interest in having his premises endorsed by the opponent. Indeed, if he succeeds in completing his argument, it will be impossible for the answerer to challenge the argument by challenging the premises, and the argument will have been strengthened.[74] Moreover, this assent is a *reasoned* assent, as opposed to an indiscriminate assent to any 'endoxa'. This is so because, in declaring his assent to each of the premises of the reasoning, the answerer implicitly acknowledges that he has exhausted the objections and counterarguments that he might have put forward. In fact, the answerer *must* assent, unless he has objections or counterarguments. This is the reason why an argument from 'endoxa' as reputable opinions is not simply an argument from authority. The rules of good "peirastic" dialectical disputations outlined in Book VIII come into their own. By pledging to withhold his agreement until all imaginable objections have been discussed and exhausted, the answerer indirectly performs the role of *testing* the questioner's reasoning.[75] Also, by helping the questioner select the right premises which will allow him to carry his own reasoning to completion, the answerer indirectly – almost despite himself – contributes to *justifying* the questioner's thesis.

As a consequence, the "common task" of both contenders mentioned at *Topics* 161a22 is not to conduct the disputation according to the rules but to find out which of the two contradictory propositions making up a dialectical problem – *p* or *non-p* – is the most warranted thesis. It is as if a dialectical argument were a confrontation not between two contenders, but between two arguments: the strict adherence to the rules of the debate erases the subjective character of the disputation, so to speak, and guarantees the epistemic value of the conclusion.[76] Thus, at the end of a dialectical disputation, if the questioner's strategy succeeds, we have a conclusion which is corroborated (to borrow Popper's terminology), insofar as it has been derived from premises which have been submitted to the best possible tests the answerer could think of, and survived them. If the answerer finds a good objection, to which the questioner cannot answer, his conclusion will remain unjustified although not necessarily refuted. In order to refute it, the answerer will have to become a questioner and try to build an argument in order to prove the contradictory proposition.

But there is a second set of constraints which are intended to ensure the epistemic significance of the conclusions of "peirastic" dialectic. The inference conducted by the questioner from one set of conceded premises to the conclusion is endowed with a certain degree of necessity. Indeed, the word 'ananchē' appears in the definition of dialectical syllogism at the beginning of the *Topics*: although the necessity involved in this kind of syllogism, unlike its demonstrative counterpart, has not been explicitly analyzed by Aristotle, it is a crucial characteristic of an epistemically meaningful dialectic. The necessity of dialectical reasoning has two components. The first is a form of conceptual necessity: the answerer *cannot but* assent to the conclusion as long as he has assented to the premises, if assenting to the premises and not assenting to the conclusion involves a self-contradiction. We can argue, however, that there are also objective constraints placed not on the answerer's freedom to assent, but rather on the questioner's procedure for building his reasoning, i.e. on his choice and arrangement of the premises. These constraints are more or less stringent, but they are all meant to ensure that at each step of the reasoning the assent of the opponent can be secured. First of all, Aristotle states that deductive reasoning ('syllogismos') as opposed to induction ('epagōgē') is "more cogent ('biastikōteros')" and more "efficacious ('energesteros')" (105a18–19). Secondly, he alludes to some softer constraints which apply to dialectical reasoning: they are expressed in terms of the "well constructedness ('diarthrōsis')" (156a19–20), or the "well-connectedness" ('synecheia', 158a35, and 'syneirein', 158a37) of the argument. Finally, the proper use of the 'topoi' constitutes a harder and more objective form of constraint.

A dialectical reasoning, then, involves a double set of objective constraints which apply to the process of its implementation and which allow a "peirastic" dialectical exchange to serve the purpose of advancing knowledge: the assent of the answerer to warranted and well-tested premises on the one hand, and a certain necessity between each step of the questioner's reasoning, on the other. Therefore, insofar as the conclusions of dialectical arguments are not only corroborated but also justified, at least provisionally, dialectic achieves more than persuasion and even rational conviction of a given audience. In a short article published in French, Barnes critically discusses several possible functions of dialectic, which he understands in the disputational sense, and suggests that through dialectic "we can effectively argue in favor of first principles, without considering such arguments as *proofs*" (1991: 111–112). Indeed, they cannot be considered as "proofs" if we identify "proof" with "demonstration ('apodeixis')" as Aristotle mostly does. However, if we give a more liberal rendition of what constitutes a "proof", one that allows a proof to provide provisionally justified conclusions, then indeed the expression "dialectical proof" would be a possible and appropriate way to describe one of the main purposes of Aristotle's dialectical arguments in their disputational form. As we shall see, this is exactly what Nifo, using some insights from Alexander and Averroes, will maintain in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*.

CHAPTER 2

Dialectic in the Latin world

Cicero, Boethius and the Scholastics

Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* initiated the long and tortuous tradition of dialectic which was in its prime in the 16th century, before rapidly dying out on the verge of the scientific revolution in the 17th century. This tradition is constituted and kept alive by a series of commentaries and treatises which enrich and modify the range and significance of the text, by reinterpreting the purpose of the discipline and by redefining its main terms. Aristotle's *Topics* has been the object of several commentaries already in the Greek world: Aristotelian philosophers like Theophrastus, Strato and Eudemus, followed by Themistius, Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Neo-Platonist Ammonius Hermiae, all wrote about the *Topics*.[77] None of the commentaries are extant except Alexander of Aphrodisias' which was published in Greek and translated into Latin in the 16th century; it played a crucial role in the intellectual rediscovery of Aristotle's *Topics* in the Renaissance, as we shall see. However, other important sources find their way through history and contribute to enriching the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* up to the Renaissance.[78] Alexander discussed Theophrastus' definition of 'topos' and Themistius has been an important source for Boethius' own treatise on the *Topics*. Moreover, fragments of Themistius' commentary are reported and discussed in Averroes' commentary on the Aristotle's *Topics*, which became available in its Latin translation early in the 16th century. In the Latin world, Cicero wrote a treatise devoted to topical arguments and related – by his own admission – to Aristotle's *Topics*; five centuries later, Boethius wrote commentaries on both Cicero's *Topica* and Aristotle's *Topics* and translated both Aristotle's *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* into Latin.

Boethius' works on dialectic – *De differentiis topicis* (DDT; 1847) and *In Ciceronis topica* (ICT; 1847a) – became the major source for the Medieval understanding of the *Topics*, at least until the rediscovery of Aristotle's own texts, and it was through his work that Cicero's, Themistius' and Ammonius' reflections became part of the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*. As for Alexander of Aphrodisias, it was unclear whether Boethius was acquainted with his commentary. Boethius' work itself was the subject of several commentaries,[79] and even when later authors commented directly on Aristotle's text, or wrote about a subject related to dialectic and the 'topoi', they often adopted Boethius' approach. His translations were not known in the high Middle Ages and resurfaced with the rest of the *logica nova* in the 12th century.[80] Several commentaries on Aristotle's texts were also written in the 12th and 13th century[81] although only Albert the Great's and Adenulph's were known and cited in the Renaissance.

The purpose of the present chapter is to highlight three essential stages of the Latin tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, represented by Cicero, Boethius, and the Scholastic philosophers. Indeed, Cicero's interpretation of the *Topics* and Boethius' commentary on it constituted the first major Latin works on the *Topics*. Boethius' translation also established for the first time the Latin vocabulary, explicitly described the complex link between dialectic and rhetoric and gave a standard definition of what a 'topos' is. After the rediscovery of Aristotle's texts, the *Topics* came to be considered as a treatise describing a lower form of logic, dealing with contingent and probable, rather than necessary and true, premises. In this sense Scholastic developments were quite unaristotelian, even though, in some cases, they used the rules of argumentation derived from Book VIII of the *Topics* in order to devise the rules of the written and oral debate, the 'disputatio' and 'obligationes'. Such forms of disputation were mainly used to exercise logical skills, and their purpose was apparently disconnected from the search for knowledge. This was precisely the understanding of the *Topics* that humanists and certain Renaissance Aristotelians rejected, and it is interesting for our purpose to that extent only. Thus, the present chapter is more properly viewed as an interlude between Aristotle's relatively open text and its Renaissance interpretations and uses. Playing the true Aristotle – as read through Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes' newly translated commentaries – against the Aristotle of the Scholastics, and integrating elements of classical rhetoric, Renaissance thinkers finally developed a novel and original approach to dialectic.

2.1 Cicero: rhetoric and reasoning *in utramque partem*

One can hardly overestimate the importance of Cicero's eclecticism for the transmission and translation of Greek philosophical thought into the Latin language and culture. Having lived in the first century BC, Cicero can be considered as very close to his Greek philosophical roots. Although his knowledge of Aristotle was only sketchy,[82] Cicero partook of some of the developments of the Hellenistic schools of thought, in particular Stoicism and Academic skepticism.[83] His *Topica* were designed to instruct Trebatius, a friend and lawyer, on a subject which he had found quite obscure; in Cicero's own words, Trebatius had been "repelled from reading the books" – Aristotle's *Topics* – which were "ignored by all except a few of the professed philosophers" (*Topica* I 3). Through his work *De Inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* which was attributed to him, Cicero can also be considered the initiator of the Latin rhetorical tradition,[84] which, after being perfected by Quintilian in his *Institutiones Oratoriae*, was very influential in the Middle Ages. Here, however, the link between rhetoric and dialectic was severed:[85] rhetoric became more and more associated with poetry (the study of literature) and with the stylistic attributes of various forms of written composition – for example the letter.[86] Then, through the newly rediscovered *De oratore*, Cicero became one of the major sources of Renaissance developments in rhetoric and dialectic: both Cicero's *De Oratore* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* – translated by William of Moerbeke in the 13th century – participated in the revival of dialectic and contributed to emphasizing the connection between dialectic and rhetoric.

2.1.1 The 'loci': invention and judgment

Cicero writes in *De oratore*: "Observe that, of those most illustrious philosophers; who visited Rome as you told us, it was Diogenes who claimed to be teaching an art of speaking well ('ars bene disserendi') and of distinguishing truth from error ('ars vera ac falsa diiudicandi'), which he called by the Greek name of dialectic" (II 157, Loeb edition). Here Cicero is reporting the views of dialectic which were widely held among Stoic philosophers, namely that dialectic is "the science of correct discussions ('orthōs dialegein')", and that it has the task of distinguishing truth from falsehood, whereas rhetoric is the art of speaking well in matters of plain narrative (DL VII 41–4).

At the beginning of the *Topica* he defines dialectic as 'ratio disserendi', where 'ratio' refers to a rational and methodical activity organized by a 'logos' (II 6) and 'disserendi' refers to the discursive nature of the enterprise. He takes over the Stoic definition of dialectic as "the science of speaking well", although he distances himself from the Stoic description of the task of dialectic – to distinguish truth from falsehood; nonetheless, through his influential writings, he helped hand down to the Middle Ages precisely this Stoic notion of dialectic. Cicero divided dialectic into two parts: the 'ratio inveniendi' and the 'ratio iudicandi' (ibid.), i.e. invention and judgment.[87] In *De inventione*, Cicero defines rhetorical invention as the "discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's case plausible ('probabile')" (I 7.9). In the same work, he associates the art of invention with what he refers to as the Greek 'topikē', and the art of judgment with 'dialektikē'; he maintains that the Stoics neglected the first and concentrated instead on the second, and he adds that invention "is more useful and prior according to nature" (ibid.). Boethius will comment on this opening passage of the *Topica*, and through his commentary the association of dialectic and judgment will endure well into the Middle Ages, remaining influential at least up to the 12th century.

Cicero was the first author to associate the 'topoi' ('loci') with the art of invention, a connection which would be largely forgotten until the Renaissance. However, with him dialectic lost the specific role it had for Aristotle. The double connection established by Aristotle between dialectic and dialectical syllogism on the one hand, and between dialectic and disputation on the other hand, slowly faded away.[88] Cicero also made dialectic into a synonym for the whole of logic, which in turn is identified with a judgmental, rather than inventive, function.[89] Indeed, even though Cicero intends his treatise on dialectical invention to be related to Aristotle's *Topics* and claims to be expounding its content, in the *Topica* we find neither the Aristotelian distinction between dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms nor that between 'endoxa' and self-evident principles. Rather, we find a disorganized collection of general headings under which arguments can be found, as opposed to the series of meticulously enunciated principles according to which an argument can be constructed which are carefully classified in the central books of Aristotle's *Topics*. Indeed, Cicero defines 'topoi' (or 'loci') as the "seats of arguments ('sedes argumentorum')"[90] (II 8), and divides them into "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" topics. Whereas extrinsic topics deal with the sources of external authority (torture, for example), intrinsic topics, such as topics "from similarity" and "consequences, antecedents and contradictories", are related to the "things at issue".[91] The latter are identical to the five forms of Stoic "indemonstrable syllogisms" of early propositional logic[92] and are defined as being more suited to the dialectician than to the lawyer. Indeed, according to Cicero, most of dialectic consists of the use of these topics (XIII 57), although he usually illustrated them with examples drawn from debates in the court. Thus, in Cicero's *Topica* we witness a rather inordinate mixture of elements belonging to different domains, mainly dialectic and juridical rhetoric, which emerge as being strongly connected to each other. This ecumenical aspect of Cicero's thinking will be very important in the Renaissance, but will be ignored in the Middle Ages.

If we now turn to Cicero's rhetorical work, we find that "eloquence" – the 'ars bene dicendi'[93] – is inextricably connected both to wisdom ('sapientia') (*De inv.*, I 1), and to dialectic.[94] In *De inventione* (I 2), he notes that "reason" ('ratio') and "speech" ('oratio')[95] have transformed men "from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk". Later (I 74), he writes that the word "argument" ('argumentatio') has two meanings: on the one hand it is "a thought ('inventum') on any matter that is either probable or certain", on the other it is the "artistic embellishment ('artificiosa expoliatio') of this thought". Here again we see that dialectical and rhetorical argumentations are very closely connected.

Indeed, Cicero sees himself as situated at the crossroads of Aristotelian and Isocratean rhetoric, where the first stresses the rational aspect common to both philosophy and rhetoric, and the second insists on the form of verbal expressions. According to Cicero, the difference between rhetoric and dialectic – understood in the Stoic sense of 'ratio disserendi' – is not epistemic, since both rhetoric and dialectic deal with both "probable" and "demonstrative" arguments[96] and he sees no sharp distinction between "dialectical" and "demonstrative" syllogism in the Aristotelian sense. Rather, the difference between dialectical and rhetorical arguments is more akin to the difference between *expressed* and *unexpressed* thoughts, or between well expressed and naked thoughts: since 'logos' means both 'ratio' and 'oratio', the definition of dialectic as the 'ratio bene disserendi' presupposes that the content of an argument must be appropriately expressed in a discourse, the 'sermo' of the Humanists, in order to be effective – and even to be intelligible at all.[97]

Cicero inherited this approach from the Stoics, who held a similar view of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric, which they considered to be the two parts of the general science of 'logos': Diogenes Laertius reports that "Some [Stoic philosophers] say that the logical part [of philosophy] is divided into two sciences, rhetoric and dialectic" (VII 41; translated by Long 1987, vol. I: 183.A). A famous anecdote reported by Sextus Empiricus clearly describes their relationship: "When Zeno of Citium was asked how dialectic differs from rhetoric, he clenched his fist and spread it out again, and said, 'like this' – thereby characterizing compactness and brevity as the hallmark of dialectic by the clenching, and hinting at the breadth of rhetorical ability through the outspread and extension of his fingers" (Adv. Math. II 7; translated by Long 1987, vol. I: 185.E). However, Stoic philosophers did not associate dialectic primarily with the practice of debate. Although numerous references point to the Stoic use of the question-and-answer method, our sources do not allow us to draw conclusions about the way in which the declared task of dialectic – distinguishing truth from falsehood – can be carried out in disputational form.[98] Neither did they give special emphasis to aporetic dialectic: although they have been known to value the technique of argumentation on both sides of an issue, in sophistical fashion, they considered this practice only as a preparation for the exercise of true dialectic (Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, 1035C–1037B; translated by Long 1987, vol. I: 187).

2.1.2 Disputation and probable reasoning

In order to understand Cicero's notion of dialectic, we need to analyze Cicero's ideal of wisdom ('sapientia'), how it is acquired and how it relates to the end and methodology of the dialectician. Is Cicero committed to the Stoics' conception of dialectic as the art of distinguishing truth from falsehood, aside from adopting their description of dialectic as the "science of speaking well ('ars bene disserendi')"? In his *Academica*, devoted to the discussion of the views of what he calls the New Academy (Ac. I 45), Cicero explicitly rejects the view that dialectic can distinguish "as a judge ('disceptatrix')" what is true from what is false (Ac. II 91). Thus, even though he accepts the Stoic definition of dialectic at face value, he denies that it can ever achieve its declared goal: the ideal of Stoic wisdom is too abstract and unattainable. What kind of judgments, then, can dialectic pass? Dialectic can indeed judge "which disjunction or conjunction is true, what has been said ambiguously, what follows a certain thing and what opposes it" (Ac.II 91). However, this only consists in "passing judgment about itself ('de se ipsa iudicat')" (ibid.). Here Cicero is referring to the fact that dialectic cannot reach out from itself, but instead has to confine itself to establishing the coherence and lawfulness of various linguistic constructions and argument forms. Indeed, Cicero adds, dialectic certainly cannot judge "how big the sun is or what the highest good ('summum bonum') is" (ibid.).[99] In another passage, Cicero refers to the clarifying function of dialectic, which "interprets and makes clear the obscure […], recognizes the ambiguous and then distinguishes" (Brutus 153). For the Stoics, this function is linked to the 'criterion' for assent which discriminates between true and false impressions, and thus leads to the discovery of truth (DL VII.42; translated by Long 1987: vol. I, 183). For Cicero, on the other hand, the function of dialectic consists in making useful distinctions so that one can avoid rashness when giving one's provisional assent to a proposition or a perception.

Cicero's general philosophical outlook is closer to the Academic Arcesilaus, who had undertaken his philosophical struggle against dogmatism "because of the obscurity of the facts that had led Socrates to a confession of ignorance" (Ac. I 44).[100] By seemingly reconstructing the history of thought, Cicero vividly depicts the rationale behind the skeptical stance: like Socrates "almost all the old philosophers, who utterly denied all possibility of cognition or perception or knowledge, and maintained that the senses are limited, the mind feeble, the span of life short, and that truth (in Democritus' phrase) is sunk in a abyss, opinion and custom are all prevailing, no place is left for truth, all things successively are wrapped in darkness" (ibid.). In another passage, Cicero assimilates this skeptical conception of truth with no less than Plato's own; after all, he writes, Plato could not have reported Socrates' views unless he agreed with them (Ac. II 23). As far as knowledge and truth are concerned, then, the Ciceronian wise man has to content himself with the probable ('probabilia') and the truthseeming ('veri similia'). Indeed, Cicero not only expounds, but also endorses the Academic belief when he writes that "they hold that something is probable ('probabile') or, as it were, resembling the truth ('veri simile'), and that this provides them with a canon of judgment ('regula') both in the conduct of life and in investigation and discussion ('quaerendo ac disserendo')" (Ac. II 10.32). For men cannot grasp ('comprehendere') anything but they can only "opine" ('opinare') (Cicero, Ac. II 148). According to Cicero, the Academics are right in holding that the Stoic 'criterion' of evidence ('perspicuitas') is unattainable and that only the "probable", Carneades' 'pithanon', is within the reach of man. However, by translating Carneades' term 'pithanon' with "probable", Cicero reinterprets the Academic position: whereas the 'pithanon' refers to that which can be subjectively persuasive, the "probable" refers to that which is objectively uncertain.

On the issue of what the probable is, therefore, we witness in Cicero a coming together of different concepts which originally belonged to the different domains of philosophy, rhetoric and dialectic. In *De inventione* he says that "the probable is that which usually comes to pass ('solet fieri'), or what is based on opinion ('in opinione positum est'), or which is a part of the ordinary beliefs of mankind, or which contains in itself some resemblance to these qualities, whether such resemblance be true or false" (I 46). According to the first characterization ("that which usually comes to pass"), probabilities correspond to the translation of the 'eikota' of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, propositions which are true in most cases (Rhet. I 2.15). For most of the Academic skeptics too, as Sextus Empiricus reports, the 'pithanon' is that "which tells the truth for the most part ('epi to poly'). For both judgments and actions, as it turns out, are regulated by what holds for the most part" (Adv. Math. VII 175).[101] The second characterization of the probable ("what is based on opinion") is reminiscent of Aristotelian 'endoxa': although Cicero does not discuss 'endoxa' as such in his treatise, he assimilates 'opinio' to the probable. Moreover, according to Cicero, "opinion" is what it is *because* it has as its object the truthseeming and not truth, and not because it corresponds to a belief held by an authoritative group of people.[102] Finally, insofar as it translates the 'pithanon' of the New Academics,[103] the Ciceronian "probable" is also linked to the notion of persuasion, and thus means "that which is convincing" – the Greek 'pistis' –, which is mostly a rhetorical concept. Thus, what in Aristotle were three separate concepts – dialectical opinions ('endoxa'), rhetorical probabilities ('eikota') and what is convincing ('pistis', 'pithanon') – coalesce into one and the same concept in Cicero.[104] The mark of this convergence is the use of the same term "probable" to signify all three concepts.

If the probable, in all these different senses, is the purpose of both rhetorical and dialectical discourse, what is according to Cicero the proper method for reaching the probable? In *De oratore* Cicero writes:

> Whereas if there has really ever been a person who was able in Aristotelian fashion to speak on both sides about every subject and by means of knowing Aristotle's rules to reel off two speeches on opposite sides of every case, or in the manner of Arcesilaus and Carneades argue against every statement put forward, and who to that method adds the experience and practice in speaking [I have] indicated, he would be the one and only true and perfect orator. (III 80)

In this passage, Cicero compares the Aristotelian methodology – presumably the aporetic dialectic described in the *Topics* – with the skeptical methodology of the New Academy, namely the habit of arguing against both sides of an issue. Cicero indirectly endorses the Aristotelian methodology understood as the practice of opposing argument to argument which was customary both in the sophistical and in the skeptical traditions, but distances himself from the skeptics' purpose of arguing *against* every thesis.[105] We have seen that for Aristotle arguing *in utramque partem* is indeed a possibility connected with dialectic, but in fact it is practiced only in order to prepare the ground for a dialectical disputation, or for a philosophical investigation. Cicero therefore, has probably read Aristotle's methodology of question and answer as an aporetic procedure, and has likened it to the Academic skeptic procedure of systematically giving reasons on opposite sides of an issue, in order to judge which opinion is more probable by weighing the arguments given in its favor.[106] Indeed, Cicero's dialogues are not Socratic in that they are not as tightly structured; nor are they directed at the suspension of judgment. Rather, they represent an aporetic search for the probable. The 'disputatio' embedded in Cicero's dialogues is not a rule-bound, tight and asymmetric exchange between a questioner and an answerer, like the disputational dialectic described by Aristotle in the *Topics*. Rather, it is a critical discussion of differing views, where two or more interlocutors investigate an issue in a rather loose manner from different viewpoints. This procedure resembles that of Aristotle's 'diaporia' – the working through of opinions –, carried out in dialogue form. The conclusion is a probable judgment, namely one which we know will be true "for the most part". In Cicero, then, the investigation of truth becomes the meeting point of Aristotelian aporetic, Socratic elenchos and the Academic practice of opposing argument to argument. It is precisely this conception of dialectic which he practiced in his own philosophical dialogues, and which became a model for such mildly skeptical but positive investigations which underly the practice – although, quite interestingly, not the theory – of Renaissance dialogue writing.

2.2 Boethius, the *Topics* and the liberal arts

Boethius, who lived at the end of the 5th century AD, is traditionally considered an important bridge between the Ancient and the Medieval worlds.[107] In that respect, he is also a crucial figure in the history of the tradition of dialectic: he translated Aristotle's *Organon* in its entirety,[108] wrote commentaries on both Aristotle' *Topics* (now lost) and Cicero's *Topica* (*In Ciceronis Topica*, ICT), and composed a few treatises, including *De Topicis Differentiis* (DTD) which were very influential at least until the 12th century, when his translations of Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* became available, together with the rest of the *logica nova*; as Aristotle became the new 'auctoritas', his own treatises slowly fell out of use. Despite the fact that his analyses lie at the intersection of different sources, Boethius suggests original and influential views on key issues in dialectic and rhetoric. Indeed, he was aware of, and drew upon, Themistius' and Ammonius'[109] commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics*; in *De Topicis Differentiis*, for example, he draws on Themistius' views of what a topic is, highlighting its role in argumentation as a tool for justifying inferences, rather than simply considering it as a "seat" of possible arguments. In Book IV of the same work, where he deals with the difference between rhetorical and dialectical topics, he stresses, in Aristotelian fashion, the rational argumentative side of rhetoric, and connects it closely to dialectic. However, in his influential commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, he is thoroughly unaristotelian in disconnecting dialectic from the art of oral disputation: quite tellingly, he disregarded Books I and VIII where the rules of disputational dialectic are set forth, and concentrated instead on explicating the 'topoi' which are the object of Books II to VII of Aristotle's treatise. Moreover, as we shall see, he does not clearly distinguish between demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical arguments, and sets rhetorical standards for all kinds of argument: the goal of any argument is to be convincing, a view which is in more keeping with the Ciceronian and Quintillian rhetorical tradition, rather than with Aristotle's own approach. The preeminence of rhetoric over dialectic in this period is eloquently represented in Martianus Capella's treatise, written around 420 AD, on the role and nature of each of the liberal arts, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii,*[110] and thus reflects a common understanding. Dialectic – which is only a preparatory discipline for the exercise of rhetoric – is allegorically described as a stern, skinny, silent and hairy woman, whereas rhetoric is represented by a beautiful, majestic and highly skilled woman.[111]

Thus, although Boethius is not himself an orator, and has no specific interest in rhetorical theory, the texts that he devotes to dialectic and the topics (ICT and DTD) are in fundamental agreement with the main lines of Cicero's position. Boethius wants to preserve his broad definition of dialectic (which, however, he calls 'logice') as the 'ratio diligens disserendi', and his distinction between invention and judgment, which he calls 'topikē' and 'analytikē' respectively (ICT 1046–1047). With Boethius, therefore, dialectic loses its strict association with the art of invention and comes to embrace the whole field of logic. Regarding invention, he writes that it is useful "not that the arguments are found, for this is fully supplied by nature, but rather that the mind might arrive at arguments without any toil or any disorder, by a path and by reason rather than by chance" (ICT 1043; see also 1048).[112] Boethius justifies the usefulness of judgment by stating that "since philosophy employs investigation into ('investigatio') and contemplation ('speculatio') of things in nature as well as actions in matters of morals", we need to establish by reason "what we should adhere to or reject, do or leave undone" (ICT 1044). Faithful to Cicero's distinction, therefore, Boethius assigns the discipline devoted to the "topics ('loci')" to invention. However, apart from the initial distinction, the rest of both ICT and DTD is devoted to judgment, essentially consisting of several kinds of deductions.[113] Boethius classifies arguments in an Aristotelian fashion by distinguishing demonstrative arguments (both true and necessary), dialectical arguments (probable), and sophistical arguments (clearly fallacious).[114] Each of these kinds of argument can be studied from the point of view of both invention and judgment. As a consequence, however – and contrary to Aristotle's own doctrine – the topics are relevant to all forms of argumentation and not only to dialectical reasoning. In addition, Boethius distinguishes between the "matter" (denoting the content of the premises) and the "form" of an argument (denoting the nature and strength of the inference pattern),[115] and between "argument" ('argumentum') and "argumentation" ('argumentatio'). An *argument* is defined as "a reason ('ratio') that produces belief ('fidem faciens') regarding something that was in doubt ('rei dubiae')" (ICT 1048), but cannot produce belief unless it is expressed ('prolatio') and organized ('dispositio') in the interweaving of propositions, namely in an argumentation (ICT 1050). An *argumentation*, therefore, is the unfolding of an argument by means of discourse ('oratio') (DTD 1173D), whereas an argument is the sense ('vis sententiae'), power ('virtus'), mental content ('mens') and reason ('ratio') included in a discourse ('oratio') (DTD 1173D). An argumentation is thus a form of discourse expressing all sorts of contents and it can be either inductive or syllogistic (deductive);[116] enthymemes are considered to be deductive inferences with a missing premise (DTD 1183A). Boethius' distinction between argument and argumentation does not correspond to Cicero's (and the Stoics) contrast between rhetoric and dialectic, but rather indicates the inner complexity of any kind of discourse. Indeed, Boethius distinguishes rhetoric from dialectic (DTD 1205C–1206C) with respect to their subject, means and ends as well as to the presence or absence of an external judge. Rhetoric deals with "particular" as opposed to "universal" subjects, employs unbroken discourse, uses enthymemes and needs an external judge to determine its effectiveness. Dialectic, on the other hand, deals with general subjects, employs a question-and-answer methodology, uses syllogisms, and does not need an external judge beyond the two contenders.

Boethius' characterization of the function and nature of a topic is linked to his more general classification of arguments. Although he claims that topics – through their connection with "invention" – pertain to all forms of deductive inferences, he maintains that they are more at home in rhetorical and dialectical contexts since they both deal with arguments which are "probable" in matter, even though they may be "necessary" with respect to their form. In fact probable arguments are not arguments whose premises are true for the most part. Rather, contrary to Cicero, Boethius uses the term "probable" exclusively in the sense of "convincing".Cicero's terminology is thus used to convey the rhetorical use of the "probable" translating the Greek 'pithanon', namely "that which persuades" (DTD 1180C) rather than the Greek 'eikota', namely "that which is true for the most part", or, even less, the Greek 'endoxa' which refers to reputable opinions (DTD 1180C).[117] Boethius' close association between the probable and the persuasive is in keeping with his psychological definition of argument as "a reason ('ratio') which produces belief ('fidem facere') concerning a matter in doubt" (DTD 1173C). For, according to Boethius, though "demonstrative" arguments may be necessary, they may in fact lack the main characteristic of being always "convincing" ('probabilis'). This happens, for example, when the demonstration, though formally cogent, cannot be easily understood.[118] Thus, although some topics are said to be more suitable for demonstration than others (DTD 1193C),[119] Boethius affirms that "the purpose of the topics is to reveal ('demonstrare') a bountiful supply of arguments, which have the appearance of truth ('veri similia')" (DTD 1182A) in the sense of being convincing in virtue not so much of their form but of their matter.

Topics, then, apply to all forms of deductive reasoning, be it demonstrative, rhetorical, dialectical or sophistical. And, insofar as topics are useful in constructing all sorts of arguments, they play a crucial role in invention. Although he agrees with Cicero on this point, Boethius gives description of what a topic is and how it functions, which is more in tune with judgment than with invention. Unlike Cicero, who defines a topic as the "seat of an argument", Boethius follows Aristotle's early commentator Themistius (DTD 1173D) and identifies topics primarily with "maximal propositions ('propositio maxima')", namely "those propositions that are universal and known and manifest to such an extent that they need no proof ('probatio'), but rather themselves provide proof for things that are in doubt, for those propositions that are undoubted are generally principles of demonstration for those propositions that are uncertain" (ICT 1051). In a secondary sense, topics are the *genera* of these propositions and contain them (ICT 1052) and they are called “differences (‘differentiae’)”.[120] An example of the use of a topic both as maximal proposition and as difference is the following:

> Let us examine first the topic which arises from the whole. ‘Whole’ generally has two meanings, either genus or complete thing made up of more than one part. What is a whole as a genus often supplies arguments to questions in this way. For example, if there is a question whether justice is advantageous, one produces the syllogism: every virtue is advantageous; justice is a virtue; therefore, justice is advantageous. The question here is about accident, that is, whether advantage is an accident of justice. The Topic which is maximal proposition is this: whatever is present to the genus is present to the species. The higher Topic of this is *from the whole*, that is, from genus, namely virtue, which is the genus of justice.
>
> (DTD 1188A–C)

It is quite clear, therefore, that according to Boethius, topics are mainly principles for validating arguments rather than strategies for finding arguments: “So in one way a Topic, as was said, is a maximal, universal, principle indemonstrable and known per se proposition, which in argumentations gives force to arguments and to propositions, [being itself] either among the propositions themselves or posited outside them” (DTD 1185D). Thus topics, understood as “maximal propositions”, provide the missing premise of a categorical syllogism and validate the conditional premise of a hypothetical syllogism. As ‘differentiae’ they aid in the discovery of the middle terms of which they are the genera and which justify the conclusions.[121] It is interesting, moreover, that although Boethius maintains that unlike rhetoric, which uses continuous discourse, the method of dialectic consists in the exchange of questions and answers, nothing in Boethius’ treatment of dialectic relates to this methodology. Moreover, although Boethius not only knew, but also translated Aristotle’s *Topics* and *Analytics*, there is no clear and consistent characterization of what distinguishes a dialectical context from a demonstrative context, apart from the fact that “demonstrative” syllogisms *may* be both necessary and *not* “probable (‘probabiles’)”, i.e. readily believable, whereas “dialectical” arguments *must be* readily believable (DTD 1181C–1182A).

Boethius’ approach is an inescapable reference for the tradition we are examining. Indeed, before the 12th century, the sources for any treatment of the “topics” were Boethius’ *De differentiis topicis* and *In Ciceronis topica*, of which several commentaries survive.[122] Boethius’ work was also crucial insofar as it established the key Latin terminology of the *Topics* and made this text itself available to the Latin speaking world. Eleonore Stump, a prominent Boethius scholar who has written extensively on the tradition of the *Topics* in the Middle Ages, describes his pivotal role as follows:

> Boethius' work on dialectic, expressed primarily in *De differentiis topicis* and *In Ciceronis topica*, stands in the center of a long, rich tradition of thought stretching from Aristotle through the fourteenth century, in which the name, nature and logical role of what Boethius took to be a Topic slowly evolved until what had been the chief instrument for discovering dialectical arguments (in Aristotle's sense of "dialectical") became just one more means of validating certain sorts of conditional inferences. (1988: 7)[123]

Boethius, therefore, is a key figure in the history of the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, and at the same time an original and idiosyncratic thinker on dialectic. His interpretation of Aristotelian dialectic produced an original but not wholly coherent blend of Ciceronian elements – most notably his emphasis on the probabilistic, persuasive and inventive nature of dialectical arguments – and of the early commentary tradition of the *Topics* represented by Themistius and Ammonius, with its stronger emphasis on judgment rather than invention. As such, it did not constitute a clear and influential reference for Renaissance interpreters of the role and nature of dialectic, who rarely cite his work.[124]

2.3 Interlude: the *Topics* in the Middle Ages and the 'quaestio disputata'

The history of the *Topics*' recovery after antiquity is relatively simple compared to that of Aristotle's other works: apparently the *Topics* were not retranslated in the Middle Ages[125] and Boethius' translation was widely used until the end of the 15th century. About 250 manuscripts and a dozen printed editions of this translation survive (Minio-Paluello 1972: 301). The *Sophistical Refutations* were also translated by Boethius and recovered in the 12th century but, unlike the *Topics*, they were retranslated several times.[126] The discovery of Boethius' translations of Aristotle's original works set the stage both for new Latin commentaries and for new developments in logic.

As far as the first are concerned, the *Topics* were not much commented on in the Middle Ages: only Albert the Great's extensive commentary, written around 1250, was printed in the Renaissance[127] and Nifo repeatedly refers to it in his own commentary. Albert identified three types of dialectic: 'dialectica inquisitiva', which corresponds to Books II to VII of Aristotle's *Topics*, is the only one which is useful for philosophical and scientific investigations; 'dialectica obviativa', which is used in debates, corresponds to Book VIII (Ch. 1–13) and is not considered as relevant to the acquisition of knowledge; 'dialectica exercitativa', which corresponds to the last chapter of Book VIII (14), has the limited purpose of giving some practical advice to contenders (Wallace: 1996). According to the great scholar of Italian Humanism Eugenio Garin, early commentaries of the *Topics* emphasized the use of dialectic for disputation, a role which was lost in the more systematic treatises on logic of the same period (1969a: 43–59). We find a good example of this trend in Boethius of Dacia's commentary, written around 1270: unlike Albert, Boethius of Dacia explicitly discusses the respective functions of the questioner and the answerer and holds that the dialectical exercise plays a role in the search for the truth.[128]

The rediscovery of Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*, followed by the translation of the *Analytics* by William of Moerbeke one century later, gave rise to new developments in what came to be known as "scholastic dialectic". Although Boethius' influence continued to dominate the scene, it inspired reflections which were even more remote from Aristotle's approach to dialectic. Two developments are particularly noteworthy. On the one hand, dialectic as a discipline became a synonym for the whole of logic,[129] and thus included the demonstrative arguments described in Aristotle's *Analytics*, the "probable arguments" (topical syllogisms) described in the *Topics*, and the sophistical forms of reasoning described in the *Sophistical Refutations.* Thus, in the Scholastic period, dialectic loses its specificity and its association with invention: it no longer deals specifically with the logic of debate, but it is defined as that part of logic which is devoted to all forms of lower-certainty arguments. As a parallel development, and starting with Abelard's innovative approach, the 'loci', which were used by Boethius to validate all sorts of inferences (valid and deductive, inductive and sophistical inferences) are used only to support conditional arguments. More importantly, Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics* is now studied for its own sake and serves as a source for different kinds of oral and written disputation, i.e. the 'quaestio disputata' and 'obligationes'. After a renewal of interest in the 12th and the 13th centuries, studies of dialectic steadily declined. To use the words of a pioneer scholar of the subject, Eleonore Stump, "Topics continue in this way to eke out a meager existence throughout the fourteenth and early fifteenth century until they experience their own rebirth in the Renaissance" (1982: 299).

In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will try to do the impossible, namely to expound the main lines of the scholastic theory and interpretation of dialectic and the role attributed to the topics ('loci'). I will also briefly describe the practice of disputation which held such an important place in education after the 13th century and evaluate its relationship to Aristotelian dialectic. I will not presume to say anything original about these complex developments; rather, I will confine myself to a sketchy summary of extant research. With respect to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, as I have defined it – the art of debate for the purpose of contributing, in one way or another, to the advancement of knowledge – Medieval developments represent only a negative backdrop against which Renaissance authors, be they humanists, Aristotelians or both, developed their own doctrine and recovered what they believed to be the real Aristotelian view of dialectic. Scholastic dialectic indeed initiated a very important and rich tradition of its own in the history of logic but, as far as I can judge, was quite distant from the spirit of Aristotle's *Topics*. This is the reason why I will merely highlight a few elements which will serve as signposts for reconstructing, in spite of major discontinuities, the tenuous thread connecting Aristotle's art of debate to its Renaissance champions.

2.3.1 The topics ('loci') and scholastic dialectic

Although Boethius, as we have seen, did not follow Cicero and only paid lip service to the difference between a demonstrative and a dialectical syllogism, he held that topics ('loci'), either as "maximal propositions" and as "differences", could be usefully applied to both contexts. In addition, Boethius held that topics function in predicative arguments (where topics provided the general premises necessary to the validity of argument) as well as in hypothetical arguments (where they verify the conditional premise).[130] In his *Dialectica* (written before 1040), the Medieval logician the Computist still adopts Boethius' account, although he stresses the function of topics in hypothetical arguments. Starting with Abelard,[131] however, there is a growing awareness of the difference between inferences which are valid by virtue of their form alone (like categorical arguments) and inferences by which hold only by virtue of the necessary relationship between the objects denoted by the terms. Whereas categorical syllogisms do not need a topic, conditional arguments and enthymemes do. According to Abelard, for example, a conditional sentence like "if it is an animal it is animate" is an imperfect inference and needs a topic – namely a maximal proposition understood as a true generalization – to provide it with its "force". Also, the 13th-century group of logicians called the Terminists, the most influential of whom was Peter of Spain (1972),[132] emphasize, in an Aristotelian manner, the categorical syllogism as the sole source of the validity of arguments. According to these scholars, dialectic, which consists of topical inferences, has the limited role of turning enthymemes into valid inferences by providing a missing premise.[133] This trend continued and was formalized in later scholastic approaches to dialectic.

Thus, the 'loci' parted company with dialectic; this divorce had two main consequences as far as discussions of the topics in the 13th and 14th centuries are concerned. First we witness a move away from the Boethian dependence of all valid inferences on the content of the topics, understood as true generalizations, towards a formal consideration of all valid inferences, in keeping more with Aristotle's *Analytics* than with his *Topics*. Topics as "maximal propositions", then, are considered quite independently of the art of dialectic. They become unnecessary as a content-dependent link between the premises and the conclusion of a valid deductive argument and they are increasingly identified with the formal validating principle either of enthymemes (imperfect syllogisms) or of particular kinds of inference, namely conditional inferences ("consequences"). The topics understood as maximal propositions provide the missing link (either necessary or contingent) between the premise and the conclusion of a hypothetical argument; they constitute the "force and power" of an argument when such an argument is formally invalid in this way. The study of consequences became a very important development of scholastic logic – and quite unaristotelian at that.[134]

Secondly, and quite independently from the use of the topics, dialectical arguments ("topical syllogisms") are considered as formally valid as demonstrative arguments and as differing from them only as far as their matter is concerned: they have probable as opposed to true premises, that is, premises which are not self-evidently true. As a consequence, they produce opinion as opposed to science and therefore possess a lower status with respect to demonstrative syllogisms. Moreover, dialectic and topics are dissociated from the art of invention and therefore from rhetoric.[135] The 'loci' are the "seats" of arguments not because they help construct them, but rather because they potentially include all the arguments they can help validate. Thus, the role of the topics in the "invention" of arguments derived from 'endoxa' for the purpose of disputation was lost in the later Middle Ages, and dialectical arguments became second-class arguments insofar as they have "probable" (or true for the most part) premises. It is as if the spirit of the *Analytics* had invaded the province of dialectic proper.

Nonetheless, in his commentary to Aristotle's *Topics,* Albert distinguished the practice of debate ('dialectica utens') from the science of logic ('dialectica docens'), and identified the first with the precepts given in Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics*. Quite apart from the use of the 'topoi' to validate imperfect syllogisms, then, it is worth asking whether scholastic logic found a legitimate place for dialectical debate, and more specifically for genuine "peirastic" dialectic.

2.3.2 The Medieval 'quaestio disputata' and the 'obligationes'

As the treatment of the topics and topical inferences moved further away from the question-and-answer methodology which was still viewed by Boethius as the basic methodology of dialectic (although nothing in his theory is directly related to this practice), it may appear surprising that one of the most important means of instruction in Medieval universities from the 12th century onwards was precisely a form of oral disputation between a 'respondens' – who maintains a thesis and gives an argument for it – and an 'opponens' – who maintains the opposite thesis and attacks the respondent either by counter-argument or by objecting to his premises. This practice has a written counterpart in the form of the 'quaestiones disputatae', which follow the main lines of the oral disputation, albeit in a more structured manner. The origins of this practice are still controversial: it has been alternatively related to the discovery of Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics*,[136] to Abelard's *Sic et non*, to Aristotelian aporetic and to the 'lectio', the Medieval lecture which included an exegesis on the questions raised by the text.[137]

Whatever their origins, we can ask what is the form and aim of such disputations, and how they are related to dialectical method. An important clue as to the structure of oral disputation is found in the form of the written 'quaestiones disputatae';[138] an example from Thomas Aquinas exhibits the following structure:

a. a question is proposed: 'quaeritur utrum…' (it is asked whether…);
b. an answer followed by one or more arguments is given by the respondent: 'et videtur quod sic' (the affirmative answer is much more common than 'at videtur quod non'), 'quia', followed by one or more arguments;
c. 'sed contra' (but on the contrary): here one or more arguments in support of the opposite conclusion or objection to the previous argument are given;
d. the respondent destroys the opponent's arguments ('responsio'), by either negating or applying a 'distinguo' to any of the premises;
e. the conclusion follows, where the original position is restated: 'unde patet…'.

If the disputation is oral, however, it will continue in a more symmetric fashion, with the opponent attacking the respondent's counterargument, and so on, until either someone gives up, or the nature of original question changes by virtue of the qualifications ('distinguo') that have been introduced.

Although there is a superficial resemblance between the methodology of Book VIII of the *Topics* and the form of the 'quaestio disputata', there are important differences between Aristotle's dialectical methodology and Medieval disputations. First of all, in the latter there is neither questioner nor answerer, but rather a defender and an opponent, neither of which asks questions. In addition, they tend to exchange roles as the disputation proceeds, making the debate more symmetrical on the model of *pro* and *contra* argumentations. Furthermore, there is no restriction as to the nature of the premises which are allowed (whether 'endoxa' or not, whether general or particular to a given science). Rather, the emphasis is placed on the independent evidence existing in favor of each premise employed and on the validity of the inference. The latter, in turn, does not depend on the use of the topics but on their syllogistic or conditional form. However, given the structure that we have just outlined, what can we say about the aim and cognitive significance of such 'disputationes'?

A text by Henry of Brussels (c.1300) quoted by Grabmann[139] sheds light on three uses of the 'quaestio disputata' as far as the knowledge of truth ('cognitio veritatis') is concerned. Two of them are "didactic ('per doctrinam')" and one is "inventive ('per inventionem')". The third is explicitly identified with the virtues of arguing *in utramque partem*, namely with the fact that when the disputation is over we can weigh both sides and see where the truth lies.[140] The first didactic mode consists of a teacher/pupil interaction during which the first imparts known truths to the second; this goal, however, is primarily achieved by the 'lectio', while the 'disputatio' may at best have an indirect didactic effect on the listening pupil. The second didactic role is more important and specific: it consists in the fact that *if* the 'respondens' has been able to fend off all the challenges to his argument, his thesis will be confirmed; it will thus constitute "science or the knowledge of truth", since "the knowledge of truth *consists in* the solution of the criticisms". In fact, the victory over an opponent does not in itself directly produce the refutation or the demonstration of a given proposition, but only strengthens it insofar as it has been shown to be able to withstand criticism. Whether or not the structure of Medieval disputations was based on Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics*, then, the purpose of a scholastic disputation is clearly different from that of an Aristotelian disputation: it does not aim at building an argument supporting or refuting a thesis, as in Aristotle's disputational dialectic, but rather at showing that the argument already devised prior to the disputation can sustain criticism and can therefore confirm the thesis it supports.

There is, however, another form of reasoning which more closely resembles an Aristotelian disputation, namely the 'obligatio'. Indeed, a great number of obligation treatises from the 13th and 14th centuries, most probably developed on the basis of the rules of dialectical disputation outlined in Book VIII of the *Topics*, are extant.[141] The name itself, "obligation", derives from the idea of duty, i.e. what a respondent must or must not concede to a questioner. Whereas the early commentaries on Book VIII focused on the purpose of disputational dialectic,[142] obligational treatises focused on the formal aspect of inference and debate strategies and therefore became assimilated to "games of consistency maintenance".[143] More precisely, the 'obligatio' is based upon two Aristotelian assumptions: the first, contained in Book VIII of the *Topics* (159a15–24) instructs the respondent to answer in such a way as to be able to attribute his failure to the thesis defended, and not to his own defense of it. The second (*Prior Analytics* 32a18–20) states that from the possible follows nothing impossible. Therefore, if the respondent contradicts himself *and* if the original proposition was possible, the fault lies with him; he is thus defeated since nothing impossible follows from the possible. The job of the "opponent" (the questioner), then, is to trick the "respondent" (the answerer) into admitting contradictory statements by successive questioning, while the job of the respondent is to avoid such traps. It is this highly asymmetric character of the disputation – with the respective roles of the 'opponens' and the 'respondens' – and its openly agonistic function which allow us to view the "obligations" in close connection with Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics*. From the beginning, however, obligation treatises were associated not only with disputations but also with fallacies and sophistical moves. Indeed, obligational disputations concern primarily formal and linguistic questions such as "Is it possible that a white thing is black?", or "Is it possible that you are a donkey?"[144] This may be why their purpose is purely agonistic rather than epistemic. At best, they aim at training dialecticians in logical skills.

In the later Middle Ages, therefore, there does not seem to be any genuine equivalent of Aristotle's emphasis on the tentative but truthful character of the knowledge produced by disputational dialectic, or, in other words, a dialectic which is neither didactic, nor "sophistical", nor purely "aporetic". Indeed, the Medieval 'quaestio disputata' neither provides knowledge nor constitutes a preparatory step towards it, but emphasizes (especially in the written form) the didactic purposes of the exchange. As for *bona fide* dialectical disputations ("obligations"), they often deal with trivial questions and – not unlike sophistical disputations – they exploit the technicalities of argument forms and the deceptions of language. Far from inspiring the renaissance of dialectic in the 15th and 16th centuries, the practice of disputation as described in treatises on obligations will become the main object of humanist criticism of scholastic philosophy and will prompt the founding of a new form of dialectic in the Renaissance.

CHAPTER 3

The revival of dialectic in the Renaissance

An introduction

As we have seen, dialectic in the Middle Ages, and particularly within the so-called scholastic framework, had been somewhat reduced to the poor sister of scientific demonstration or to a tool for formal linguistic disputes. The *Topics*, little studied in their entirety and divorced from their original purpose, namely that of explaining the structure and meaning of serious disputations in connection with invention, had become a source of lower-certainty inferences (dialectical syllogisms), derived from probable premises and yielding equally probable conclusions. The Ciceronian rendition of 'endoxa' with "probabilities" proved very resilient in the Middle Ages, even in so Aristotelian a philosophical context, different from, and hostile to the rhetorical tradition. Echoes of a general attitude of disregard for the art of debate can also be found in the Jesuit 16th-century commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics*, most of which still defend a scholastic version of Aristotelianism.[145] The scholastic tradition persisted well into the 17th century and is equally reflected, among others, by another important Jesuit source on Aristotle's logic, the Coimbra commentary: here the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* are not even included "so that the reader is not obliged to enter their labyrinths" (Collegius Conimbricenses 1606, "Ad lectorem"). On the other hand, the tradition of Socratic inquiry through questions and answers, which Aristotle tried to capture in the *Topics,* had degenerated – at least in the eyes of critical humanists – into a sterile exercise of scholastic (in the sense of schoolwork) exchange of futile opinions at best, and at worst into an openly sophistic practice.[146] In order to criticize dialectic and extol rhetoric as the true art of discourse, Humanists will seize on the technical and disengaged character of "obligational" disputes.

For the purpose of reconstructing the tradition of Aristotle's dialectic, what happens in the Renaissance – and more particularly in the first half of the 16th century – is crucial. One thing is immediately clear to anyone, even approaching this subject for the first time: Aristotle's *Topics*, until then known only in Boethius' translation and little commented on, becomes the main reference text for rethinking the relationship between logic, epistemology and rhetoric. Indeed, although the importance of the text did not extend into the next century, elements of the tradition of Aristotle's dialectic may well have contributed to bringing about some of the intellectual changes which go under the name of "scientific revolution". In this domain at least, Aristotelianism – which was decried by humanists as a monolithic and backward-looking philosophical approach – became far more eclectic and innovative, and even served newly emerging humanists' concerns. As Christa Mercer writes: "The anti-establishment sentiments of the humanist and reformation leaders and the intellectual crisis they provoked encouraged critical eclecticism among Aristotelians (…). The philosophy of Aristotle was commonly put to a variety of uses and served as a starting point for many diverse investigations in all areas of philosophy" (1993: 44).

In the Renaissance, the *Topics* occupy a crucial place in three different and apparently unrelated – sometimes even antagonistic – fields. Firstly, we witness the development of a new, humanistic-oriented, and generically anti-Aristotelian logic, which refers to Aristotle's *Topics* as a founding text, and is centered for the most part around the notion of "dialectical invention". Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, published posthumously in 1515, is the most accomplished and influential text of this intellectual movement, where the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* merges with rhetorical themes inspired by Cicero and Quintilian. Secondly, with the revival of what has been called "pure Aristotelianism", the Renaissance produced new commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* – most notably Nifo's – as well as new Latin translations of the same texts. In this context, the tradition of dialectic benefited also from the Greek edition and Latin translations of Alexander of Aphrodisias' extensive commentaries[147] and from the translations of Averroes' "Middle Commentaries" on the same texts. Finally, in the second half of the 16th century three important literary-oriented treatises on the dialogue form were written, by Torquato Tasso, Carlo Sigonio and Sperone Speroni: they all depict the dialogue as the literary representation of a dialectical disputation in the sense of Aristotle's *Topics*. We may add that these three developments took place mainly in Italy – more precisely in Venice and Padua – and are only occasionally paralleled in Northern Europe.[148] In this part of the book, I wish to analyze precisely these aspects of the Renaissance interest for Aristotle's *Topics*, centering on three major works: Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, Agostino Nifo's commentary on the *Topics*, and Carlo Sigonio's *De dialogo liber*. I shall consider these works as paradigmatic of those different components of the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* in the Renaissance; the perspectives that they offer will occasionally be enriched and enlightened by reference to the positions and comments of other authors, whose purpose and remarks were in tune with those major trends.

The analysis of Renaissance dialectic from these three different perspectives will show the extent and the multifarious nature of Renaissance interest in Aristotle's dialectic. Moreover, by exploring the heyday of this tradition we shall be able to show how the lines which usually serve as clear markers in identifying separate fields in Renaissance studies are blurred. In one sense, all these developments – including Aristotelian commentaries – partake of the humanistic movement if we understand it in the broad sense of a return to the texts and values of the ancients in order to defeat and innovate on the scholastic heritage:[149] some Aristotelians, like Nifo, are no strangers to Humanism defined in this large methodological sense. Humanism and Aristotelianism also converge in the new humanist translations of Aristotle's *Topics*, the first of which is that by Lefèvre d'Etaples (1503), where word-by-word translations current in the Middles Ages give way to more fluent and elegant versions of Aristotle's texts, less abstruse in terminology and more in tune with the new preoccupations of the times.[150]

Moreover, in delineating the contours of Aristotelian dialectic in the Renaissance, we may have to remap complicated and still partly unexplored philosophical territory.[151] For example, Nifo's extensive commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* relies not only on Alexander of Aphrodisias' newly translated commentary but on Averroes' as well: in this context, then, Averroism and Alexandrinism are not two warring factions of Aristotelianism, but two aspects of the same enterprise, the recovering of the true Aristotelian meaning of dialectic.[152] Moreover, in some cases commentators readily enlist even Cicero, the hero of humanist anti-Aristotelianism, in order to explain Aristotle's *Topics*; this is the case of an anonymous commentary published in Venice in 1559, which we shall compare to Nifo's commentary.[153] Joachim Périon is also a particularly striking – and extreme – example of this trend. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, this Aristotelian enemy of Petrus Ramus sets out to show that Cicero, who avowedly sought to imitate the *Topics*, "has borrowed a lot from it" (1541: 312). In so doing, Périon reinterprets Aristotle's *Topics* in the light of Cicero's rhetorical approach, thus contributing to a thoroughly humanistic reading of Aristotle's own texts and to making Aristotle himself, no less than Cicero, a worthy author of the 'studia humanitatis', to the point where he loses his specificity. Demarcating lines between Platonism and Aristotelianism are also interestingly blurred. Plato – especially through Socrates' *persona* – looms large, in Renaissance treatises on the dialogue form written in the second half of the 16th century, together with Aristotle's *Topics*. In the field of dialectic, Platonism – sometimes even Neo-Platonism[154] – and Aristotelianism tend more often than not to converge.[155] Indeed, the treatises on the dialogue form originate from a specific question addressed in the commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*[156] – "Can a dialogue be a form of poetical imitation?" – but try to address a deeper epistemological issue, which is reminiscent of Plato's own question: what is the cognitive value of dialogue as opposed to solitary speculation? This concerns not only ethics and politics but also questions of natural philosophy, which are already admitted as legitimate subject matters of dialogues by Torquato Tasso.[157] Finally, the so-called Renaissance "new dialectic", initiated by Lorenzo Valla's *Repastinatio dialectices et philosophie* and Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* is not as anti-Aristotelian as has often been supposed, although it emphasizes rhetorical sources and persuasive discourse rather than argumentative cogency. Quite to the contrary, these authors reinstate the inventive function of discourse and the Aristotelian union of rhetoric and dialectic which had slowly been broken off in the Middle Ages; they also endow rhetoric with a higher cognitive worth precisely in the light of the *Topics*. In an interesting twist, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* published in Paris in 1541, Joachim Périon shows how "Cicero and Aristotle can be united" – as the title reads – , in order to defend true dialectic against what he believes has become the new orthodoxy of the antiaristotelian logic defended by protestant humanists like Ramus and Melanchton. Indeed, the Aristotelian adversaries of these champions of antiaristotelianism often provide us with a more interesting and open reading of Aristotle's *Topics* than the humanists do. As Erika Rummel argues in a book devoted to the humanist-scholastic debate in the Reformation, reformed teachers took up slogans from humanist writers in order to attack their catholic scholastic opponents. However, such statements were used as a tool of controversy rather than as a tool of real reform of the scholastic curriculum: "For a few years at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Europe saw an alignment between the forces of Humanism and the reformation. The two movements appeared to march in lockstep, but the alliance proved unstable. The Reformation was fundamentally about doctrine, not about methodology" (1995: 194–195).

In his work, Peter Ramus also stresses his allegiance to Plato, and plays down Aristotle's tradition of dialectic as arrogantly appropriating dialectic and restricting it to its narrow meaning. In fact, according to Ramus, dialectic encompasses all art of reasoning and of knowing (Pierre de la Ramée 1555: 18) be it concerned with science or with opinion, and Aristotle was wrong to separate these two domains. More specifically, Ramus' main treatise (*Dialectique*) does not focus on invention, but on judgment. Invention, to which the first part of the treatise is devoted, does not deal with heuristics, but with the parts of discourse, and practically amounts to an enlarged enumeration of categories. Judgment, on the other hand, is called "method": it is the most important part of logic and consists of "disposition", namely the art of formally constructing correct and effective judgments and arguments. Judgment "of doctrine" comprises the theory of syllogisms and other argument forms, whereas "judgment of prudence" concerns their application to single cases with a view to achieving persuasion in relation to a given context (ibid.: 75–82). According to Ramus, Aristotle's *Topics* deal precisely with this last application of method. Thus, whereas in Agricola the messy process of invention comprises considerations of judgment, the opposite is true for Ramus, and judgment is the most important part of dialectic. In this sense, therefore, his approach is more scholastic than that of his Aristotelian adversaries, most notably Périon and Charpentier. As Walter Ong writes: “If Ramism arises out of opposition to Scholasticism, it arises in devious ways. For the abstract formalism of ramist rhetoric and dialectic resembles Scholasticism more than it does the humanist ‘eloquence’ that spearheaded the anti-Scholasticism of Ramus’ day” (1958: 53).[158]

Besides trying to show the interconnections among these branches of Renaissance revival of Aristotelian dialectic, I would like to show that through these different paths, the real spirit of Aristotle’s *Topics* was recovered, its meaning enlarged, and its range of applications widened. This is true especially for what I have called “disputational” dialectic.[159] In reconstructing the Renaissance tradition of Aristotle’s *Topics* in these different contexts, I shall not lose sight – quite the contrary – of the general epistemological issue underlying the major developments in the tradition of dialectic, namely what an interpreter has called the “dialectical road to truth” (Armstrong 1976).

CHAPTER 4

The new humanist dialectic and rhetoric

Rudolph Agricola on invention and probability

It is a commonplace that rhetoric held a crucially important place in Renaissance culture, displacing dialectic as the queen of the trivium. The Ciceronian ideal of rhetorical eloquence, as a complement of, or even a substitute for, philosophical wisdom is hailed as one of the distinctive qualities of the humanist movement. Hannah Gray writes: "The function of knowledge was not merely to demonstrate the truth of given precepts but to impel people towards their acceptance" (1963: 500). Eloquence to the humanists "meant above all persuasive power" (Seigel 1968: XIII)[160] and as such it was pursued by rhetoric. Wisdom, for its part is the goal of philosophy and by itself "has no necessary power over men (…). If the two could be joined together, then wisdom would be made active and eloquence committed to the service of truth" (Seigel 1968: XIII–XIX).[161] Most humanists were professors of rhetoric and the humanities, as opposed to professional philosophers. Heirs to the practice of medieval *ars dictaminis*, Renaissance rhetoricians and grammarians had a more important role compared to previous ages, and fulfilled it most notably in recovering, translating and interpreting the classical heritage. Even though one should not exaggerate the importance of the humanist movement within Renaissance culture – as we have seen, it is only one component of a far more complex picture where Aristotelianism, among other currents, played a crucial role (Kristeller 1961) – the influence of humanist rhetoric was significant, most notably on dialectic. In fact, dialectic was often identified with Medieval logic as a whole, and thus suffered a severe blow: from Francesco Petrarca's letter to Caloria (March 12, 1335) to Juan Luis Vives' *Against the pseudo-dialecticians* (1519), the polemic against the emptiness and artificiality of "barbarious" logicians is one of the distinguishing features of Humanism (Garin 1969). At the same time, we witness a proliferation of attempts to replace scholastic dialectic with a "new" dialectic, for the most part founded upon the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, and influenced by rhetoric. From Poliziano and Lorenzo Valla in the 15th century through Rudolph Agricola, to Johannes Sturm, Philip Melanchton, Johannes Cesarius and Peter Ramus in the 16th century,[162] such attempts, rather than forming a coherent whole, indicate a readiness to experiment with various new forms of *ratio disserendi*, which would satisfy a conception of inquiry according to which dialectic is essentially linked to rhetoric: the reading of Aristotle's work on dialectic was particularly influenced by the recovery and assimilation of Cicero's and Quintilian's rhetorical heritage.

Acquaintance with Cicero's corpus of rhetorical works increased greatly in the 15th century. Only *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* – most probably not written by Cicero – were known in the Middle Ages; suddenly, *De oratore*, *Partitiones oratoriae*, *Orator*, *Topica ad Trebatium* and the *Orationes* were frequently published and commented on, with a peak between 1527 and 1560, when 566 commentaries and glosses to Cicero's works were printed (Ward 1983: 150–152).[163] Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae* were first discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1416, and between 1482 and 1559 the work went through more than forty editions (Ward 1983: 160). Cicero's work was also joined by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, frequently retranslated and commented on.[164] In order to replace William of Moerbeke's 13th-century translation, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was first retranslated in the 15th century both by George of Trebizond (1445) and by Ermolao Barbaro, whose translation was published only in 1544 with Daniele Barbaro's commentary. It was then retranslated seven times in Italy in the 16th century, both in the Latin and in the vernacular, by Carlo Sigonio among others.[165] Most of the commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, like those written by Daniele Barbaro, Antonio Riccoboni, Pietro Vettori and Marco Antonio Maioragio, were also published in Italy in the middle of the 16th century.[166] During the Renaissance, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* ceased to be used mainly as a source of Aristotle ethical theory, and began to be studied as a rhetorical treatise in its own right.[167] As Lawrence Green has remarked, many Renaissance humanists and commentators used Aristotle's *Rhetoric* "as a study of the role of the emotions in persuasion, and more generally as a study of the role of the audience in persuasion" (1994: 3). Nifo's commentary, which was published in 1538, is the only one which clearly reaffirms rhetoric's subordination to dialectic.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how the tradition of dialectic in the sense of Aristotle's *Topics* is related to the renaissance of rhetoric, encouraged by the humanists. In this context, I wish to address two separate issues. Firstly, since the project of constructing a new dialectic was carried out in conjunction with an overall stress on rhetoric, it is necessary to show how rhetoric, as understood by Renaissance humanists, provided a model for forging an art of discourse which they considered to be superior to Medieval dialectic. This particular episode of the ongoing "battle of the arts" between rhetoric and dialectic began in Italy between the 14th and 15th centuries and later migrated to northern Europe in the 16th century. In order to illustrate it, I shall draw mainly on a remarkable and famous exchange of letters between the humanists Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro which dates from 1485–1486, and on Lorenzo

Valla's *Repastinatio dialectices et philosophie* of 1509 (RDP). The exchange between Pico, the renowned author of the humanist manifesto – the "Horation on the dignity of man" – and Ermolao Barbaro, the humanist translator of Aristotle and Themistius, is a well known public controversy on style, included in the correspondence of Angelo Poliziano and published as early as 1498 in his *Opera omnia*. Lorenzo Valla's text, written in 1439, revised in 1448, and published for the first time in Milan in 1496–7,[168] is a landmark work in Renaissance polemical writings on dialectic which aims at refounding dialectic by subordinating it to rhetoric (Seigel 1968: 142).[169] Valla, who died in 1458, is a self-taught court humanist who also taught rhetoric briefly in Pavia. Taking Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae* as a model, he sought to rewrite logic's three main parts, terms, propositions and arguments, by simplifying them and making them compatible with rhetorical theory. In this part of the chapter, then, I shall look at the so-called "revenge" of Renaissance rhetoric over medieval dialectic (Seigel 1968: 143).

Secondly, against the backdrop of this "revenge", I shall consider in more detail one of the treatises of the "new dialectic" movement. Since both primary and secondary sources are rather extensive, I have chosen to concentrate on one pivotal text in Renaissance dialectic, namely Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, which was written around 1479 and was first published in Louvain in 1515. This choice is based upon several reasons:[170] indeed, some of its features, together with an important historical contingency, make it a particularly representative text for my purposes. Firstly, unlike Lorenzo Valla's *Repastinatio*, with which Agricola's text has often been compared,[171] Agricola's book focuses on dialectic. In particular, Agricola centered his work on topical theory rather than on rhetoric, and explicitly linked it to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*. Whereas Valla created out of rhetoric a broad discipline which included dialectic, Agricola "rhetoricized logic and devalued rhetoric" (Monfasani 1990: 183). In this sense, Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* cannot be read as an anti-dialectic polemical manifesto, as Valla's mainly was and still is.[172] Secondly, Agricola's text has a high degree of both originality and internal coherence. Unlike many later treatises, especially those published in northern Europe (as for example those by Sturm, Melanchton, Eck and Cesarius) for which it constituted a model, Agricola's text does not fall prey to the temptations of a certain eclecticism which mixed dialectical invention with the *Organon*'s more traditional distinctions. Instead, it manages to preserve a beautiful unity as a project. Lastly, the particular historical position occupied by Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* enhances its status as the major attempt to build a new dialectic, and is particularly important for our purposes. Both geographically and temporally, it is literally at the crossroads between Italian 15th-century Humanism and North-European 16th-century attempts to use this tradition to develop a new approach to dialectic. Agricola composed his treatise at the end of his ten-year stay in Italy, in Pavia and Ferrara, from 1469 to 1479. The work was first published in Louvain in 1515 and enjoyed much success, attested both by the fact that it circulated widely in Germany, France and the Low Countries,[173] and by the publication of several commentaries and epitomes:[174] "From 1515 onwards more than forty editions of *De inventione dialectica* were published and it became one of the most often printed books in the 16th century" (Mack 1993: 257). Bartholomeus Latomus, professor of rhetoric in several European universities (Cologne, Louvain and Paris) wrote a perceptive and influential summary of the book.[175] To close the circle, Agricola's work was finally published in Venice in 1559 and translated by Orazio Toscanella in 1567.[176] Despite its success in northern Europe, it did not replace the *Organon* as a textbook in Italy, as far as I know, but there is evidence that the book had some impact, especially in Venice, in the second half of the 16th century. References to Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* appear in two Italian works at least. A brief direct reference appears in the *Commentarius in universam doctrinam* by Antonio Riccoboni (1596, Chapter XLI: 129). More importantly, two of Agricola's main definitions appear in the anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* published by the Academia Veneta in 1559, which I shall discuss in the next chapter. Here (fol. 2b), the definition of 'locus' is a *verbatim* quotation from Agricola; above all, echoing Agricola, dialectic is characterized, literally, as the art of "disputing probably ('probabiliter disputare') of any proposed subject" (fol. 3b).[177]

Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* can thus be considered a good synthesis between the concerns of Italian humanists and an understanding of Aristotle's *Topics* which emphasizes the tight connection between dialectic and rhetoric. It is to this extent that it suits the purpose of the present study: in this chapter I shall show how Agricola's "new" dialectic was constructed by incorporating those features of rhetoric which the humanists considered to be superior to Medieval logic. Indeed, Agricola's text testifies to a new emphasis on *invention* – a fundamental rhetorical category – as opposed to *judgment*. This was made possible by transferring a Ciceronian rhetorical distinction to dialectic and reading it into Aristotle's *Topics*. As such, dialectic became a more general, and less technical, instrument of discourse and proof, which could be applied to all the arts and sciences. In order to compare Agricola's approach to other contemporary developments, I have also chosen to consider briefly two groups of texts which focus specifically on the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic. Firstly, I shall refer to Renaissance commentaries on the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle writes that "rhetoric is a counterpart ('antistrophon') of dialectic".[178] Rather strikingly, one of the major sources which is quoted approvingly in these commentaries is Alexander of Aphrodisias' own commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, where he compares rhetoric and dialectic and stresses their similarity. Secondly, I shall consider Renaissance commentaries on Cicero's *Topica ad Trebatium*, the work where Cicero interprets Aristotle's *Topics* and gives it a thoroughly rhetorical reading. More specifically, I shall look at the passage where Cicero distinguishes between invention and judgment;[179] this privileged viewpoint will allow us to peer into, so to speak, the rhetorical corpus, and shed new light on the important connection between rhetoric and dialectic. The discussion of humanist approaches to dialectic will also set the stage for fully appreciating the renaissance of the Aristotelian commentary tradition on the *Topics*, which will be the object of the next chapter.

4.1 Renaissance Humanism and the revenge of rhetoric

Cicero advocated the union of eloquence and wisdom[180] when he described the "perfect orator": "No man has ever succeeded in achieving splendor and excellence in oratory, I will not say merely without training in speaking, but without taking all knowledge ('sapientia') for his province as well" (*De oratore* II 1.5; see also *De inventione* I 1.1). What Cicero meant was that the 'ars bene dicendi' presupposes a certain amount of knowledge of human and natural affairs in order to be effective. Rhetoric, the 'ars bene dicendi', is not opposed to dialectic, the 'ars bene disserendi', but the two arts are necessary for someone to achieve the higher ideal of the accomplished and world-wise intellectual. In the Renaissance, instead, the relationship between the two ideals of wisdom and eloquence became a symbol of the battle of the arts – philosophical dialectic versus literary rhetoric. Taking Cicero's perfect orator as a model, the humanists tried to undermine the kind of philosophical dialectic they viewed as an arid and empty exercise. In 15th-century Italy, this quarrel between rhetoric and dialectic pitted humanists like Lorenzo Valla and Ermolao Barbaro against philosophers and professional dialecticians. Francesco Petrarca and Coluccio Salutati had already engaged in such a polemic in the 14th century (Garin 1969), while Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus,[181] among other northern humanists, will pick it up in the 16th century; Agricola himself, as we shall see, was not immune to the temptation of stigmatizing the dialectic practiced by certain Aristotelian logicians. The positive outcome of this particular episode of the ongoing battle of the arts was a redefinition of dialectic which accounted for some features of rhetoric and which, to a certain extent, reinstated the old Aristotelian intrinsic relationship between rhetoric and dialectic and carried it a few steps forward.[182]

4.1.1 Philosophy against persuasion

The Humanists often referred critically to a particular group of dialecticians known as English 'calculatores' whose works were introduced in Italy in the 14th century (Sylla 1982) but their critiques are rather general. It is hard, therefore, to point to a specific enemy as the target of the humanists' attack.[183] Their purpose was, at least in part, to respond to some old charges leveled by philosophers against rhetoric, in order to carve out a more important place for rhetoric within the arts of discourse. This is the reason why, before looking at the humanists' critiques against dialectic in the name of eloquence[184] – and at Valla's *Repastinatio* in particular – I wish to consider the issue from the opposite perspective, namely the critique of rhetoric as it was carried out by philosophers and dialecticians.[185] I shall consider as a paradigmatic example of the opposition between philosophy and rhetoric Pico's imaginary – and extremely eloquent – defense of a Paduan "barbarian" philosopher against the attacks of humanist rhetoricians, as well as Ermolao Barbaro's response in 1485:[186] in their exchange, two renowned humanists represented two rival conceptions of the purpose and nature of knowledge which can be identified with the arts of dialectic and rhetoric respectively. Even apart from its intrinsic value, Pico's imaginary reconstruction is useful also because there were no real responses to humanist rhetoricians' charges: professional philosophers probably felt so secure that they did not bother to answer the often disorganized and exaggerated critiques of the humanists. Within this brief correspondence, I can single out three major themes, which are reminiscent of the traditional distinction between philosophy and rhetoric. Firstly, dialectic is characterized as sober, as opposed to the overly ornate rhetorical discourse.[187] Secondly, rhetoric is identified with sophistry and hence with deceit, while dialectic is identified with knowledge and the attainment of truth. Thirdly, while rhetoric is linked to the manipulation of *words* and the emphasis on style, dialectic is viewed as the instrument of philosophy, insofar as it aims at the knowledge of *things*. These themes are particularly important because they will contribute to a new understanding of dialectic, which will result in the elaboration of several treatises devoted to a "new dialectic". In other words, a new rhetorically informed dialectic was designed so as to save the positive aspects of dialectic highlighted by Pico, without renouncing the privileges of rhetoric: its effectiveness and its involvement in human affairs. The "perfect dialectician" is the heir to Cicero's "perfect orator".

The three charges that humanist philosophers level against humanist rhetoricians are eloquently described in the exchange. Pico's general move is to defend the "dull, rude, uncultured philosophers" (Breen 1952: 395) and he responds to the humanists' critiques of the philosophers' lack of cultural sophistication with pride, exclaiming "To us this is glory, and is no cause for contempt" (ibid.: 397).

He appeals to the philosopher's inner beauty as opposed to the outward "word-painting" of the rhetorician (ibid.: 399): "Among them were likenesses of a shaggy face, loathsome and disgusting; but within full of gems, a rare and precious thing, if you looked within you perceived something divine" (ibid.: 398). This, writes Pico, is "eloquence of the heart" and not of the tongue (ibid.: 395). "Our object", he declares, is "the word as thought, not the word as expression" (ibid.: 398). The style appropriate to the search for a philosophical truth, as opposed to the truth of the forum, is a sober way of speaking which accomplishes the task of serious research:

> We do not want our style delightful, adorned and graceful; we want it useful, grave, something to be respected; we would have it attain majesty through rudeness ('horror') rather than charm through delicateness ('mollitudo'). (…) Let they therefore admire us as sharp in searching, thorough in exploring, accurate in observation (…). Let them admire our style's brevity, pregnant with subject matters many and great. Let them admire (…) how skillful we are, how well-equipped to destroy ambiguities, dissolve difficulties, to unravel what is involved, by mind-bending syllogisms to weaken the false and confirm the true". (ibid.: 397)

Given this characterization, it is not surprising that, in a Platonic fashion, rhetoric and eloquence are identified with sophistry and cheating. Pico writes:

> For what else is the task of the rhetor than to lie, to entrap, to circumvent, to practice sleight-of-hand? For, as you say, it is your business to be able at will to turn black into white, white into black; (…). For the nature [of eloquence] is either to enlarge by addition or to reduce by subtraction, and putting forth a false harmony of words like so many masks and likenesses it dupes the listener's minds by insincerities. Will there be any affinity between this and the philosopher, whose entire endeavor is concerned with knowing the truth and demonstrating it to others?" (ibid.: 395–6)

By the sheer power of words, rhetoricians are able to turn things around and to manipulate an audience of simple people. Of the philosophers, on the other hand, Pico affirms: "We do not endeavor to entice the multitude but to frighten them off" (ibid.: 399). Words, moreover, "hide" things like a useless and distorting make-up: "Let us be cautioned against the writer who, fond of an artificial complexion, lets his reader enjoy nothing else; he never sees the real thing, nor the vital flush which we have often perceived beneath the whiting of a powdered face" (ibid.: 397).[188] Pico even opposes the Holy Scriptures style of writing to rhetoric's particular way of "moving and persuading": "The words of the Law do not move or persuade, but compel, stir up, convey force; they are rough and rustic, but alive, breathing, flaming, stinging, penetrating down to the depths of the spirit transforming with marvelous power the whole man" (ibid.: 399). It is not style which is convincing, but "the life of the speaker, the truth of his matter, and soberness of discourse" (ibid. 399). This is certainly an eloquent and highly rhetorical defense of the dialectician and the philosopher against the rhetorician, and Ermolao, in his answer, most pertinently uses this to demonstrate the necessity of eloquence for philosophy. He writes: "The foes of eloquence cannot maintain their cause save by eloquent men; in this respect they are like slaves, like women, like beasts" (ibid.: 403).

The imaginary representation of the Paduan philosopher on the part of someone who, like Pico, was himself close to humanist concerns, shows that we are dealing not so much with a battle against a foreign enemy, but rather with an internal struggle to redefine the field of the *trivium*, the arts of discourse. In fact, the same arguments that Pico mobilizes against rhetoric are used by his counterparts to discard a dialectic which was perceived as being too wordy and self-contained, dangerously similar to sophistry, and so self-enclosed as to be useless to deal with the knowledge of "things" in any subject, be it natural, political or ethical. At the same time, rhetoric is transformed into a serious art and is often compared to medicine, a theme certainly inspired by Aristotle's own comparison between dialectic, rhetoric and medicine in the *Topics* (101b 5–10): all these arts are not valued by their results but by the method they use and by the diligent way in which they apply it.[189] As for dialectic, in the humanists' hands it becomes a more humane, rich and effective discipline by incorporating some of the features of rhetoric.

4.1.2 Dialectic and sophistry

The traditional charges that philosophy brought against rhetoric are turned on their head and leveled against dialectic. Together with other sources, mainly Petrarca's "Letter to Tommaso Caloria" (1335) and Valla's *Repastinatio*,[190] Barbaro's response to Pico best characterizes the humanistic revenge of rhetoric over and against philosophy. First of all, the structural and linguistic simplicity of dialectical reasoning is considered as a major shortcoming by the Humanists. In the preface to Book II of his *Repastinatio*, Lorenzo Valla compares dialectic and rhetoric:

> The dialectician uses the syllogism naked (as one might say). The orator uses it clothed in purple and armed and decorated with gold and gems (…). The orator not only wishes to teach, as the dialectician does, but he also wants to please and to move. These sometimes contribute more to victory than proof does (…) The dialectician, whose speech is domestic and private, will not aim at that same splendor and majesty of speech as the orator will.
>
> (RDP 175–176; cit. in Mack 1993: 111)

Dialectic does not merely suffer from a stylistic defect; rather, because their purpose is limited to teaching and does not encompass moving and delighting, syllogisms demonstrate the truth, but do not necessarily convince others of it.[191] A modern commentator writes: "[The orator's] eloquence would represent a unity of content, structure and form (…). without his eloquence, truth would lie mute" in the hands of the philosopher (Gray 1963: 504). This is, I think, the meaning of the passage, which follows the one just quoted, where Lorenzo Valla writes: "[Rhetoric] rejoices in sailing in the open sea and among the waves and in flying with full and sounding sails, nor does it give way to the waves but rules them (…). Dialectic, on the other hand, is the friend of security, the fellow of the shores looking at the lands rather than the seas, it rows near the shores and the rocks" (RDP 177; cit. in Mack 1993: 111). What according to Lorenzo Valla was supposed to be a "refoundation ('repastinatio')" of philosophy and dialectic, is in fact the affirmation of the superiority of rhetoric over dialectic, albeit a rhetoric which has incorporated material hitherto usually treated in Aristotle's *Organon* (like syllogisms and categories).[192] According to Valla, rhetoric, modeled on Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae*[193], is a far wider and more complex and complete discipline than dialectic: the latter pretends to achieve learning by applying a few simple rules,[194] whereas real-life arguments, writes Valla, do not need (and ought not) to follow the rules exactly (RDP 282–286 and 304–306).[195] In the preface to the second book, Valla continues: "For dialectic used to be an entirely brief and simple thing, which can be seen from a comparison with rhetoric. For what is dialectic but a kind of confirmation and refutation? These very things are part of invention, which is one of the five parts of rhetoric" (RDP 175; cit. in Mack 1993: 111): in Ciceronian fashion, Valla associates dialectic with invention rather than with judgment, but still considers it to be but a small part of the wider and more complex enterprise carried out by rhetoric. Commenting on Valla's privileging of rhetoric over dialectic, Jerrold Seigel writes that "(…) he did not think that dialectic was therefore any more rigorous a procedure than rhetoric. It was only cruder and less polished" (1968: 176).[196]

To the humanists, not only are the dialecticians unable to convey the truth once they have found it, but, like the Sophists, they do not seem to be striving towards it at all, if one is to follow certain logicians who – wrongly – call themselves Aristotelians. Petrarca writes:

> They shield their sect with the splendid name of Aristotelians and pretend that Aristotle was wont to discuss in their manner (…). But they are mistaken: Aristotle, who was a man of fervent spirits, discussed problems of the highest order and wrote about them (…). No greater contrast can be imagined than that between this great philosopher and a man who does not write anything, understands but little, and shouts much and without consequence. ("Letter to Tommaso Caloria": 136)

These logicians resemble "gossiping women" (Vives 1782: 93), and the practitioners of scholastic disputations are considered "childish old men" (Petrarca ibid.: 139). These same charges against medieval dialectic are repeated by Agricola: dialecticians are prey to "that miserable and captious anxiety of speaking" and practice their art only for its own sake (II.1; ID 107, DID 180).[197]

In his response to Pico, Ermolao notices that rhetoric is not to be equated with sophistry: "(…) to say that philosophy conflicts with eloquence because the orator's business is but to deceive and lie is clear calumny, savors not at all of the peripatetic and appears to ignore that there is a difference between an orator and a sophist, a difference which Aristotle made in his *Topics* and *Rhetoric*" (Breen: 408). The humanists are right in appealing to Aristotle in order to distinguish rhetoric from sophistry for, unlike Plato, Aristotle considers those rhetoricians who argue for the sake of victory and not for the sake of truth and investigation as an anomaly: "What makes the sophist is not the faculty, but the moral purpose" (Rhet. 1355b15). Most Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* embrace the theme of the difference between rhetoric and sophistry;[198] in his *De inventione dialectica*, Agricola himself declares that "fallacies belong to dialectic neither more nor less than monsters or illnesses belong to the constitution of nature" (II.7; ID 127, DID 212): they are exceptional perversities of discourse, albeit inevitable. Quite to the contrary, writes Petrarca, it is not the rhetoricians but the dialecticians who "are not set to find the truth – they want the struggle (…). There is one thing, my friend, that I want to tell you: if you aim at virtue and truth, avoid this sort of men" ("Letter to Tommaso Caloria": 134–5). In the preface to Book III of the *Repastinatio*, Lorenzo Valla also chastises dialecticians and Aristotelian philosophers for reveling in their artificial jargon and for practicing disputation only for the sake of victory. He declares that he wants to free dialectic from the snares and deceits of "the sophists who invented new words for destroying their adversaries. In so doing, they attain an undeserved victory, like those soldiers who during the battle taint their arrows with poison, and perhaps they are even worse than these" (RDP 277).[199] By contrast, rhetoricians aim at the truth: "When we dispute we are not enemies, but we militate both under the same emperor who is the truth (…). He who in a disputation is won by reason, gains because he learns". And again: "Therefore we cannot win if truth does not win" (RDP 277).[200] This is an interesting reference to the theme of the "power of truth" which was common in the ancient world and which is present in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: "Rhetoric is useful because the true and the just are naturally superior to their opposites, so that, if decisions are improperly made, they must owe their defeat to their own advocates" (I.1.11).

Because of the dialecticians' emphasis on the formal validity of reasoning as well as their neglect of common language, the humanists can claim, in Ciceronian fashion, that rhetoric alone can achieve a union of eloquence and wisdom and get a hold on the real world. How does rhetoric reach this connection with reality and truth while dialectic falls short? First of all, humanist advocates of rhetoric are common-sense realists and prefer concreteness to abstract terms.[201] Lorenzo Valla is a good case in point: in the first book of his *Repastinatio*, he argues that each philosophical abstract term (like essence, 'quidditas', the good, etc.) should be replaced by a "thing ('res')" (RDP 8–21).[202] That "things" should be preferred to "words" is a common theme among Renaissance authors, including Agricola, as we shall see. It is important to understand that this "root opposition (…) is not that between the mental and the extramental. Things are constituted not in opposition to the mind, but in opposition to the word" (Ong 1958: 129). Humanists also think that reasoning is useful not only for abstract knowledge, but also for solving problems related to moral and political action. Therefore, a discussion has to represent those practical dilemmas, precluding its resemblance to a formal medieval disputation. Being more flexible, rhetorical ways of arguing have an advantage over the simple rules of syllogisms. Moreover, language cannot allow itself to depart from the laws of custom and habit: Valla writes: "If you attack me with fallacies, I shall appeal to the laws of custom and speech ('leges loquendi ac mores')" (RDP 329; see also 219). This is the meaning of the emphasis humanists put on ordinary Latin, as opposed to the artificial language of the philosophers: both Valla and Agricola aim at "reuniting logic and real language" (Mack 1993: 245).

In this respect, it may appear as surprising that many Renaissance commentators of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* explicitly quote Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on the *Topics* and stress the similarities between rhetoric and dialectic, over and above their differences.[203] Rhetoric and dialectic share some basic features: they deal with common rather than specific principles, they are practical arts like medicine, they may deal with opposites, and they use the same argumentative structure. In this sense, rhetoric is defined as an "offshoot", rather than as the "counterpart" of dialectic (Maioragio 1571: 1a; Vettori 1548: 1–3). However, according to humanist dialecticians, this similarity between rhetoric and dialectic does not suggest that rhetoric can be reduced to dialectic.[204] Rather, it indicates an important difference between Medieval dialectic and the new dialectic: unlike logic, dialectic has to be more thoroughly distinguished from philosophy and theology, with which it was closely associated in the Middle Ages. Moreover, dialectic – just like rhetoric – is an *instrument* for any kind of knowledge, should be studied only briefly, and should not be practiced for its own sake. This theme runs through two centuries from Petrarca to Erasmus and Vives, and will finally, and paradoxically, result in radically detaching the arts of discourse from the "true arts and sciences" to which all the efforts must be devoted (Vives 1782: 101).[205]

4.2 Rudolph Agricola and the reform of dialectic

This brief survey of the themes evoked in the opposition between rhetoric and philosophy serves to map the intellectual background which will allow us to understand some of the features of the reform of dialectic introduced by Agricola in his *De inventione dialectica*. As previously mentioned, this important text appeared for the first time in 1515 in Louvain under Erasmus' patronage, but had been written in 1479 in Italy at the end of a ten-year stay in Pavia and Ferrara.[206] It became an extremely influential text in northern European universities, was praised by Johannes Sturm, Erasmus and Peter Ramus, and even replaced Aristotle's *Topics* in some universities.[207]

A few decades ago, Agricola's approach was often compared to Valla's most notably by Vasoli (1968) and Jardine (1977 and 1983). More recent commentators, however, acknowledge that Agricola knew of Valla's text,[208] but they challenge this "apostolic succession in humanistic logic" (Monfasani 1990: 181) and recognize important differences in the material treated and their general intellectual orientation.[209] Agricola cannot simply be considered as carrying Valla's project a step forward;[210] rather, whereas Valla dealt with Aristotle's parts of logic (terms, propositions, arguments) and considered them as a part of rhetoric, Agricola rethinks the nature and purpose of dialectic centered around topical invention, and enlarges it to include elements traditionally associated with rhetoric. The choice of associating dialectic – more particularly Aristotle's *Topics* – with invention is indicative of the place Agricola's dialectic occupies within the spectrum of traditional approaches to the subject. By opting for invention, Agricola chooses Cicero's meanings of dialectic among the four possible meanings which will be nicely summarized by Antonio Riccoboni in 1596 in his commentary on Cicero's and Aristotle's rhetoric, a work clearly influenced by Agricola. Riccoboni writes that Cicero identified dialectic with invention, Boethius linked it to judgment, Aristotle with the use of probable ('verisimilibus')[211] premises in arguments, and Alexander of Aphrodisias with dialogue and inquiry proceeding by question and answer (Chapter XXVIII: 83). Indeed, unlike Ramus, Agricola is generally uninterested in judgment, which he identifies with a few syllogistic rules. Moreover, he distances himself significantly from Aristotle's notion of "reputable opinions", and thinks that reasoning by question and answer is just one possible kind of dialectical argument among others. Rather, Agricola is clearly inspired by Cicero's connection between dialectic and invention, although he plays down the role of rhetoric and the ideal of Ciceronian eloquence.

Agricola's work, then, deals exclusively with dialectical invention[212] and is composed of three books, whose contents can be roughly described as follows:

Book I:
Brief definition, reorganization, classification, and description of the topics (‘loci’).

Book II:

a. The use of the topics: description of the nature and function of dialectical invention and its relationship to rhetoric
b. The three components of dialectic: subject matter (all matters in doubt), instrument (exposition and argument), treatment (strategies of argumentation)

Book III:
Disposition and the affects.[213]

Despite the fact that the same subjects are sometimes dealt with at different places in the text, the work manages to maintain a certain overall structure and progression. In what follows, I shall concentrate on the beginning of Book I and on the whole of Book II, where the nature of dialectic is mainly analyzed. As far as the content is concerned, I will analyze Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica* with a view to clarifying two main broad themes which run through the whole treatise, namely the notion of invention and the meaning of the word “probable (‘probabilis’)”. Invention is not merely identified with the art of finding suitable arguments with the help of the ‘loci’, but constitutes a more ambitious “logic of inquiry” (Cogan 1984: 182). Moreover, invention encompasses two main components which traditionally belong to rhetoric, the affects and disposition, or the ordering of arguments. The term “probable” appears in the very definition of dialectic – ‘ratio probabiliter disserendi’ – as the method of discussing “in a probable way” about any given question. The use of this term, however, does not signify a “transition from philosophical dogmatism to discursive probabilism” as Jardine’s mildly skeptical interpretation would have it (1988: 45).[214] Rather, the use of the term “probable” is linked to what for Agricola is dialectic’s main task, namely to prove, albeit in the generic sense of “to remove doubt” about something (Cogan 1984: 196).[215] Indeed, Agricola’s meaning of the term “probable” is closer to “persuasive” (‘pithanon’), than to “true for the most part” (‘eikos’); it is even further removed from Aristotle’s ‘endoxon’, namely what is reputable. At the same time, as we shall see in detail, the thrust of Agricola’s approach to dialectic in his insistence that the purpose of any argument is to prove a given statement rather than simply persuading an audience of its truth: persuasion is the result of a “probable argument”, that is an argument that is able to prove, in a stronger sense than making something acceptable to a given audience. Within this enlarged notion of argument, a proof is the revelation and elaboration by artificial and discoursive means of the *real* relationships existing among objects and events in the world. Agricola’s dialectic shares with humanist rhetoric a very strong common sense realism: dialectic allows us to get a hold on *things* as opposed to dealing merely with *words*.

These two themes – invention and probability – interestingly relate Agricola's work to the polemic humanists carried out against dialectic in the name of rhetoric. The analysis of his *De inventione dialectica* will help us understand how a new dialectic was a response to deeply felt intellectual needs which had brought about the rehabilitation of rhetoric as well as the condemnation of Medieval dialectic. Moreover, the fact that the construction of this new dialectic was inspired by Aristotle's *Topics* shows us another important aspect of its recovery in the Renaissance, namely the rehabilitation of the Aristotelian connection between dialectic and rhetoric, although, as we shall see, Agricola went much further along this road. As a consequence of the important function attributed to dialectic and the fact that it encompasses all the argumentative aspects of rhetoric, Agricola returns rhetoric as a discipline "to its Medieval role of mere verbal ornament" (Monfasani 1990: 183).

4.3 Invention and judgment

In order to understand the discussion of "places ('loci')" in Agricola, we have to see why dialectical invention, as opposed to judgment, is central to Agricola's dialectic, and what his emphasis on dialectic entails with respect to the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric. Agricola deals with these broader issues only in the second book of *De inventione dialectica*, which is devoted to the use of places in all actual arguments, a subject which, writes Agricola, constitutes the essence of dialectic. The nature and role he assigns to dialectic emerges from a comprehensive classification of the arts: some arts are designed "to know the nature of things, others to mend the life of men, and others to understand the rules of discourse and speech" (II.2; ID 111, DID 192). The arts of discourse are assigned the task to ensure communication between a speaker and a listener. In order for communication to succeed, three things need to occur: "That what is taught by the speaker can be learnt, that the one in front of whom we speak eagerly listens, and that about which we speak is probable and convincing to him ('habeatur fides ei')" (II.2; ID 111, DID 192). The first task belongs to grammar, the second to rhetoric and the third to dialectic. While grammar teaches proper speech, rhetoric predisposes the listener to listen well by delighting him. As for dialectic, it deals with the substance and content of speech itself, argument and proof, and ensures that every piece of communication which aims at proving something to a listener succeeds. Dialectic, therefore, is defined as "the art of disputing in a probable way ('ars probabiliter disserendi') about any proposed thing, to the extent to which the nature of its subject is capable of conviction ('fidei')" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193). Despite the fact that they appear to be similar at first sight, Agricola's definition of dialectic is quite different from Boethius': Boethius defines dialectic as 'ratio diligens disserendi', and an argument as 'ratio fidem faciens' and Agricola substitutes the term 'diligens' with the term 'probabiliter' which he explicitly borrows from Cicero's own definition of argument as 'probabile inventum ad faciendam fidem' (I.1; ID 4, DID 3). In this way, Agricola extends the domain of dialectic and makes it into the art of dealing with all arguments insofar as they are used to prove a claim. Moreover, among the three functions of speech Agricola borrows from Cicero – namely to teach ('docere'), to move ('movere') and to delight ('delectare') (I.1; ID 2, DID 1)[216] – rhetoric accomplishes only the last one. Dialectic, on the contrary, fulfills the primary function of speech and discourse ('oratio et sermo') namely to teach (I. Proemium; ID 2, DID 1). However, the term 'docere' may be misleading, since it suggests dialectic's pedagogical role in presenting results to students. 'Docere', instead, means "to prove ('probare')":[217] Agricola writes that the purpose of dialectic is "to speak probably (…) namely to teach something to someone who listens" (II.3.; ID 113, DID 196). Alardus confirms this reading. In his commentary on Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, he writes, referring to Lorenzo Valla (RDP, Book II): "To teach is not taken *simpliciter*, since sometimes it means to reveal ('patefacere') and to show ('ostendere'), and sometimes to prove with arguments and to make clear ('planum facere')" (I.3; ID 114, DID 197). In Agricola, then, dialectic is inextricably linked to using speech in an argumentative way in order to prove something, and it is precisely in this sense that it differs from history and poetry (II.22; ID 182, DID 297).

Given Agricola's stress on the link between dialectic and proof, it may seem surprising that he focuses on dialectical invention as opposed to judgment. However, according to Agricola, "invention" does not only consist in finding arguments and proposing all possible arguments related to a given subject, according to Cicero's and, to a certain extent, Boethius' understanding. Rather, it includes the most important part of judgment, namely the selection of those arguments which are most apt to prove a case, as well as their final arrangement, traditionally devolved to the function of disposition. In his *Epitome*, Latomus too stresses the fact that invention includes part of judgment, since to invent means to find those arguments which are "suitable to create conviction ('quae fidei faciendae apta sint')" (32v–33r). In this way, Agricola empties judgment of its traditional function of ensuring that an argument is conclusive and therefore produces certified knowledge and justified conviction. Rather, he reduces judgment to a set of formal laws, which include both the modes and figures of syllogisms as well as fallacious forms of reasoning: "Judgment is something much easier, because it consists of some certain laws, not very difficult and not many in number" (II.1; ID 108, DID 180–181); Judgment merely fulfills the function of verifying that the reasoning "is not fallacious and misleading" (I.2; ID 5, DID 8), and thus has a kind of double-checking role.

An interesting discussion of the distinction between invention and judgment in the Renaissance can be found in the commentaries on the beginning of Cicero's *Topica ad Trebatium* (II 6–7), most notably Visorius' commentary. This author, known also as Jean Le Voyer, is familiar with Agricola's work, since he quotes his definitions of the probable and of place. He identifies judgment with "that which gives intelligibility to speech (…) by disposing the things [found] and by arranging them with order" (12v). Judgment also consists of certain "rules" of syllogism (12r), and it is "the norm of the argument which polishes and adorns what was rude and rough" (12v). Judgment, then, corresponds to the form of an argument, whereas invention corresponds to its matter (13r): "To invention is attributed the greatest force, thrust and weight of the whole argument, whereas to judgment belongs its economy, interconnectedness, succession and elocution" (12v). Moreover, although neither invention nor judgment are prior "by nature", insofar as they are both equally necessary for discourse, invention is prior to judgment by time, order and importance. If we understand that invention and judgment "are not traceable to two such clear-cut steps in cognition, but rather to two different ways of approaching the cognitive process" (Ong 1958: 114),[218] it is clear that Agricola empties judgment of its traditional meaning in order to enrich invention with new functions. This is because Agricola clearly prefers the "inventive" approach as more dynamic and heuristic and tends to attribute to invention features which were traditionally considered more akin to judgment. The fact that Agricola uses the faculty of 'consilium' or 'prudentia' as a kind of fine-tuned discriminatory ability in connection with invention and not with judgment (II.1; ID 106, DID 178) is indicative of this shift.

To understand more precisely and positively Agricola's notion of invention, we have to consider the first book, where he distinguishes his own approach from Aristotle's. Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* starts with what he considers to be the primary material for dialectical invention, namely "the properties and differences of places" (II.1; ID 109, DID 182) handed down, and differently elaborated, by the tradition which starts with Aristotle and continues with Cicero, Quintilian, Themistius and Boethius. From the outset, then, he sees himself as belonging to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, which he briefly summarizes. The fact that he does not quote any Medieval work on the *Topics* reflects the particular way in which Renaissance authors reconstructed – and thereby contributed to create – the tradition of dialectic. According to Agricola, the initiator of topical dialectic is Aristotle, "a truly great man" (I.3; ID 7, DID 14) and with his *De inventione dialectica*, he clearly means to improve on Aristotle's treatment of the subject. As Ong rightly observes: "The Agricolan development is not an anti-Aristotelian phenomenon. It coincides with a return to Aristotle's text rather than to the texts of Peter of Spain, Ockham, Buridan, Ralph Strode, Albert of Saxony, Dullaert, and other full-fledged logicians" (1958: 125). However, according to Agricola, Aristotle's work exhibits certain general shortcomings: he is one of those who "covered the light of things with the darkness of speech" (I.3; ID 7, DID 14), he hid certain discoveries from his readers and was more interested in contradicting others than in finding out about things. Agricola also formulates three more precise critiques. Firstly, "he has enclosed the matter of the places within too tight borders", namely definition, genus, *proprium* and accident (I.3; ID 8, DID 15).[219] Secondly, Aristotle has put tight limits on the art of dialectic itself by restricting it to things that cannot be demonstrated and thirdly, he has not shown how the places should be used in practice. As a consequence, one way to view the details of Agricola's reform of dialectic is to consider it as a response to these three failures of Aristotle's *Topics*. By examining what Agricola considers as the main differences between his own approach and Aristotle's, we shall have a better idea of what he means by dialectical invention.

4.3.1 The places

To "invent" means to find the right arguments to prove a case, of whatever nature it is. In his commentary on Cicero's *Topica*, Visorius too defines invention as "the devising of true or truth-seeming [arguments] which render the cause probable" (12r). An argument in general is something which provides a link between that which is more known and that which is less known or simply unknown. A place therefore, has to help find such link. Traditionally, a topic served to find the middle term of a syllogism which provided this connection, and according to Boethius – who followed Themistius on this point – topics served to validate a syllogism by providing a rule or a general maxim. Agricola describes topics neither as general headings for different arguments, the way Cicero does, nor as Boethian maxims, but as more complex strategies for building suitable arguments: his whole first book deals with such strategies. Moreover, Agricola extends the role of topics to all forms of reasoning, not only those obeying syllogistic laws, and compares a place to a measuring stick applied to two measures in order to verify that they are "agreeing ('consentanea')" with each other (I.2; ID 4–5, DID 7–8). Moreover, Agricola maintains that in order to find the arguments which provide such a proving link between the premises and the conclusion, men can rely on certain common "relationships ('habitudines')" or similarities which exist among all natural occurrences.[220] Topics therefore collect these natural links under a "common heading", e.g. cause, which "contain all arguments" understood as "the instruments that are able to create conviction" (II.2; ID 6, DID 9). According to Agricola, however, topics do not only contain possible argument forms, but they also tell us something about the internal organization of the objects to which our arguments refer. Agricola writes: "By following these headings, we can turn our minds around the things themselves and perceive whatever in each of them is convincing and suitable for what our speech sets out to teach" (I.2; ID 6, DID 9). By drawing on Cicero's notion of place as the "seat" of arguments, "[Agricola] makes the more sweeping claim that there are similar connections really existing in the world" (Mack 1993: 141).

Agricola's definition of place follows from the description of its function: a place is "a certain common sign ('nota') of things through whose prompting and indication we are able to find out what in each thing is probable" (II.2; ID 7, DID 9), i.e. capable of proving, and not only of persuading. Agricola rejects Boethius' notion of place as "maximal proposition", which was aimed at validating inferences rather than at finding arguments.[221] Instead, he builds on the heuristic aspect of Cicero's definition in order to widen the scope of Aristotelian dialectic to include any discoursive instrument of proof. Indeed, he considers that a place is useful not only for devising a suitable argumentative strategy, but also for understanding the nature of a thing: a topic is not simply a seat of arguments but a "sign of things". This function of the places becomes clearer when, later in the second book, Agricola illustrates how they are to be put to use in what he calls a "topical description" (II.28 and 29), which can be characterized as "an organized exploration of the nature of a subject" (Mack 1993: 130). This involves summarizing what can be said of an object from the point of view of each topic, e.g. according to definition, genus, species, proprium, act, reason, effects, etc…; once we have collected knowledge of our subject by topically describing both our subject and our predicate, "we possess all the force of its nature" (II.28; ID 209, DID 563), and we can build a complete description of both of them. Then, by comparing these descriptions we can find out which arguments are suitable in order to prove our case and which are not. Among others, Agricola develops in detail the following example (DID II.29, ID 215–19, DID 564–5). If we wish to show that a philosopher should get married, we construct a topical description of a philosopher, and another topical description of a wife and then, by comparing the two descriptions, we can determine those aspects in which they agree and those in which they disagree. According to the place of "definition", a philosopher is "a man who pursues the knowledge of human and divine subjects with virtue" and a wife is "a woman legitimately taken for life in order to have children"; the two descriptions agree insofar as pursuing virtue and having children are compatible. From both topical descriptions, therefore, we get the following argument: "Those who pursue virtue will want to have children; therefore, those who pursue virtue will get married". Every time two topical descriptions agree with each other, the two objects corresponding to the subject and the predicate can be shown to be closely related and therefore to be suitable for making a strong case.

A less relevant topical description will make for a weaker case. For example, if we choose as a definition of a philosopher "someone who is indifferent to pleasures and pains", we will get the following argument: "A philosopher will not forgo to marriage because of the nuisance brought about by a wife and the privation he has to endure because of the children", which makes a less convincing case if we want to argue in favor of a philosopher's marriage. Places therefore help us choose arguments suitable to prove a case insofar as they allow us to structure and deepen our knowledge of objects at hand, enabling the hidden properties of things to emerge. Agricola approvingly quotes Cicero's assertion that "there are no improbable claims that cannot seem probable" in this way. However, whereas Cicero means that implausible claims can be made to seem plausible, Agricola means that claims that may appear difficult to prove are "provable", namely they can actually be proven. The crop of possible arguments yielded by the topics is fodder for he who knows how to argue creatively, and can turn even apparent counterevidence into positive arguments in favor of a claim.

4.3.2 The field of dialectical invention

Concerning the subject matter of dialectic, Agricola writes that "dialectic applies to everything which we can dispute about through some reason or method, and is not limited to a certain subject matter, but only provides arms with which we can be ready and prepared for every fight" (I.3; ID 10, DID 17). Agricola's dialectic, unlike Aristotle's, is not restricted to subjects which cannot be demonstrated but require something more than rhetorical persuasion.[222] As we shall see in the next section, Agricola holds that demonstration is simply an extreme case of "disputing probably" and dialectic is concerned with proving a case also in fields traditionally entrusted to rhetoric, like politics and the law.[223] Instead of being associated with a particular domain of knowledge, dialectic is a general instrument which applies equally to all the other arts:[224] "Dialectic is not universal because of its possession of universal premises or general inferential rules, but rather because of the generalized support it gives to inquirers on particular subjects" (Cogan 1984: 184). Since it deals with arguments, dialectic is not only an art but the "leader and stabilizer ('dux et stabilitrix') of the other arts, without whose help the others cannot maintain their borders" (II.2; ID 110, DID 191).

A question, the subject matter of dialectic, is simply "all matter in doubt" (II.6; ID 121, DID 206–207). If this is so, however, dialectic can be accused of swallowing up all the other arts and making them useless, as Agricola himself acknowledges. In order to answer this objection, Agricola distinguishes the order and method of dialectic from its matter: "The *matter* of dialectic is all that of which we have to discuss in a probable way, that is (…) every question, whatever it may be, as long as we remember that the things of which, and through which, we discuss are drawn from each art, of whatever kind, and that the *order* and the *method* of discussing ('disserendi ordinem rationemque') belong to dialectic" (II.7; ID 127, DID 212; my emphasis). The "method" of discussing is our ability to prove any statement drawn from the specific sciences. The ordering of arguments – their "disposition" – which always depends on the circumstances, also belongs in an essential way to dialectic, as we shall see.

The scope of dialectic is wide for a second reason as well. Every subject needs the help of dialectic, since the realm of absolutely certified knowledge is rather limited. In a passage which is reminiscent of Cicero's allusion to the skeptical attitude, he writes that "a small number of things which we learn is certain and unmoved; so that if we were to believe the Academy, we know only that we know nothing. There is no doubt that many things are dragged here and there by the imagination of each person, according to the way anyone has figured out it would be more convenient in order to prove his intention" (I.1; ID 3, DID 2).[225] This passage has been linked to Agricola's alleged skeptical notion of knowledge and inquiry: since we can know nothing with certainty, we have to limit ourselves to discussing both sides of an issue in a probable way, in order to find out what seems more likely to be the case (Jardine 1977 and 1983). However, this skeptical interpretation of Agricola's work (and of Valla's, for that matter) does not seem to be correct for several reasons.[226] We have already anticipated that the word "probable" is not linked to the comparative plausibility of arguments, but to the possibility of proof, a point that we shall develop in more detail in the next chapter. Moreover, Academic skepticism is listed by Agricola among "incredible beliefs" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193). More importantly, when Agricola points to the rarity of absolute certainties, he intends to convey two different messages. Firstly, he wishes to carve out an important place for dialectic as a logic of inquiry: "It must be true of everything of which we try to create belief that it is received with a certain doubt or lack of certainty; for no one undertakes to teach something which is evident insofar as it is evident, but insofar as it is subject to contention and doubt" (II.6; ID 121, DID 206–207; translated by Mack 1993: 175). Agricola's skeptical statements, therefore, are a way of significantly extending what Aristotle considers to be the domain of dialectical arguments, namely controversial theses, and stressing the importance of dialectic as a heuristic device. Secondly, Agricola wants to stress the fact that any proposition, even the most certain, requires proof in order to be accepted, and that such proof pertains to dialectic whenever the recipient of the proof is not convinced in advance, so to speak, that is practically any time. Thus, dialectic provides the discoursive proof which will ensure that a given proposition, whatever its degree of certainty, will actually be accepted by a specific audience and in no way signifies the renunciation of certainty in favor of relative plausibility. We can apply to Agricola what Luce Giard writes about Lorenzo Valla: "His skepticism indicates a way of proceeding in the search for truth, and not a final judgment about the non-existence of truth, or about the impossibility of attaining it" (1982: 15).

4.3.3 The use of arguments: affects and disposition

In the third book, Agricola deals with two issues, affects and disposition, which have traditionally been excluded from dialectical invention and treated exclusively as rhetorical tools. Both subjects, which are anticipated at the beginning of the second book, are inseparable from invention and can contribute to enlarging its scope and transforming it into an effective instrument of inquiry and proof. As we have seen, of the three functions of speech – to teach, to move and to delight – only the last is reserved for rhetoric by Agricola. According to him, rhetoric is devoid of any argumentative function, and is identified instead with the art of speaking beautifully and in an ornate fashion. Indeed, since delighting depends on the state of mind of the listener and not only on the ability of the speaker (the same discourse can delight one and distress another), it belongs to rhetoric and not to dialectical invention: "Therefore delighting is not the purpose of discourse, because it does not occur because of the discourse but because of the listener's mind" (II.5; ID 119, DID 204).[227] On the contrary, Agricola associates moving an audience, a traditional function of rhetoric, with dialectic. While speech "can teach without moving and delighting, it cannot move or delight without teaching" (I.1; ID 2, DID 1). Thus, contrary to both Aristotle and the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition, but following Valla, Agricola holds that the affects are an important part of dialectic: "Argumentation, everything by which we consider all that is doubtful and uncertain, (…) is necessary for arousing emotions, but [in this case] it ought to be very dense and thickly packed. For strength is necessary for the intellect to be seized and for the mind itself to be carried away from itself and, as it were, placed outside itself" (II.4; ID 116, DID 199; cit. in Mack 1993: 204). Some arguments may be pure, leaving no place for emotions, though that is rather uncommon. But, while simple teaching is "an easy thing", "the beating and moving of the listener through the affects, transforming him in whatever state of mind ('abito') you please (…) belongs only to the highest minds" (I.1; ID 2, DID 1).

This view presupposes that affects are not simply the accidental by-product of skillful manipulation. Rather, they are both the legitimate instrument and the result of proper dialectical arguments.[228] Moreover, from the point of view of the speaker, the expression of affects may have the additional function of conveying information. Agricola explicitly states the argumentative nature of passions when he remarks that, by expressing some emotion in speech, a speaker mainly wants to transfer some information to the listener: "The purpose of those who pray, complain, or interrogate is chiefly to ensure that the listeners learn what their desire is, by which pain they are afflicted, or what is it that they want to know, even though they are perceived as doing something different" (I.1; ID 2, DID 1). Agricola acknowledges that the union of reasoning and affects within the same function of dialectical invention testifies to a certain rhetorization of dialectic: the "nerve" of discourse is intimately and inextricably associated to its "flesh" (III.14; ID 278, DID 441).[229] Also, his inclusion of the affects into dialectic shows that Agricola is aware of the role the audience plays in the effectiveness of every argumentation. Whereas formerly – and also in Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* – rhetoric was considered more suitable than dialectic for convincing a crowd, Agricola "democratizes" dialectic and is proud of the fact that his own approach to dialectic can appeal to common people. An argument is such only insofar as it sways the listener and convinces him; similarly, a proof is always a proof for someone, since it presupposes the communication between two parties – the speaker and the listener.[230] Therefore, Agricola does not share an opinion, still widely held in the Renaissance, according to which dialectic "speaks probably" about a thesis, namely collects those arguments necessary to prove it, while rhetoric only speaks persuasively by appealing to a given audience: rather, according to Agricola, to persuade *is* to prove. This distinction is still affirmed by Riccoboni (*Paraphrasis in retoricam Aristotelis*, 31), who associates it to the Stoic image of the closed/open hand and by Riccoboni who holds that dialectic is more concise and rhetoric more ornate owing to their respective tasks. According to Agricola, on the other hand, a dialectical argument must be as "fleshy" as a rhetorical argument in order to convince; a rhetorical argument will only be more stylistically sophisticated.

If invention includes the affects, whose treatment was traditionally attributed to rhetoric, it cannot be altogether separated from disposition either. "Disposition" is a rhetorical term which signifies the construction of an argumentation, i.e. a series of arguments, according to certain rules and order. As such, it could be associated with judgment, understood in a broad sense. Instead, Agricola tightly links disposition to invention, which virtually absorbs it. For both disposition and invention are part of the end of dialectic which consists in "finding those things which are suitable for creating conviction ('fidem facere') and, once these have been found, to dispose and order them in such a way that they are most apt to teach" (II.3; ID 114, DID 197). Indeed, learning the places is not enough, as Agricola points out in his last critique to Aristotle's treatment of topical invention; it is utterly useless if one does not know "what their use is, and how with them the faculty of disputing has to be arranged" (II.1; ID 109, DID 182). "Only Quintilian", Agricola writes at the beginning of the second book, "has made the effort to teach the reason for dealing with them [the places], and to show how from them we can derive invention" (II.1; ID 108, DID 181), although he has hastily put in one heap rhetorical and dialectical places. But the philosophers, Agricola complains, do not read Quintilian. This is why the second book, especially the second part devoted to argumentation, is replete with strategic advice of all sorts.[231] Unlike Aristotle, who focused on arguments alone, Agricola implicitly distinguishes between an argument and an argumentation, namely the particular discoursive form in which an argument is embedded. On this point, he follows Boethius, Valla and other Renaissance commentators,[232] although he believes that an argumentation is not simply the formal translation of an argument in discourse, but must be adjusted to a particular context and audience. As a consequence, several argumentations may correspond to a single argument. According to Agricola, it is never good to follow literally the rules of syllogistic logic: the only rule that should guide a dialectician is that "no permanent rule may be given" (II.19; ID 170, DID 281).

Disposition, therefore, is inseparable from, and even more important than, finding out the relevant arguments. Agricola writes: "Order not only greatly helps in learning things, but sometimes their proof rests for the most part on it (…). So that he who will be able to find all things which create conviction, but will fail to dispose and order them in such a way that they prove ('fidem facere') the thesis that they were intended to prove, will not deserve to be called a dialectician" (II.3; ID 114, DID 196–197). Such a dialectician would be like a painter who could paint the parts of a body but not put them together.[233] In his *Epitome*, Latomus writes that disposition provides "an intelligibility by which we can obtain the assent ('assensum') of the listener, and we can also extort conviction ('fidem') from a reluctant auditor" (32v). Agricola, for his part, writes that "a wealth ('copia') of invention is something given to ungoverned and almost mad intelligences, but beauty of disposition and order are produced by skill and judgement. Of these, the former is a sign of a happier nature, and the latter indicates a more cultivated discipline. Both are to be wished for, but the latter is more praiseworthy" (III.15; ID 285, DID 450; cit. in Mack 1993: 225). Disposition also requires personal inventiveness and originality, while relying on the laws of syllogisms betrays a "cold and weak" mind, as well as a childish attitude (III.14; ID 277, DID 256). Mack writes that Agricola "makes disposition something which has to be thought about in each particular case" (1993: 219). Moreover, he does not associate dialectic with a particular kind of disposition, such as reasoning by question and answer,[234] as opposed to continuous speech. Both are possibilities of dialectic, and their use depends on the desired purpose of discourse: "In continuous speech the color of truth is more beautiful, but in the disputation the research is more thorough" (II.15; ID 155, DID 256).

We may conclude, then, that for Agricola dialectical invention tends to coincide with dialectic *tout court*, except for a few simple rules which are left to judgment. Moreover, dialectic encompasses some important functions and characteristics which were traditionally attributed to rhetoric, and which were particularly emphasized in the Renaissance, the affects and disposition which are meant to address an argument to a given audience. Dialectical invention in this sense is bound to become *the* main discipline dealing with speech, whenever discourse is used in argumentation and discoursive proof.

4.4 Probability: proof and things

The word "probable" occupies a crucial place in Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*: it figures in the definition Agricola gives of dialectic, and is essentially connected with the expressions 'fidem facere' and 'docere'. As we have seen, Agricola defines dialectic as "the art of discussing in a probable way ('probabiliter') of any proposed thing, insofar as each thing is capable of conviction ('fides')" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193). In order to understand the project underlying Agricola's new dialectic, we need to describe as precisely as possible meaning of the term "probable" as he uses it, a task which which is notoriously difficult: "Since it signifies something intermediate, it is liable to a great variety of meanings, some stronger and some weaker" (Deman 1933: 260). It will be easier to understand Agricola's meaning of probability if we consider how it fits into the larger network of possible meanings present in the tradition of dialectic. As we have seen, Aristotle's understanding of the term 'endoxa', which both Cicero and Boethius erroneously translated by "probable", refers to the idea of "approval" as the basis of credibility and legitimation. This meaning survives in the medieval expression "probable masters" ('magistri probabiles'), who are the most accredited masters, in the sense that they are trustworthy, as well as properly trained and time-tested (Deman 1933: 261). Other Medieval commentators, among whom Albert the Great, use the term probability by contrasting it to truth: a probable statement refers to what is not unquestionably true but is only true in most cases.[235] This meaning of "probable" is rendered by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* with the word 'eikos', which indicates what holds in most cases but falls short of absolute constancy and does not create absolute certainty in the mind. A classic example of such a probable statement in this sense is: "Parents love their children"; the probability of these statements can be objectively ascertained. In other words, probable is that which resembles the truth but does not attain it ('verisimilis'). It is mostly in this sense that Cicero and Quintilian[236] used the term. Its subjective counterpart[237] is a certain kind of assent which is bestowed upon one side of two contradictory statements with "the fear" that the other side may be true.[238] As measured by the quality of assent it involves, a dialectical syllogism whose premises are only probable can be considered as being midway between scientific demonstration and rhetorical persuasion. In this respect, probable reasoning appears inferior to scientific demonstration which brings about an unshakable adherence of the mind. In a slightly different meaning, the word "probable" is also associated with the domain of the contingent, that which could be otherwise, and it involves an element of conjecture insofar as it produces a kind of knowledge which is not in itself less certain than scientific knowledge, but is unstable and liable to change over time: in the Middle Ages, a "probable certainty" "indicates a certainty to which you recognize the possibility of failure, and which is obtainable in contingent matters" (Deman 1933: 273). We shall encounter this meaning of the word mainly in Sigonio's treatise on the dialogue form.

When we now come to Agricola, we realize that the word "probable" has yet another cluster of meanings. In Agricola's definition of dialectic, the term "probably" ('probabiliter') is not used in the sense of either "approved", "truthseeming" or "contingently true", but rather in a sense related to the activity of proving something. It is thus related to what is persuasive (the Greek 'pithanon'). This is clear when we notice that the main function of dialectic, to teach ('docere'), means, as we have seen, to prove.[239] The words 'probabilis' and 'docere' are associated with another term, 'fidem facere', which is also connected to the idea of proving: every dialectician "teaches in order to create conviction with speech ('ut fidem facisse oratione')" (II.3; ID 113, DID 196).[240] Antonio Riccoboni agrees that "to create conviction ('fidem facere') is to teach" (1596: 82). Although the expression 'fidem facere' is commonly translated with "to create conviction", or "to create belief", we should be wary of associating it with the simple persuasion of the listener. Agricola insists that a dialectician worthy of this name has to create conviction ('fidem facere') "with discourse and argument ('oratione et dicendo')" (II.3; ID 113, DID 397) and not by other means designed to weaken the listener's abilities to resist.[241] Therefore, the term "conviction" in the expression "to create conviction" refers to a state of mind created by an argument or reasoning and, therefore, it is neither a conviction created by any uncertain means, nor simply a synonym of an uncertain belief acquired by persuasion. In this sense, 'probabilitates', or proofs by rational means, are opposed to 'auctoritates', or the opinions of the most accredited authors, already in the Middle Ages (Deman 1933: 264). Deman writes: "With the word *probabilis* we want to signify all that is liable, or demands, or provides proofs of reason, of whatever nature their probatory force is" (Deman 1933: 262). Still, the fact that the words 'probare', 'docere' and 'probabiliter dicere' are often associated with the expression 'fidem facere' is indicative of the necessary connection existing between proof and conviction: in order for a particular reasoning to be considered as a proof, it must be effective and its audience must be convinced.

It is significant that Agricola inherited Cicero's translation of the term 'endoxa' and explicitly distances himself from Aristotle: "We call probable in discussing ('in disserendo') not what is really probable, namely (as Aristotle said) what appears to all, to most or to the most knowledgeable" (II.2; ID 111, DID 192). This is so, Agricola explains, because we can speak in a probable way of things which do not agree with generally held beliefs, for example impossible events recounted in stories – e.g. that men can be transformed into birds – or ideas which are outright incredible, like that good and evil are the same thing, as Heraclitus claimed, or that nothing can be known, as the Academy held (II.2; ID 112, DID 193). This remark suggests not only that Agricola's understanding of probability is different from Aristotle's "reputable opinions", but also that the objects to which it is applied are different. According to Aristotle, 'endoxon' is a property of beliefs, and hence of the premises of dialectical reasoning, insofar as they are held by a suitable class of people. For Agricola, on the other hand, probability is a property of the reasoning itself, as is testified by the frequent use of the expression "to speak probably" of something.[242] Nor is there any trace in Agricola's text of the Ciceronian objective meaning of the word "probable", namely "that which comes to be for the most part", or of the subjective sense of that which creates a weak kind of assent, the "assent with fear" that the side of the contradiction one defends may be false.

"To speak probably ('probabiliter disserendi')" about something, therefore, means using rational and argumentative means in order to prove something in such a way that a listener believes it. However, since the criterion of valid proof is not simply the formal structure of the argument, it is necessary to examine the conditions an argument must fulfill to constitute a proof for something in Agricola's view. Understanding exactly what Agricola means by the word "probable" will allow us to see why one can "speak probably" of incredible stories or even impossible beliefs. Agricola writes just after the critique of Aristotle's 'endoxa': "We shall call probable what will be said *suitably* and *fittingly* ('apte consentaneeque') about the subject proposed" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193; my emphasis).[243] These two words, suitable ('aptus') and fitting ('consentaneus'), hold the key for understanding not only Agricola's concept of probability, but also his notion of proof, which is tightly bound to it.

4.4.1 "Suitability" and audience

Agricola associates the term "suitably ('apte')" with the stated purpose of dialectic, that of creating belief ("fidem facere"): "Dialectic will be concerned with speaking in a probable way ('probabiliter'), and probable will mean whatever can be said as suitably as possible ('quam aptissime') for creating belief ('ad fidem') according to the thing proposed" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193; cit. in Mack 1993: 170). According to Agricola, proving is a an audience-dependent notion, insofar as we have spoken probably of a given subject once we have succeeded as much as possible in creating the corresponding belief in our audience. Although it sounds like an oxymoron, an important qualification must be added to the purpose of dialectic: to create conviction "as much as possible", mirrors Agricola's expression "as suitably as possible". Indeed, his definition of the probable implies that there exist several degrees of proof and hence of conviction, which vary according to the inherent difficulty of the issue at hand, the nature of the audience, and the speaker's abilities to arrange the available material and to construct what Agricola calls a "topical description" of the subject. The highest of these degrees of proof is demonstration, which is an argument that produces certainty about the thesis it purports to justify.[244] In his comment, Latomus states that the task of dialectic is to bring about both "certainty and probability with discourse" (31v) and in his only reference to reasoning *in utramque partem*, Agricola writes: "But if we say that the probable ('probabile') is not only what can be said ambiguously and on both sides ('ambigue et in utramque partem'), but that the more certain ('certius') anything is the more probable ('probabilius') it is, and that what is undoubted ('indubitatum') would seem to be the most provable of all, then all arts of every kind will be made up of probable things" (II.4; ID 122, DID 207; cit. in Mack 1993: 171). Therefore, as far as the reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Organon* is concerned, there is in principle no sharp distinction between the *Analytics*' and the *Topics*' purposes and subject matters. Demonstration would be only one extreme – and probably not so frequent – case of dialectical invention.[245] Monfasani explains the continuity between dialectical and demonstrative arguments by observing that Agricola "viewed certitude exclusively in respect to the psychological state of the listener, regardless of the quality of the proof, and not at all in respect to the scientific rigour of the demonstration justifying certitude" (1990: 187, footnote 28). This, however, is only part of the story. If Agricola's notion of proof were just an audience-dependent notion – something has been proved when (and if) an audience has been convinced – this would undermine his ambitious project of making dialectic into an instrument of knowledge, and not only of persuasive discourse. It is in this context, I think, that the second term used in the definition of probability becomes crucial.

4.4.2 "Fittingness" and the world

The other term appearring in Agricola's definition of "probable" is "fitting ('consentaneus')": "We shall call *probable* what will be said *suitably* and *fittingly* ('apte consentaneeque') about the subject proposed" (II.2; ID 112, DID 193). The term "fitting" also appears at the beginning of the first book, when Agricola is trying to show the usefulness of places for proving something.[246] Agricola employs this term to indicate that, in order for an argument to be effective, there must necessarily be a certain agreement or coherence between what proves and what is proved, between the premise and the conclusion. Indeed, as Aristotle claimed, "all true things agree ('consentire') with true things". However, Agricola continues, "one thing is that they agree, another that they build conviction ('fidem astruere'). Therefore, in order for something to be able to confirm something else ('ad alterius confirmationem aliquid adhiberi possit'), it is necessary that [what proves] is united by a certain reason ('coniunctum quadam ratione'), and has a certain kinship ('velut cognatum') to that which it is brought about to prove": if you affirm the premise, the conclusion cannot subsist without, and if you deny it, the conclusion would seem to fall apart (I.2; ID 4, DID 7). This passage suggests that the concept of fittingness or agreement does not simply signify a generic coherence in the sense that certain things do not contradict each other. Rather, the agreement necessary for proof requires that a more special relationship is singled out among all those which are compatible with a general coherence. This relationship is what the places identify. What underlies this idea of agreement, or fittingness, is precisely that the world is made up of an infinite network of possible relationships, of which some actually hold and some do not. By helping us to find out which relationships actually hold, dialectical invention becomes an instrument for discovering the truth about the world. Freely referring to the Stoic definition of dialectic, Agricola writes: "Dialectic teaches the method of speaking in a probable way ('rationem probabiliter disserendi'), *that is*, it is merely the instrument for distinguishing truth and falsity, by use and help of which, all the practitioners of the different subjects can more easily explore what is true and false in their own subject matter" (II.7; ID 125, DID 210; my emphasis). He thus equates a stronger and a weaker role for dialectic: the former consists in "distinguishing" the truth, and the latter in "exploring" the truth. After citing the passage, Mack comments: "Agricola is quite prepared to speak of true and false in relation to dialectic" (1993: 172); Latomus also speaks of dialectic as "the leader for understanding truth and falsity ('veri falsique comprehendi dux')" (31r–v). However, in another passage he writes that dialectic is merely an instrument capable of improving our natural abilities to "penetrate the secrets of things" (2r). Although he is quite ambiguous on this point, we can say that according to Agricola it is not dialectic itself which allows us to distinguish truth from falsity, for this is the task of metaphysics or the sciences. Rather, dialectic helps the practitioners of the specific disciplines to do in a more structured way what they would naturally do in a more disorderly fashion.

We may conclude that according to Agricola, an argument is probable, namely it provides a proof for something, not only when it is suitable or convincing ('aptus') with respect to a given audience, but also when it is fitting ('consentaneus'), namely when it is able to pick out those relationships in the world which really hold. Implicit in all of Agricola's descriptions of dialectic's nature and task is a certain common-sense realism which consists in the view that the things in the world are organized according to countless relationships; invention helps us identify some of them as privileged and makes them explicit by constructing a fitting reasoning. If we succeed and our reasoning is as close as possible to the order of things as they really are, we shall have created conviction in our listeners, and our discourse will constitute a proof of the beliefs we want to convey. Thus, discourse can prove only insofar as it fits the world and not only insofar as it speaks in a suitable way to a given audience.

A place, then, singles out all those relationships which hold among objects and events. Also, according to Agricola, a discourse is clear either because of the "words" used – this is the function of grammar and rhetoric – or because of the "things" referred to. In turn, clarity of "things" depends either on nature (some things are more evident or more obscure by nature) or on dialectic. In the latter case, clarity depends on the *order of things*. The fact that something is said earlier or later in a discourse "brings more or less intelligibility than something else": "order", writes Agricola, "not only helps greatly for learning things, but their proof ('fides') sometimes relies for the most part upon it" (II.3; ID 114, DID 196). Agricola also uses another term – "coherent ('coherens')" – which seems to describe the same property of discourse as "fitting". No argument is coherent because it is drawn from a particular "place". Rather, "an argument is coherent when such is the condition of things among each other that they can be brought together in the form of a syllogism or in another approved form of argumentation, through which it can be inferred that things are coherent among themselves ('coherentes inter se') and necessarily interconnected ('connexas')" (II.1; ID 106–7, DID 179). In the first part of this definition, Agricola calls an argument "coherent" when it succeeds in exhibiting the relationships existing in the world. Agricola is struggling to make dialectic an instrument of knowledge applicable to all arts, rather than a mere exercise of words, or even an exercise of the mind itself. He expresses admiration for mathematics, a science which does not depend on the power of words: "[Mathematics] does not belong to the vain disputes of men and is not capable of screams, but is content with the dust and the stick in order to draw on the ground, and follows rather the silent faith of the eyes than the garrulous faith of the ears" (I.1; ID 107, DID 179). In the second part of the definition, Agricola states that things "are coherent among themselves" when they can be captured in a coherent argument. We could rephrase this statement in a way that would make the definition of the coherence of discourse less circular. Agricola may be expressing the belief that *if* things are coherent among themselves, then they can be captured in a coherent argument; in other words, it shows his faith in the possibility that discourse can describe real existing relationships in the world, and therefore that a dialectical proof may not be entirely dependent upon the conviction of a given audience.

We can interpret in a similar way one of Agricola's most important, but somewhat elusive, distinctions, namely the distinction between "exposition" and "argumentation", which occupies a few chapters (16–23) of the second book. Both exposition and argumentation are parts of discourse ('oratio'), which, as the main instrument of invention, allows dialectic to fulfill its function, namely to speak probably of a given subject. The first, and most straightforward, distinction between exposition and argumentation is based on the difference between their audiences: "Exposition is that which only tells the way something is, to a listener who believes it, an argumentation is that which tries with effort to win over [a reluctant listener] in order to show him how something is" (II.16; ID 156, DID 258; see also I.1).[247] Exposition proves by exhibiting *causes*, argumentation by using *reasons*: "We call reason that by which we know something, and cause that by which the thing is" (ibid.). When one says that a lunar eclipse occurs because the earth is positioned between the sun and the moon one is "exposing", but when one predicts that tomorrow the moon will be obscured, by explaining why this will be the case, one is "arguing" (ibid.).[248] In argumentation lie "the strength and nerves of the disputant, because exposition finds (so to speak) the proof ('fidem'), and argumentation makes it" (II.17; ID 159, DID 261). We can create conviction ('fidem facere') in two ways, either with things or with words: we use the first in exposition and the second in argumentation. Exposition proves by showing the order and coherence of the things narrated, even though we do not prove each one of them to be true. An argumentation, by contrast, proves with words "by collecting dubious things with a probable argument" (II.2; ID 162, DID 265), since an argument is that "with which we embrace the thing which we want to prove together with that invented device ('inventum)' with which we try to prove it" (II.17; ID 162, DID 265–266). Although both use discourse, exposition does not rely on specific argument forms, but rather uses language to express emotions (as in poetry), chronologically ordered facts (as in history) or causal relationships (as in philosophy). Argumentations, on the other hand, use particular arrangements of words, canonized by the tradition, which are especially designed to force belief upon a listener. Different forms of argumentation are the well-known syllogism and induction, together with their truncated or enlarged forms ('enthymēma', example, 'epicheirēma').[249] More complex is the case of a proof by exposition. We have already seen that exposition creates conviction or proves not through the artificial construction of interconnected systems of words, but by expressing things as they are. However, when a speaker has to face objections, "it is not enough that things are true, but they also have to be solid ('firma') and such as they can carry, as it were, their own proof ('velut fidem sibi ipsis facientia')" (ID 183; DID 298). In other words, an exposition has to be "probable".[250] In order to be probable, namely to prove, exposition has to be "argumentative", "fitting" and "consequential". It is "argumentative" "if it possesses the reasons of things"; it is "fitting" if it respects the characters, the times and the places of what it is describing; and it is "consequential" if "the things which come earlier are not discordant from those which follow" and when the last "appear to depend from the conviction ('fides') of those which come earlier" (II.22; ID 184–185, DID 299). In other words, it is "consequential" if it ties the listener's mind with a "knot" and allows him "to touch, as it were, things with his hand" (ibid.).

As to the rationale of the distinction between exposition and argumentation, we can say that exposition *exhibits* the order of things themselves to someone who is well-disposed to believe them, while argumentation *constructs* a linguistic device in order to create conviction, since it has to overcome the obstacle of a resisting listener. This is why Agricola writes that exposition *finds* the proofs, while argumentation *makes* them. However, despite what may appear at first glance, the main instrument of proof and conviction is exposition, which is simply a way of representing the natural cohesion and order of things in discourse: this is what mainly convinces and proves. Argumentation, by contrast, does not simply reflect the order of things. Rather, it introduces some artificial means of persuasion and an element of constructedness for the sake of persuading an audience. But things remain the main object of discourse and words are justified only insofar as they add a new dimension to discourse when things, as mediated through the order of exposition, are not sufficient. The distinction between these two modes of probable discourse, exposition and argumentation, can clearly be related to the humanistic theme of the relationship between things and words, and to the higher importance of the first with respect to the second.

4.5 Conclusions: argument, persuasion and invention

Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* is a significant work in its own right: it is a coherent, original and serious attempt at inventing a new dialectic to replace Aristotelian manuals like Peter of Spain's compendium of Aristotle's *Organon*. It is also explicitly centered around Aristotle's *Topics*, and thus participates in its Renaissance revival and contributes to the history of the tradition it has initiated. Although Agricola does not simply intend to comment on Aristotle's text, and thus does not contribute directly to a better understanding of it, he develops and pushes to their limits two important aspects of Aristotle's approach to the arts of discourse, namely the ancient connection between dialectic and rhetoric, and the importance of the topics for what Cicero would later call "invention". Thus, although strictly speaking Agricola's approach to dialectic is different from Aristotle's and more in tune with the rhetorical sources of the humanist rebellion against dialectic, it can still be considered as one of its offshoots.[251] As far as the first point is concerned, Agricola conceives the overall project of enlarging dialectic into a broader and more general instrument of proof, incorporating elements which were traditionally reserved for rhetoric, like the affects and disposition. This move has enlarged – and enriched – the notion of dialectic, which can deal with all forms of argument, including debate. Agricola uses rhetorical rather than formal criteria for evaluating arguments: a good argument cannot but persuade. However, persuasion cannot be firm and justified unless the argument is so constructed as to serve as a proof of the thesis. Thus, in Agricola's definition of dialectic the term "probable" is used in the etymological sense of what is "apt to prove" and is applied to argumentative reasoning as a whole rather than just to its premises. As for dialectic, it is the art of proving a statement by means of discourse, namely the art of creating a firm conviction about the truth of a statement in the minds of a given audience. It is true that already for Aristotle winning over a reluctant audience by discourse is the purpose of both dialectic and rhetoric, if their commonality is understood in the most generic sense as dealing with discourse as it is addressed to another party. However, Aristotle distinguished dialectic and rhetoric with respect to the type of audience involved, the type of discourse used, and the kind of subjects treated: dialectical reasoning is addressed to one single well-qualified interlocutor, whereas rhetorical reasoning is addressed to a wider and less qualified audience; dialectic uses questions and answers and a limited set of legitimate tools of discourse, while rhetoric uses long continuous discourse and includes affects as a legitimate means to prove; finally dialectic deals with general issues ("is pleasure a good?") rather than particular theses ("was this particular pleasure justified?"). Agricola's dialectic appears therefore as a super-discipline encompassing in a generic way what Aristotelian dialectic and rhetoric have in common. Also, owing to his belief in the relatively elusive character of firm knowledge, Agricola sees a basic continuity between proof and demonstration: the latter is only a rare limiting case of the former just in case the conviction created in the audience is steadfast.

The second aspect of Agricola's dialectic, the emphasis on invention, is clearly Aristotelian insofar as it uses topics as strategies for finding those arguments which are suitable to prove a thesis to a particular audience. However, as we have seen, Agricola seeks to retain the task the Stoics attributed to dialectic, that of being the arbiter of truth and falsity in matters as different as political decisions and the knowledge of the natural world. In this respect, he would like dialectic to play a higher role than mere persuasion, allowing for the knowledge of *things* as opposed to the knowledge of *words*. As we have seen, the distinction between these two different tasks of dialectic reflects the ambiguity of the notion of invention itself, which may include both the invention of arguments and the discovery of things. It is an open question whether Agricola can reconcile these two aspects of invention in his "new dialectic", and whether the second objective is feasible at all. Jardine, following Bacon's rejection of these new dialectics in the name of the empirical method, concludes her chapter on humanistic logic by cautioning against confusing "humanist attention to method (which strives in the direction of textual and literary problems) alongside scholastic incursions into deceptively similar areas associated with their particular professional interest in mathematical and scientific reasoning" (1988: 186). Other interpreters are more nuanced in their judgment: "To humanists, on the one hand, and to the growing number of genuinely empirical scientists, on the other – both of whom emphasized (…) the necessity of particularized and "real" instruments of knowledge – Agricola provided a logic adapted to their new forms of inquiry" (Cogan 1984: 193).[252] For my part, I think that even today Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* can be seen as an extremely rich and useful guide to the arts of discourse, argument and proof, used in a creative way. However, the second task of dialectical invention, that of discovering of the truth about the natural world, is a patent illusion: Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* lacks the capacity to establish a firm connection between discourse to the real world and was rightly superseded during the 17th-century scientific revolution by mathematics and the experimental method. Nonetheless, even though the need expressed by the humanists to reach the real world remained only a wish, their common-sense realism, expressed by their avowed preference of things over words, was a useful incentive for research. Moreover, as we shall see, the theme of using dialectic in order to find out about the truth, and not only to construct persuasive arguments, will emerge very clearly in Nifo's commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* and in Sigonio's treatise on the dialogue form: both authors defend the idea that rule-bound debates facilitate in several ways the discovery of truth. Quite apart from Agricola's own particular approach, Renaissance attempts at replacing scholastic logic with a new rhetorically-conscious dialectic did not produce the hoped-for fruits. As they started to be used as new

University handbooks, dialectic treatises eventually became as pedantic and abstract as the Medieval scholastic works they were meant to criticize. However, humanist aspirations for the pursuit of genuine and original intellectual questions sifted through to the general cultural environment and nourished the thought of more thoroughly Aristotelian authors, most notably Renaissance Aristotelian commentators.

CHAPTER 5

The *Topics* and Renaissance Aristotelianism

Agostino Nifo's commentary and his sources

The major aspect of the Renaissance revival of dialectic, in a broad sense, is the fate of Aristotle's *Topics* within the movement that has been identified as "Renaissance Aristotelianism", and in particular Italian Aristotelianism. As Charles Schmitt writes: "After the decline of the Aristotelian school of antiquity, the most complete recovery, assimilation and understanding of Aristotle – both in spirit and in letter – was to be found in the Veneto from the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth century" (1983a: 123). As for the *Topics*, a text which had been either neglected or used for studying various logical inferences in the Middle Ages, we witness not only a renewal of interest but also the recovery of the ancient Aristotelian meaning of dialectic. Dialectic is explicitly linked to disputation and debate, and its epistemic value is reaffirmed. Although the term 'endoxa' is still most often translated as "probabilities",[253] it is understood as describing premises which are such as to force the opponent to assent, and not as lower-value premises producing only opinions as opposed to firm scientific beliefs.[254]

Aristotelianism was of paramount importance during that period, both institutionally – the philosophical university establishment was for the most part Aristotelian –, and in terms of the number of published editions; nonetheless, this important current of thought had been neglected as the backward-looking scapegoat of Humanists and Platonists, the most advanced intellectual movements of the Renaissance. Finally, Ernest Renan (1866) and John H. Randall (1961) opened the way to a rehabilitation of Renaissance Aristotelianism: Renan with a pioneering work on Paduan Averroism and Randall with his study on the relationship between Paduan methodological innovations, and the 17th-century scientific revolution. Though widely criticized today, Renan and Randall had the merit of directing scholarly attention to this "vast and powerful movement of thought" (Kristeller 1962: 19).[255] After them, other scholars such as Paul Oskar Kristeller, William Edwards and Charles Schmitt opened new perspectives and initiated more precise and detailed work on the subject. A few barriers have begun to crumble, such as the rigid oppositions of Aristotelianism and Humanism, Averroism and Alexandrinism, Italian and foreign Aristotelianism. Moreover, the interest in Aristotelianism has widened and now goes well beyond the study of particular problems, such as the methodological issue which culminated with Zabarella's *regressus* theory, or the discussions surrounding the immortality of the soul.[256] Rather, Aristotelianism is increasingly considered as "a highly complex tradition (…) [which] can be called 'Aristotelian' only in the sense that the text of Aristotle furnishes its basis or the cement that binds it together and makes it a tradition in the strict sense of the word" (Edwards 1983: 206). Aristotelianism can thus be viewed as fruitfully interacting and even merging with other movements of thought, without losing its identity. Indeed, Aristotelian philosophers contribute to build a strong tradition of thought not only because they take Aristotle's texts as a basic reference, but also because they see their work as part of a communal enterprise. It is in this sense that Charles Schmitt (1983a) has studied Italian Aristotelianism, effectively carrying out Randall's project twenty years earlier: "Italian Aristotelianism forms an unusually well integrated tradition. (…) These men are not setting forth an original and personal world-view. They are working cooperatively on problems, and the history of those problems has to be followed through the whole tradition to see what any individual added" (Randall 1960: 201–201). The newly translated commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes, which become important references in the 16th century, make this communal enterprise somewhat timeless: ancient commentators of Aristotle are considered in the Renaissance as contemporary voices worthy of critical discussion and not merely as authorities of the past who must be followed blindly. Though innovative in many important ways, Renaissance Aristotelians, quite unlike Platonists and Humanists, see themselves as partaking of a long continuous tradition of thought (Schmitt 1979: 142): although this tends to obscure their original and specific contributions to the history of thought, it offers an opportunity to adopt a diachronical and integrated perspective by giving a prominent role to the sources to which Renaissance authors chose to refer.

In this chapter, I will look at Renaissance Aristotelianism by referring to the *fortuna* of the *Topics* with respect to both its translations and its commentaries, a subject which has not yet been adequately studied. This will allow me to examine much-debated general issues – the respective roles of Scholasticism and Humanism and the dichotomy between Averroism and Alexandrinism – from a particular viewpoint, and hopefully shed some new light on them. The subject matter of this study is still too vast, however, and therefore I will further restrict its object and its geographical extension. Firstly, I shall look at the history of translations and commentaries of only parts of the first and eighth books of the *Topics*, although I shall include some passages from the *Sophistical Refutations*. These are the sections where the nature and function of dialectic are specifically defined, and which I have analyzed in the chapter devoted to Aristotle. Secondly, I shall concentrate on the recovery and interpretation of Aristotle's *Topics* which took place in the Venetian Republic in roughly the first half of the 16th century, culminating in Nifo's truly wonderful commentary.[257] I shall compare this major work to some other minor commentaries, most notably the anonymous commentary which appeared in Venice in 1559. In this perspective, I shall also discuss, by way of a flashback, both Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Averroes' relevant commentaries since they both appear as active interlocutors in Nifo's own work.

As for the phenomenon called "Paduan Aristotelianism", it is sometimes designated by different terms,[258] but is still considered, following Randall, a well-defined and crucial intellectual movement, in particular as far as logic and methodology are concerned. This is partly due to political reasons (the much-praised freedom of thought characterizing the Venetian Republic), to general cultural reasons (the development of Greek studies within Italian Renaissance Humanism), and to the extraordinary editorial activity which took place in that town (Schmitt 1983a). Indeed, after importing new and interesting developments from France, it was in the Venitian province that Paul of Venice initiated an important school of Aristotelian philosophy in the 14th century (Bottin 1983a). This school flourished for over a century and reached its heyday in the first half of the 16th century, while its developments were later exported, in the second half of the 16th century, to France, Germany and Spain (Schmitt 1983a). Aristotle's *Topics* were part of this intellectual movement and in those years were the object of some new translations and commentaries, both in France with Périon (1541, 1558) and Charpentier (1567), and in Germany with Eck (1516–17), Grynaeus (1556) and Pacius (1605). Although I will refer to these relatively minor developments only briefly, they show that Aristotelianism was truly a complex and, what is more, an international phenomenon (Schmitt 1983a: 11).

5.1 Renaissance Aristotelianism and dialectic

Curiously, there were no new Humanist translations of the *Topics* in the 15th century:[259] even Argyrophilus, who translated the *Organon* in its entirety in 1479, including the *Sophistical Refutations*, omitted Aristotle's work on dialectic.[260] The first new translation of the *Topics* published in the Renaissance was a revision of Boethius's by Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, a French Aristotelian Humanist, which was published in 1503 in Paris under the title of *Libri logicorum*. This became the main Renaissance translation and was re-published by Thomas Junta in the edition of Aristotle' *Opera* with Averroes' commentary in 1550–52.[261] An interesting new Latin translation of both texts was later produced by Johannes Baptista Rasarius; they accompany his translations of both Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on the *Topics* (1573) and of the Pseudo-Alexander's commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* (1557). Outside Italy, notable humanist translations include Périon's *Topicorum libri VIII*, published in Paris in 1558, Charpentier's *Aristotelis ars disserendi*, published in Paris in 1567 and 1572 and Julius Pacius'

Organon which was printed in Geneva in 1605 and included the Greek text. Pacius also published the last important commentary on the *Topics* in 1597.[262] As Schmitt has pointed out, referring to the number of bilingual editions of Aristotle abroad, "by the 1540's and 1550's the center of philological studies and humanistic work on Aristotle had begun to move from Italy to northern Europe, especially to Paris and later to the Lower Countries". In Italy, on the other hand, "not only were the monumental medieval commentaries of Thomas Aquinas and Averroes frequently reprinted, but we also find a proliferation of new commentaries on the set university texts" (1979: 127).

As far as the understanding of Aristotle's text is concerned, the Aristotelian school of Padua and, more generally, Veneto Aristotelianism greatly benefited from the translation and publication of both Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Averroes' commentaries on the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*. Both authors had a major impact on the renaissance of Aristotle's major works on dialectic. Before analyzing Nifo's commentary, therefore, I shall describe Alexander's and Averroes' understanding of dialectic and reconstruct the history of the recovery of their relevant works in the Renaissance.

5.1.1 Alexander of Aphrodisias: Aristotelian dialectic and the art of debate

Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on the *Topics* is the only Greek commentary on Aristotle's text which survived the high Middle Ages. Although this work did not greatly influence Boethius' understanding of dialectic, it was most probably translated into Arabic in the 8th and 9th centuries and was known by Averroes, who discusses at length his definition of 'topos' as opposed to Themistius'. What in the Renaissance, and up to Wallies' edition at the end of the 19th century, was believed to be Alexander's commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* is known today to have been composed around 1120 by a Greek scholar, Michael of Ephesos, and is the most complete extant Medieval commentary on that work.[263] Both commentaries – Alexander's commentary on the *Topics* and Pseudo-Alexander's commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* – were recovered and published in Greek as *editio princeps* in 1513 and 1520 respectively[264] and were later translated into Latin several times in the first half of the 16th century – the *Topics* for a total of seven editions and the *Sophistical Refutations* for a total of five.[265] Alexander's commentaries were crucial to the understanding and assimilation of Aristotle's texts on dialectic in the Renaissance: the richness of this extraordinary translation and editorial activity is reflected in the new commentaries on Aristotle's works produced in the Venetian Republic, and most notably Nifo's, where Alexander's analyses will loom large. In order to better appreciate the way in which Nifo used, and occasionally modified, Alexander's approach to dialectic, we need to describe it in its own right.

Alexander was most certainly in charge of an important chair of Aristotelian studies at the end of the 2nd century AD in Athens or in another important city in the Roman empire. He wrote on almost all of Aristotle's works, but did not comment on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, even though he devoted several important passages of his commentary on the *Topics* to the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric. He was the last commentator to be thoroughly Aristotelian (in contrast with later Neo-Platonist commentators): his purpose was always to render Aristotle's text coherent and perfectly intelligible, by drawing, if necessary, on claims that Aristotle himself made, or might have made, in other works. Even when he puts forth original theses, he does so by seemingly expounding on Aristotle's text; as Sharples writes: "He often regards himself as attempting to provide, on the basis of Aristotle's writings, a solution to a problem which Aristotle himself had not discussed; even when his own position is clearly a rejection of earlier Peripatetic theories, he regards himself as providing a more Aristotelian solution" (1987: 1180).

Alexander's commentary on the first book of the *Topics*[266] is introduced by a historical overview, where Aristotle's definition of dialectic at 100a18–21 is compared to the Stoics' and Plato's respectively: though dialectic is explicitly said to "contribute to finding the truth ('pros tēn euresis tēs alētheias')" (1.9), it is equally clearly associated with the art of dialogue and debate ('dialegesthai') by question and answer (3.8). Developing even further Aristotle's comparison between dialectic and medicine at 101b5–10, Alexander maintains that dialectic is similar to medicine because the value of these arts does not reside in achieving a specific end, but rather in being exercised in the right way; moreover, they are both contingent, context-dependent arts and need judgment – "an understanding appropriate to them with a view to accommodating the circumstances" (32.15–20) – to realize their purposes effectively. In a long section, Alexander had previously discussed Aristotle's opening sentence of the *Rhetoric*, where rhetoric is defined as a "counterpart" ('antistrophos') to dialectic. Alexander definitely emphasizes the similarities between rhetoric and dialectic, and stresses more clearly dialectic's main difference from rhetoric, the use of questions and answers. He also develops the analogy between the two arts in great detail and cited the fact that both rhetoric and dialectic deal in principle with all subjects: dialectic does so from the point of view of what is "common and approved ('koinon kai endoxon')", while rhetoric through what is "persuasive and approved (''pithanon kai endoxon')" (4.1–16). Either of them, he continues, can deal with both sides of the same question, namely can be employed to bring about one effect and its opposite – good and evil – unlike medicine, for example, which legitimately brings about health only (4.20–5.6). He then describes the two main differences between rhetoric and dialectic: rhetoric deals more readily with individual rather than general issues and with decisions in the domain of action, most notably political, rather than with theoretical questions (5.7–17). Most importantly, dialectic does not use continuous speech, but an interrupted series of questions and answers. Alexander also describes at length what a 'topos' is, and adopts Theophrastus' early definition as a "starting point ('archē')" or an "element ('stoicheion') from which we take the starting point concerning each matter by focusing our thought upon it" (5.17– 22).[267]

In explaining Aristotle's definition of syllogism, Alexander understands Aristotle's phrase "from what has been posited ('tethenta')" as "from what has been obtained and agreed to and conceded ('synchōrēthenta')" and adds "either by the interlocutor or the author of the syllogism himself" (7.26–8.1); he thus stresses the continuity between syllogisms used in debate and "lonely" syllogisms, since both need their premises to be conceded to, a hint that will be taken up in the Renaissance. Alexander also indirectly reinforces the link between dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms by introducing the distinction between the matter ('hylē') and the form ('schēma') of syllogisms: matter indicates the kind of content expressed in the premises, and form the order of the terms or premises of syllogisms. Whether Alexander's distinction is tenable or not,[268] one of its consequences is to ensure that dialectical syllogisms, which differ in matter from demonstrative syllogisms, may be considered as fully legitimate arguments. Also, according to Alexander, there are indeed arguments which are necessary, i.e. those whose conclusions follow necessarily from the premises, without being formally valid: "Necessary has a wider extension than just the necessity of syllogisms" (9.7–8). Rhetorical arguments or hypothetical arguments where the universal premise is missing are of this kind: they are materially valid and thus perfectly acceptable by virtue of the content of their premises. Conversely, a valid deductive argument whose premises are not constituted of the right matter is as useless, he writes, as an object which has the form of a saw but is made of wax. The consideration of matter also serves the purpose of denying that some valid deductive inferences, as for example inferences where the conclusion is identical to one of the premises, are indeed syllogisms. Above all, syllogisms are "instruments" and as such they have a purpose, namely to prove something and to do so in a necessary fashion; Alexander writes that the consideration of matter is necessary for a deduction to be a syllogism, because syllogisms must prove something: "The form of the wording is not enough to produce a syllogism, first of all, what is meant by this wording has to be capable of proving ('deiknymi') something" (10.19–21).

We can gather what Alexander means by "proving" from a previous passage: "The use of the syllogism is to make obvious ('phaneron') what is not held to be known through things that are known and obvious" (9.23–25). In order to prove, all syllogisms derive their conclusions in a necessary fashion. But for Alexander there are deductive inferences which can be necessary without being formal syllogisms: it is the case of rhetorical syllogisms (enthymemes) which are necessary but only in virtue of a missing premise ("the man deserves to be punished for he is a traitor" supposes the truth of: "All traitors must be punished").[269] As for dialectical syllogisms, they are formal syllogisms in the full sense of the word, and thus they can prove a conclusion, although they differ materially from demonstrations, namely "syllogisms which yield knowledge ('epistēmonikos syllogismos')" (15.25). They use premises which are "approved" and express "reputable opinions" rather than "true and primary things which have then credibility ('echein ten pistin') not through others but from themselves" (18.15). Nonetheless, when commenting on the uses of dialectic, Alexander emphasizes its crucial importance for philosophy and science, as well as for finding the truth. Interestingly, Alexander follows Aristotle in strongly associating dialectic with 'peirastic' investigations (28.22–30), as opposed to both teaching and sophistical reasoning. For all these reasons, Alexander is considered by Renaissance Aristotelians as both closer to Aristotle's real positions and as presenting a modern and positive view of dialectic.

5.1.2 Averroes: the art of logic and kinds of assent

In the Renaissance, Averroes is considered Aristotle's Medieval commentator *par excellence*. The revival of his thought in the 16th century joined forces with the best fruits of Renaissance Humanism to produce the intellectual renaissance of Aristotle's dialectic. A doctor and judge in 12th-century Cordova, Averroes commented on a great number of Aristotle's works, most notably the logical works,[270] and was engaged in political and religious debates, especially against the "dialectical theologians". Echoes of this debate, and of Averroes' rationalistic positions, also appear in his own logical work. He had access to most of Aristotle's works and to some of the Greek commentators' texts in the Arabic translations produced in the 8th century. Among others, Averroes was acquainted with Alexander's extensive commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, and mentions it in several places, though not in the relevant chapters of the first and eighth books.

Averroes himself wrote a fairly long commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* and *SophisticalRefutations*, which came to be known as "Middle Commentaries". Unlike many of his other works, these texts were not translated into Latin in the Middle Ages, but were either transliterated into Hebrew characters, or translated into Hebrew.[271] Averroes also wrote a Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which was translated into Latin in the 12th century.[272] In 1523, Abraham de Balmes[273] translated Averroes' commentaries on the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* from Hebrew into Latin, while in the 1520's Jacob Mantinus translated the first four books of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *Topics*; both translations are included in the so-called Junta edition of Aristotle's work published for the first time in 1550–1552.[274] Together with the new translations of Averroes' commentaries, the Junta edition went a long way towards incorporating the best available translations of Aristotle and those which were midway between the Medieval *verbum e verbo* and the elegant but inaccurate Humanist translations.[275]

Averroes also wrote a short commentary on the *Topics*, which was included in a work which came to be known as the "Short Commentary on Logic". This synthetic commentary on the *Organon* has a more general didactic purpose than his longer Aristotelian commentaries, which are more exegetical in character. It also provides interesting information on the role of topics and dialectic in relation to the other domains of logic. This work was also transliterated into Hebrew characters, translated into Hebrew in the 13th century and translated into Latin by Abraham de Balmes in the 16th century, finally to be published in the Junta edition (Wolfson 1973b). The last part of this short treatise, which is composed of short commentaries on Aristotle' *Topics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, was translated into English in 1977. As the editor of this English translation, Butterworth, writes: a "consequence of incorporating rhetoric and poetics into logic is that it allowed Averroes to stress the importance of each art for inquiry and instruction, as well as to allude to the way each art shared in the attributes of logic. He thus countered the prevailing tendency to restrict rhetoric and poetics to eloquence and to examine each solely in terms of style" (1977: 21).

Averroes' choice of linking dialectic to rhetoric and poetics had more important consequences on his understanding of the topics and on the role of dialectic as compared to the rest of logic. In his reorganization of Aristotle's *Organon*, Books II to VII of Aristotle's *Topics*, those dealing with the 'topoi',[276] are placed by him before the *Prior Analytics*, in that they enable the construction of all syllogisms by assisting in the conception of the major premises.[277] The *Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics* (Books I and VIII), the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* deal with the use of arguments in achieving different kinds of "assent" (the Arabic 'tasdiq'),[278] which is the judgment that something is the case. In this respect, they all belong to the "art" of logic, namely its actual use. Whereas the assent brought about by demonstration is firm in the sense that it cannot be challenged, the assent brought about by dialectical arguments is as firm but can be challenged (par. 2, p. 47). This is due to the fact that dialectical premises, unlike the premises of demonstrative arguments, may be false and often are so, "outside the mind", even though they are true "inside the mind", i.e. may be believed to be true although they are actually false (1977: 48, par. 4). However, the conclusive nature of both dialectical and demonstrative arguments sets both of them apart from rhetorical and poetical arguments which may proceed by means other than argumentative cogency, and thus bring about a more fleeting form of assent; the evaluation of their strength is also more dependent on the circumstances and thus contingently related to context. In the Middle Commentary on the *Rhetoric*, Averroes writes that dialectic and rhetoric can be useful even in cases where the conclusions are true *per se*, when an interlocutor does not understand the demonstration, or when the time is lacking for a long reasoning (1.1.15). However, whereas the conclusions of both rhetorical and dialectical arguments can be challenged, someone using rhetorical arguments is necessarily aware that they can be challenged, and is thus aware of their contingent nature, whereas a dialectician may be unaware of it. Accordingly, there is a difference between the premises used in dialectical arguments and those used in rhetorical ones: dialectical premises represent commonly accepted beliefs, while rhetorical premises express beliefs that are *thought to be* commonly accepted (1.2.14).

Dialectic is indeed a contentious art for Averroes, similar to the art of fencing, and dialectical arguments are arguments addressed to another person in order to refute his point of view or to force him to accept a different one. "Reputable premises" are particularly important in bringing about the interlocutor's assent and Averroes discusses their different types in the Short Commentary, but not in the long one. Conversely, he comments at length on the uses of dialectic for philosophy and the sciences in his Middle Commentary, but does not mention them in the Short Commentary on Logic. We will deal with these important issues – and compare them to Alexander's solutions – in our discussion of Nifo's own commentary.

5.1.3 Aristotelianism and Humanism

The editor of the Junta edition evokes a basic opposition between Greek and Arab interpreters of Aristotle, and explicitly sides with Averroes. In the preface (I.I.3r), he accuses earlier Aristotelians: "What is ridiculous and dangerous at the same time, they preferred to err with the Greeks than to think right with the *barbari* ('cum barbaris recta sentire')". Such statements prompted a modern scholar to state that "it would seem that the Graecists have displaced the humanists as the main enemy of the Latin, Averroistic Aristotle" (Cranz 1976: 123–24). According to Schmitt, the Junta edition represents "a rather severe reaction against an overly philological and 'humanistic' approach to Aristotle" (1979: 127). Schmitt interprets such an opposition as "a debate between 'Humanism' and 'Scholasticism' in the middle of the sixteenth century" (1979: 133), where Scholasticism stands for the renewed interest in Aristotle. By the word "Humanism", on the other hand, he means both a philological attention to Aristotle's Greek text and the fact of including Aristotle in the "humanities" camp, by privileging his ethical and rhetorical works and by retranslating him according to new standards of elegance (Kristeller 1956). In my opinion, however, a distinction should be made between these two components of what Schmitt calls "Humanism". As far as the first sense is concerned – that of a philological faithfulness to Aristotle's fully recovered texts – there seems to be no opposition between Humanism and Aristotelianism. Despite the fact that those who actually translated either Aristotle's or the Greek commentators' texts were professional men of letters and can thus be classified as humanists, those who, like Nifo, used those translations are better characterized as "pure Aristotelians". At least as far as logic is concerned, Alexandrinism understood as "pure

Aristotelianism" and Averroism "do not exclude each other but rather complete each other in more than one way" (Risse 1964a: 16–17). Indeed, the fact that both the edition of Averroes' systematic commentaries on Aristotle's texts and the translations and editions of Alexander of Aphrodisias' more philological commentaries on those same texts could be published at roughly the same time indicates a convergence rather than a divergence between the two approaches. This is all the more true, since Renaissance authors used Averroes' works mainly as an instrument for understanding Aristotle, and not as systematic treatises in their own right.[279] The usefulness of the recovery of Greek commentaries on Aristotle was recognized even by the editors of the Junta edition, who published Averroes' commentaries (Cranz 1976: 125–126). Moreover, both Averroists and Alexandrians understand logic as independent from theology and metaphysics, and the difference between them is merely one of emphasis.[280] Kristeller even argues that the terms "Averroism" and "Alexandrism" do not mean much if they are broadly defined: Averroism means nothing more than "secular Aristotelianism" (1960: 152), and Renaissance authors used the term Alexandrism only to indicate Alexander's doctrine of the mortality of the soul: "If we wish to take Alexandrism more broadly, in a sense not sanctioned by Renaissance usage, we may understand by it the increasing use made of the Greek text of Aristotle and of his Greek commentators, as against the medieval Latin translations and commentaries" (Kristeller 1960: 153). Schmitt himself admits that a considerable amount of humanist-inspired work was spent in the of careful editing and translating of the texts which were to be included in the Junta-Averroes edition.

Concerning the second sense of Humanism, advocating the study of Aristotle within the larger framework of the humanities camp, it is true that as a rule, Italian Aristotelians, at least, remained hostile to a humanist-oriented Aristotle.[281] As far as the *Topics* are concerned, Italian Aristotelians did not generally embrace the rhetorical and Ciceronian interpretation favored by the humanists, unlike the French Aristotelians as Périon and Charpentier. We do find, however, one such humanistically-oriented Italian work, an anonymous eclectic commentary published in Venice in 1559, which draws inspiration from Cicero as well as from Alexander of Aphrodisias in order to interpret the Aristotelian dialectic. This text was edited by the Academia Veneta, an institution which, though very short-lived (1557–1561), was nonetheless extremely important especially because of its extensive editorial projects.[282] Given that Carlo Sigonio was a major figure of the Academy as its "Humanist rector", and given his documented knowledge of the *Topics*, I suspect that he was the author, or one of the authors, of this anonymous commentary.[283] Agostino Nifo's commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* perfectly illustrate the interplay among all these different developments in the tradition of dialectic.

5.2 Agostino Nifo between Averroism and Alexandrinism

Agostino Nifo is the sole representative of Veneto Aristotelianism to comment on the *Topics*, but the quality of his work largely compensates for this dearth. His extensive commentary is at the crossroads of all the interpretative traditions of the *Topics* mentioned so far. Indeed, even though he is an original thinker, Nifo draws extensively on previous commentaries; as he himself writes, "I would like to put forth some thoughts which are included partly in Alexander's commentaries, and partly from Averroes' paraphrases, as well as a few ideas from those who were called 'iuniores'" (2.1), namely Medieval authors.[284] Besides Alexander of Aphrodisias, from whom Nifo draws his main inspiration, and Averroes, the Medieval Latin commentary tradition on the *Topics* is not completely absent: apart from critical references to the 'iuniores', Nifo often quotes more approvingly Albert the Great's interesting – and only – Medieval extant commentary.[285] As we shall see, his reading of Aristotle's text is often close to the more humanistically-oriented commentary of the Academia Veneta.

Agostino Nifo, who died in 1538,[286] obtained his degree in philosophy and medicine in Padua in 1490, taught there from about 1492 to 1499 and participated in an early Aristotle-Averroes edition published in 1495–96. He later taught in Pisa, Rome, Naples and Salerno; in Naples, he was also in contact with the humanist circle of Giovanni Pontano. By 1503, after learning Greek, "he came to prefer the Greek commentators over Averroes", especially the logical writings (Gillispie 1981: 122). Alexander and Averroes, however, are often cited side by side and never in opposition to each other, although, as far as dialectic is concerned, Nifo's major source is clearly Alexander.[287] Nifo probably wrote his commentary on the *Topics* after 1523, since this is the date of the first publication of Abraham de Balmes' translation of Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* from the Hebrew, which he cited; he also had access to Alexander's commentary on the *Topics* both in the Greek original and in Latin manuscript translations or pre-print editions.[288] Nifo's commentary on the *Topics* appeared posthumously in 1540 and 1542 in Paris, and in 1557 and 1569 in Venice (Lohr 1988);[289] it was published together with Lefèvre's revision of Boethius' translation, in which Nifo only changed a few words.[290] He also wrote a commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations*, which appeared for the first time in Venice in 1541, and a short treatise on dialectic, *Dialectica ludicra*, published in 1521.[291] Nifo's work merits careful attention not only for the perceptiveness of his reading of Aristotle's texts, but also for its structural characteristics. His lengthy analysis proceeds by a slow progression towards what he considers to be the right reading of Aristotle, through a series of objections or proposals coming from different authors and his own solutions or reflections on them.[292] He critically discusses ancient and Medieval commentators, but instead of simply accepting or rejecting them, he often qualifies them so that he can use their intuitions to build his own interpretations. Thus, in exposing and discussing Nifo's texts, I shall often refer to the commentaries he cites or to those which provide an interesting comparison.

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall quote from Nifo's 1557 Venice edition of the commentary on both the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*. As to the Latin Alexander Nifo read, I shall refer to, and translate into English, Johannes Baptista Rasarius' translations of his commentaries on the *Topics* and on the *Sophistical Refutations* which were published in Venice in 1573 and 1557 respectively[293] and which were based on an improved Greek text compared to the Aldine edition. Rasarius taught Latin and Greek in Venice for twenty-two years; his translations are clearer than the translations by Guillelmus Dorotheus made and published earlier. Moreover, they are accompanied by his new and interesting translations of Aristotle's own texts: without losing any of Aristotle's precision, they are more forthcoming in rendering the original texts more explicit and perspicuous. As far as Averroes' commentary is concerned, I shall refer to the third Junta edition of 1573–76.

My exposition of Nifo's commentary and of the authors on whom he draws will be divided into three parts: the definition of dialectic and its basic terms (syllogism, probable premises), the uses of dialectic (for exercise, conversations and the philosophical sciences), and finally the different kinds of dialectic as they are defined both in the eighth book of the *Topics* and in the first book of the *Sophistical Refutations*.

5.3 The meaning of dialectic

Nifo's commentary starts with a strong defense of dialectic and its role in philosophy against those – a clear reference to some Humanists – who wanted to abolish dialectic altogether, since they claimed that those who practiced it (like the ancient sophist Protagoras and the Medieval logicians Hesberus, Ferebricius, Strodus, Suisectius) did not know any philosophy (2.1). However, Nifo writes, it is their fault, and not the fault of dialectic, if this discipline has been dissociated from philosophy and has degenerated into sophistry. From the very beginning of his commentary, therefore, the crucial question appears to be the cognitive role of dialectic as opposed to sophistry. In this respect it is indicative that Nifo mentions Protagoras as someone who has given dialectic a bad name, a common theme in Platonic circles which is reminiscent of Plato's hostility towards the Sophists. The fact that, alongside Protagoras, he mentions several medieval logicians known as 'calculatores',[294] also reveals his sympathy towards the humanists' critical association of dialectic with sophistry.[295] Against both the Sophists and Medieval logicians, whom he considers as being exclusively interested in the formal characteristics of discourse, Nifo sides with Alexander, who, he feels, has highlighted the usefulness of dialectic for philosophy:

> In the first place [Alexander] proposes for how many, and which, things it [dialectic] is useful, and secondly, not long afterwards, he explains what its aim is. From what he affirms, it is clear that dialectic is worth the attention of those who philosophize, insofar as it is of no little weight in the invention of truth itself ('ad ipsius veritatis inventionem momentum non parum praebet'), which is the aim of the philosopher. (2.1)

This is almost a *verbatim* quotation from Rasarius' translation of Alexander's commentary on the *Topics*: "(…) it is clear that especially those who philosophize have to apply themselves also to dialectic, because it leads to the invention of truth which is the aim of the philosopher's investigation" (5a).[296]

5.3.1 Dialectic and demonstration

Since the starting point of Nifo's analysis is the role of dialectic in the "invention of truth", he implicitly commits himself to sorting out the relationship between dialectic and demonstration. In order to construct his own notion of dialectic, Nifo distances himself from both Plato and the Stoics. To Plato, he objects that dialectic does not only consist in "dividing and composing, but also in syllogizing".[297] Against the Stoics, Nifo states that "the power of dialectic does not always consist in affirming the truth, because sometimes a sophist who is a dialectician syllogizes the false, the one who uses topical syllogisms, syllogizes the probable from probable premises, and the rhetorician the persuading from persuasive premises" (2.1). Rather, according to Nifo, dialectic consists in "syllogizing" and this is why Alexander, "the great interpreter of Aristotle" wrote that "dialectic is nothing else but the syllogistic method" (2.1).[298] This preliminary definition indicates that Nifo stresses the similarity between dialectic and demonstration: indeed, the Latin translation of Alexander's text does not read "nothing else but" the syllogistic method but simply states that dialectic *is* the syllogistic method. Like Alexander, Nifo considers that the difference between dialectic and demonstration is not in the *form* of the syllogism, but in its *matter*, namely in the nature of their respective premises (2.2). Rephrasing Aristotle's definition of syllogism in the *Topics* (100a25–27), Nifo writes that every syllogism is "a discourse ('oratio') in which from something which has been conceded, something else follows" (2.2).[299] But whereas "demonstrative syllogisms [reason] about necessary things from true and necessary [premises] ('circa necessaria ex veris et necessariis'),[300] dialectical syllogisms [reason] about probable things from probable [premises] ('circa probabilia ex probabilibus')" (2.2), i.e. from the Aristotelian 'endoxa'.[301] So, while reiterating

Aristotle's statement of the difference between dialectical and demonstrative syllogism in the *Topics* (100a28–29), both Nifo and the anonymous commentator of the Academia Veneta introduce Alexander's distinction between form and matter. Despite the fact that dialectic includes a wider range of deductive and inductive inferences sanctioned by the 'topoi', Nifo considers dialectical syllogisms as formally valid as demonstrative syllogisms, and therefore their conclusions as legitimate.

This was already Alexander's position in his commentary on *Topics* 100a25–27, where Aristotle gives his definition of syllogism. Rasarius, slightly changing the vulgate version, translates the passage as follows: "A syllogism is a reasoning ('oratio')[302] in which something being posited, something other than what has been posited, necessarily occurs *from* that which has been posited" (7a).[303] Alexander comments on the two crucial terms of Aristotle's definition, "something being posited" ('positis quibusdam') and "necessarily" ('necessario'). The first expression differentiates syllogisms from other forms of reasoning and means "assumed and conceded. And conceded either by he with whom we discuss if the syllogism is directed to someone else, or by oneself, if someone makes a syllogism when he is proving something by himself" (7a–b).[304] Alexander stresses the fact that premises have to be conceded to, either by an adversary, in the case of dialectical syllogism, or by oneself, in the case of other kinds of syllogisms which may include didactic or demonstrative reasoning:[305] this establishes an analogy between demonstration and dialectical reasoning, since premises need to be assented to in all cases. As far as the word 'necessarily' is concerned, Alexander writes that "it does not mean that in syllogisms a necessary conclusion is produced ('effici'), since in most syllogisms the contingent is produced (…). But it indicates that what is shown follows necessarily from the propositions themselves; and that such is the relationship between those which are posited and the conclusion" (9a).[306] This reading contrasts sharply with Albert's view of necessity. In the introduction to his commentary, he states from the outset that the *Topics* have to be placed after the *Posterior Analytics* because there is no necessity in the conclusions of their syllogisms. Whereas "demonstrative syllogism" provides the "necessity of the consequent", this is not the case for dialectical syllogism: "Dialectical syllogism (…) since it syllogizes the probable ('probabilia') from the probable, it does not have the necessity of the consequent" (233a). Albert contrasts the absence of necessity of dialectical syllogisms to the necessity of demonstrative syllogisms (240b), making probability an attribute of the inference ("form") and not only of the premises ("matter"); in so doing he identifies the necessity of the inference with the figures and modes of the syllogisms described in the *Prior Analytics* (239a).[307]

In the same opening pages of his commentary, Nifo addresses the issue of the distinction between invention and judgment, which he links to the difference between dialectic and demonstration. He reports that some, like Cicero and Boethius, argue that dialectic is inventive, because it teaches how to find the middle term of a syllogism, while demonstration has a judging function because it teaches how to evaluate what has been invented (2.4). Nifo comments that "judgment always presupposes invention" (3.1) and that both invention and judgment are necessary for the construction of syllogisms. However, "with respect to those problems of which we search and investigate the truth" (3.1), dialectic is inventive because it looks at "both sides of a contradiction ('ambas contradictionis partes')", whereas a demonstrative syllogism judges insofar as "it teaches how to syllogize the truth from the true, the necessary from the necessary and what is *per se* from what is *per se*" (3.1). In another passage, Nifo explicitly links invention to dialectic's ability to look at both sides of an issue: "And since truth lies in one part of a contradiction, if a dialectician ('topicus') teaches to find both parts ('ambas invenire') from probable premises, he will also teach the one in which truth lies" (3.1). For this reason, Nifo argues, Alexander writes that dialectic and rhetoric are rightly called "powers ('potentias')", for, in Rasarius' translation, "he who can do opposite things, really *can* something (...). This is why common people admire such men [dialecticians and rhetoricians] as more powerful than the others" (6 a–b).[308] Albert also thought that dialectic, as opposed to demonstration, is linked to invention and not to judgment. However, he argued that this is the case because dialectic "is mixed with conjecture and does not have a perfect grasp of the link between premises and conclusion ('consequentiae perfectam rationem')" (233b). As opposed to Alexander and Nifo, therefore, Albert considers that the inventive character of dialectic does not connect it to the search for the truth, but reflects the conjectural nature of the enterprise.

The comparison between dialectic and rhetoric, as well as the discussion of their similarities and differences, occupies a relatively important place in the opening pages of Alexander's commentary, considering that Aristotle himself does not address the issue in the *Topics*.[309] The subject is also taken up both in Nifo's commentary and in the anonymous commentary of the Academia Veneta. Whereas Nifo considers only one similarity between dialectic and rhetoric, namely the fact that both "have the faculty of arguing opposites ('facultatem argumentandi ad opposita')" (2.3),[310] Alexander, followed closely by the anonymous commentary of the Academia Veneta,[311] adds another important similarity, namely that both dialectic and rhetoric "deal with common things" ('in communibus versatur')" (Rasarius 6a)[312] as opposed to the specific principles of each science. A dialectician, writes Alexander, who "argues in the same way of musical, medical, and also geometrical, physical, ethical and logical issues", "proves ('probat') them from common and probable [premises], and not from the specific [premises] of the proposed things" (ibid.: 6a–b).[313] It is interesting to compare the ways in which Alexander and Albert explain the fact that dialectic uses common premises. According to the latter, the fact that dialectic "must conclude with respect to a given subject from common notions ('quaestionem ex communibus terminandam')" proves its subordinate status with respect to demonstration: "I call common those notions, which can be found in most or in all things, not deeply entrenched in them ('non profundata in ipsis') as specific and essential notions are, but which appear only in the surface" (234a). Thus, according to Albert, dialectic deals with the outward appearance of things as opposed to their essence, and therefore provides us with common, in the sense of merely superficial, knowledge.

5.3.2 Probability and disputation

The respects in which dialectic differs from rhetoric can also contribute to our understanding of its nature. First, already in Aristotle, dialectic differs from rhetoric because it deals with general and universal as opposed to individual subjects; it is also more apt to deal with theoretical as opposed to political and ethical subjects. But, above all, dialectic, unlike rhetoric, proceeds by question and answer. This is also one of the features which distinguishes dialectic from demonstration: apart from its role in "finding" rather than "judging" the truth, which will be examined in the next paragraph, the main characteristic of dialectic is its essential connection to the practice of disputation. It is through this connection that Nifo, following Alexander, explains the fact that dialectic reasoning employs "probable"[314] – 'endoxa' in Aristotle and Alexander – premises.

Nifo comments on the very first sentence of Aristotle's *Topics*, whose Latin translation reads as follows:[315] "The purpose of this treatise is to find a method which will allow us to syllogize [to build syllogisms] about every problem [question] that has been proposed from probabilities, and when we shall ourselves sustain a disputation ('logos') [defend something in a disputation], we do not say anything inconsistent [contrary]" (2.1; Rasarius 5a). Boethius' translation, unlike an anonymous Medieval translation,[316] already rendered the Aristotelian 'logos' by the word "disputation" and Rasarius does the same (5a), followed by Nifo. Indeed, whereas Albert did not seize upon the term in order to define the scope and purpose of dialectic, Nifo, following Alexander and Averroes,[317] explains the etymology of the word "dialectic" as coming from "discourse ('sermo') between two people, one of whom tries to win over the other" (Nifo 2.3). Alexander refers to the mode of discourse (questions and answers) rather than to the purpose of the exchange (winning an argument): "rightly such a method received the name of dialectic. In fact it derives from 'tou dialegesthai' [Greek in the text], which actually consists in questioning and answering ('interrogatione et responsione')" (5b).[318] Nifo is even more explicit in linking dialectic to disputation when he defines dialectic as "a syllogistic method about every problem from probabilities", an idea rendered in Greek as 'dialegesthai' and in Latin "sometimes to discuss and sometimes to dispute ('tum disserere, tum disputare')"[319] (2.2).

This definition is consistent with the two asymmetric roles of the questioner and the answerer designated by Aristotle in the first sentence of the *Topics*. Thus, both Alexander and Nifo focus on the aspect of Aristotle's definition of dialectic which explicitly refers to the practice of disputation: "Since topical art is a way of arguing ('ratio disserendi') and every way of arguing concerns two people, a questioner and an answerer", Aristotle in the opening passage of the *Topics* states how dialectic is useful for both contenders. Nifo gives two renditions of this division of labor between questioner and answerer. Firstly, like Alexander, he assigns the most active role to the questioner, who has "to syllogize every problem according to its kind ('generatim') either by constructing or by destroying it" (3.3).[320] In a second rendition, explicitly following Alexander,[321] he sets out the tasks of both questioner and answerer in relation to each other: "The task of the questioner is to lead the answerer to admit something which is against his own opinion or the opinion of other approved people ('aliorum probatorum'), as towards a contradiction. The task of the answerer is to use the power of argument in order to say nothing which will contradict his own opinion or the opinion of other knowledgeable people" (3.3). In other words, whereas the questioner has the burden of proof, the answerer can limit himself to self-defense. We shall see that while the questioner has the more active role, it is not necessarily the more important one from the point of view of the testing function of dialectic. Nifo's definition differs from Albert's, who interprets "contrary ('repugnans')" in Aristotle's definition of the role of the answerer (100a18–21) as "contrary to the method interpreted according to its tradition and principles" (235b), rather than "contrary to his own opinion". Albert's rendition is indicative of the formalistic leanings of Medieval interpretations of the *Topics*, where what counted was not defending or opposing a thesis, but following certain rules.

Indeed, in Nifo's commentary there is an explicit and ongoing link between the definition of dialectic and the content of Book VIII of the *Topics*, which describes the strategies of disputations: even more than for Aristotle, for Nifo a disputation is not merely a possible practical application of dialectic, but coincides with the realization of its main purpose. This sets him apart from Medieval approaches to dialectic: according to Albert, for example, Book VIII deals with the "removal of obstacles" (237a–b) and thus constitutes only a preparatory step in the construction of arguments. This structural link between the first and the eighth book of the *Topics* goes back to Averroes,[322] who in his Short Commentary considers Books I and VIII to constitute a unity, and to be placed after the *Posterior Analytics*.[323]

The fact that dialectic consists specifically of an exchange of questions and answers determines the nature of the premises of dialectical arguments, which for Nifo are "probable and common" as opposed to "true and specific": the meaning and content of "probable premises" depend on their role as the questioner's instrument for bringing about the assent of the answerer. Dialectic uses premises which are not self-evidently true[324] but which are capable of forcing the opponent to assent. Both Nifo's and the Academia Veneta's anonymous commentary rephrase Alexander's statement of the connection between dialectic *as* disputation and the nature of dialectical premises. Alexander, as translated by Rasarius, writes: "Insofar as [dialectic] argues from conceded [premises] ('ex concessis') through interrogation, it does so from probable [premises]. For probable and persuasive [premises] are usually granted and conceded to by the answerers" (5b).[325] The Academia Veneta'a anonymous commentator adds a new twist to the connection between the art of debating and probable premises: since by debating we can reach both true and false conclusions, our dialectical reasoning must start from "probable" premises since they can be false as well as true. He writes:

> For if someone were to ask the reason why dialectic proceeds only from probable [premises], [we can answer that] this seems undoubtedly to be the case, because since dialectic teaches to interrogate and to answer (…), it is necessary that dialectic discusses ('disserit') about everything, since all things can be handled through questions and answers. If then a dialectician deals with *any* proposed subject, he must necessarily reason sometimes also about false things. And if this is so, it is impossible that he should always prove from true premises [but also from probable premises], since the false can never in any way be derived from the true. (1b)

Indeed, "probable" premises share two main characteristics: they are such as to be easily conceded to by the interlocutor, and they can be either true or false. Nifo writes:

> Those [premises] are probable ('probabiles') which are conceded to by the answerer, whether they are true or false, as long as they are granted by the answerer. The reason for this is that the task of the questioner is to lead the answerer to something against opinion. For often a questioner leads the answerer to something against opinion from false premises, *as long as* they are probable to the questioner and conceded by him. (2.2)

Thus "probable" premises are indifferent to truth value and have to find their legitimacy elsewhere: "Probable [premises] *as* probable, are neither true nor false" (4.3). This is where the meaning of the Aristotelian 'endoxa' becomes crucial. Indeed, as already mentioned, Nifo accepts the traditional Latin translation of 'endoxa' as 'probabilia',[326] but he comments at length on Aristotle's definition of 'endoxa', and gives it an interpretation which is more in tune with Aristotle's intended meaning of the term as "reputable opinions" than with the understanding of probable premises as expressing lower-certainty propositions. Lefèvre's revision of Boethius' Latin translation of Aristotle's definition of 'endoxa' – the reference text for Nifo's commentary – reads as follows: "Those [opinions] which appear ('videntur') to all or to most or to the knowledgeable, and of these to all, or to the most known and most approved ('probatis')" (4.2).[327] In the reference text of Alexander's commentary, Rasarius gives a slightly different version of Aristotle's definition: instead of "those which *appear* ('videntur') to all (…)", he translates "those which are *approved* ('probantur') by all (…)" (10b–11a). Nifo goes a step further in the same direction, and corrects the weak impression conveyed by the verb "to appear" in the Boethius/Lefèvre's translation, by commenting: "By 'appear' ('videntur')[328] Aristotle does not understand those opinions which appear to the exterior senses, but those which appear to the opining virtue ('opinatrici virtuti') which is the approving power ('vis probativa')" (4.4).

The term "probable", therefore does not mean truthseeming; "truthseeming" refers to a property of *things*, whereas "probable" refers to a property of *our judgment of things*. In this subjective sense, probable propositions are not inferior to true propositions. Nifo makes this point explicitly when he discusses the meaning of the term "probable" at some length. Some might say, he writes, that the word 'probabilia' has two meanings: for "some [probable propositions] are primary, which do not derive their probability from others, and some are secondary which receive their probability from others" (4.4). This is a clear reference to Albert's distinction between probability 'per se' and probability 'secundum modum acceptionis'. According to Albert, propositions are probable 'per se' when "the predicate does not have a necessary and essential link ('inhaerentiam') with the subject": this is the classic meaning of Aristotle's 'eikota', like "parents love their children". These propositions, however, are probable 'secundum modum acceptionis' when the link between subject and predicate is necessary "but it is not perceived ('accipitur'), unless by a sign which appears to all, or to most people or to the most knowledgeable" (241a–b). For example, "the sun is greater than the earth" is probable only 'secundum modum acceptionis' insofar as its truth can only be ascertained by the measure of the respective diameters of the star and the planet. Albert also identifies the probable and the truthseeming ('verisimilis') and establishes a hierarchy between the true and the probable: just as "in sight, some things are manifested by a light coming from the outside ('aliena'), like colored things, and some by their own light, like bright bodies" (240b), so probable principles need to be illuminated by first principles in order to be comprehended by the intellect.[329] Nifo, for his part, rejects probability *per se*: probable propositions are contingent, not in the sense that the link between subject and predicate lacks necessity, but because they *may* be false, while still fulfilling their role in the disputation. He thus returns to the Aristotelian meaning of the word 'endoxa': "Nothing can be called probable unless it appears to us. For nothing is more probable than something else thanks to its own nature, but [only] as long as we approve it ('probamus'). We approve what appears to us, which is demonstrated by the Greek word; for 'probabilia', which in Greek are called 'endoxa', are also called 'approved' ('approbata')" (4.4).

Nifo rightly follows – and quotes (4.3) – Alexander on this point, who distinguishes the probable from the true in a similar way:

> The probable then is different from the true not because it is false, since certain probable propositions ('probabilia') are true, but according to the judgment ('iudicio'). For the judgment of truth derives its existence from the thing of which it is a judgment – since when it accords with reality ('cum re consentit') it is true. The judgment of probability ('probabili iudicium') instead, does not derive from the things, but from the authors ('auctoribus') and from the opinions which they hold about the thing ('iis opinionibus, quae de re habentur'). (11b)[330]

Notice that unlike Albert, Nifo, following Alexander, does not understand "probability" 'secundum modum acceptionis' of a given proposition as the fact that its inner necessity depends on the existence of an *exterior* sign, but rather as the expression of its mode of validation, i.e. the fact that it is approved by a certain trustworthy group of people. In other words, "probability" is considered by Nifo as an epistemological rather than an ontological notion. Thanks to Alexander's commentary, – and despite the problematic Latin translation of the term 'endoxa' – the Renaissance commentator Nifo returns to Aristotle's meaning of the term.[331]

Nifo raises a further question in connection with Aristotle's definition of 'endoxa'. "Someone might ask", he writes: "Why do you say that those opinions which appear only to the most famous and approved ('quae videntur famigeratis probatissimis') are probable, since they are very few?" (4.3). In his view, there seems to be an inconsistency in the definition of 'endoxa' itself, which is highlighted by a further question: What about those opinions which are approved by a few experts but rejected by the multitude (4.4)? As far as the first question is concerned, Nifo predicts that the opinions of the experts and those of the multitude will not disagree, since "those famous and most approved will be most praised by the many (…), and therefore their opinions will appear to them as most probable" (4.3). As far as the second question is concerned, Nifo acknowledges that according to his own definition of probability, some things may simultaneously be probable and not probable "since what appears to the knowledgeable ('sapientibus') often does not appear to all" (4.4). But he states that this conflict not only does not undermine the concept, but it is one of its necessary features, since "as in contingent matters, both opposites contingently hold, so in probable matters, both opposites can contingently be proved" (4.4). It is interesting to note that on this issue Averroes took a very different position. In his short commentary on the *Topics*, dealing with the content of dialectical premises, he establishes a hierarchy among the different kinds of probable opinions listed in Aristotle's definition of 'endoxa' (*Short Commentary*, par. 13: 52). According to Averroes, the most valuable opinions are those which are approved by everyone, and the opinions of the experts are valuable only insofar as they are the object of a general consensus: “Now the most noble of all of these is that which is attested to by everyone or by most people (…). Thus the opinions of learned men become generally accepted because everyone or most people hold the opinion that their opinions ought to be accepted” (ibid.). Perhaps not surprisingly, Nifo did not take the option of making the opinion of the many the legitimating instrument of the opinions of the few experts, for this would have degraded dialectical arguments, and especially their conclusions, to an instrument of public persuasion, as opposed to a means of searching and testing the truth. Rather, Nifo either predicted an automatic agreement between the opinions of the many and those of the few, or envisaged that both sets of opinions can be “probable” at the same time. Albert too established a hierarchy among different kinds of probabilities ‘per signum’: those having a lower value are those which appear to all, since they remain at the surface of things (as for example: “snow is white”). Those which appear to the knowledgeable have a higher value since they penetrate “deeper in the causes of essential properties” (241b–242a).

In conclusion, it has emerged so far that Nifo’s commentary does not establish a distinction between dialectic and rhetoric in terms of the subject matter treated, for both deal with the same kind of questions, which include philosophy and the sciences; however, one would deal by question and answer with issues which are in need of investigation and have not yet been established. In order to better distinguish dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms, Nifo uses Alexander’s difference between the form and the matter of arguments and argues that since the *form* of dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms is the same, the conclusions of dialectical syllogisms can be derived in the same necessary way as the conclusions of demonstrative syllogisms. Where dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms differ is in the nature of their respective premises, i.e. in their *matter*: “Probable” and common in dialectic, true and specific in demonstration. This has to do with the way dialectic carries out its proofs, namely by having its successive premises assented to by an interlocutor. The defining feature of dialectic, therefore, is its connection with the practice of disputation and the special way in which debates can lead to the production of knowledge.

5.4 The uses of dialectic and knowledge

This discussion of the uses of dialectic, which Aristotle carries out in *Topics* I.2, is all the more necessary, writes Nifo, beacuse someone may think that “since dialectic uses syllogisms derived from probabilities” and “since in philosophy we use demonstrations, dialectic is useless for philosophy” (6.3). In fact, writes Nifo, quoting Alexander: “Dialectic is useful both for philosophy and for the invention of truth; and this method is not disjoined from philosophy" (ibid.).[332] As already mentioned, according to Aristotle (*Topics* 101a25–38), dialectic is useful for three purposes: for mental training ('gymnasia'),[333] for conversations ('enteuxis')[334] and for the philosophical sciences ('kata philosophian epistēmai').[335] Aristotle added that dialectic is useful "in connection with the first principles ('ta prota') of each science ('ekastēn epistēmēn')", translated from the Latin as "for the first principles which are in each discipline" (Boethius/Lefèvre, Nifo 7.2). Aristotle continues by stating that this function belongs most properly to dialectic: since it is an "investigating faculty ('exetastikē'), it opens the way to the principles of all methods of disciplines ('archai tōn methodōn')".[336]

Despite the widely different historical backgrounds, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Averroes, Nifo and the anonymous commentator of the Academia Veneta hold remarkably similar views on how to interpret Aristotle's uses of dialectic. Even Albert the Great shares some of the their intuitions on this question,[337] although he represents the discordant voice on the general issue of the relationship between dialectic and demonstration. The most important similarity concerns the third use of dialectic, that "for the philosophical sciences",[338] which came to be considered the most important of the three since it tightly binds dialectic to philosophy, and therefore to knowledge. Nifo, for example, writes at the beginning of his commentary: "If sometimes dialecticians have expressed dangerous opinions (…) this is not the fault of dialectic, but rather of those who have separated dialectic from the knowledge of things, which indeed is nothing different than if someone separated the body from the soul or the eye from the faculty of vision" (2b).

If this is so, the first use of dialectic, "exercises ('exercitationes')", is clearly subordinated to the third one as its preparatory moment. For the commentators, however, it plays an important role since exercise it is not simply a game, but "an attempt to deal with each side of a problem" (Nifo 6.4). Moreover, exercise builds an acquired disposition ('habitus') for distinguishing truth from falsehood, like what happens in the practical arts (Averroes 3v). As for the second use, "conversations", it is not emphasized, nor is it connected to "disputational dialectic". Rather, the commentators usually associate it with the practice of rhetoric – like the anonymous writer of the Academia Veneta – and it thus came to signify either a loose discussion among many (Nifo 6.4) or a discussion with the unsophisticated crowd (Averroes 5r).[339] At best, it has been seen as a means for refuting the members of a different sect – be they Stoics, Epicureans, or others – on the basis of their own beliefs (Nifo 6.4–7.1), a practice which, according to Averroès (5a), makes the refutation more effective; Alexander remarks that "one is almost always satisfied with what he has himself determined" (Rasarius 14b).[340] According to Albert, there is only one substantial task of dialectic, namely that for the philosophical disciplines. Of the other two, exercise is useful *towards it*, and conversations *becauseof it*, insofar as they remove obstacles to philosophical contemplation by refuting adversaries (247b).

The fourth use of dialectic, namely "for the principles of each science", is unanimously considered by the commentators we are examining as a further specification of the third use of dialectic "for the philosophical sciences". Indeed, they hold that the third use of dialectic comprises two different components. The first component, "the invention and judgment" of the truth, is openly associated with the method of discussion *in utramque partem*, while the second component, which is related to the first principles of the sciences, provides the proof of the first principles of each science through common notions to someone who denies them, and is associated with disputation. According to all these commentators, therefore, serious dialectic is useful to *prove* the first principles and not to *arrive at* them, an understanding which differs from that of contemporary interpreters of Aristotle. More specifically, Averroes holds that there are two kinds of proof, which we could call the dialectical and the analytical proof, an interpretation which is also shared, as we shall see, by Alexander and Nifo. Averroes writes: "There are two species of demonstration ('duae species demonstrationum'), one which proves ('verificat') things that are unknown in themselves, and another which allows us to prove what is known in itself ('qua verificatur per se intelligibile') to he who denies them and this is shown ('commostratur') through the most probable premises" (6r).[341]

In what follows, I shall look at each of the two different components of the usefulness of dialectic for the philosophical sciences, namely the "invention and judgment of the truth" through reasoning *in utramque partem*, and the "proof" of the first principles through disputation. These two components can roughly be linked to "aporetic" and "disputational" dialectic respectively, a distinction which has been introduced in the discussion of Aristotle's *Topics*. We shall then come closer to understanding the relationship between dialectical and demonstrative proof.

5.4.1 The "invention" and "judgment" of the truth

At 101a34–36, Aristotle describes the function of dialectic in the philosophical sciences as follows: "For the disciplines which concern philosophy, [it is useful] because, since we can raise doubts on both sides ('potentes ad utraque dubitare') we shall easily be able to see the true and false ('intuebimur verum et falsum') in each particular thing" (Nifo, 7.1).[342] The first thing to notice is that, unlike Cicero, Nifo does not associate the use of dialectic which Aristotle identified with the method of discussion *in utramque partem* with a mildly skeptical conception of knowledge. Quite to the contrary, "according to this use, [dialectic] is an instrument of invention and judgment of the truth ('inventrix ac iudicatrix est'). This is why dialectic, through which disputations develop ('per quam disputationes fiunt'), is useful for the knowledge of truth ('ad cognitionem veritatis')" (Nifo 7.1). Alexander is equally explicit in linking the discussion *in utramque partem* to knowledge both in philosophy and in science: "Dialectic leads to the sciences of philosophy, and to knowledge derived by science ('ad cognitionem ex scientia'), that is to the invention of truth and to knowledge" (Rasarius 14b).[343] He then describes the sciences which make up philosophy as comprising physics, ethics, logic and metaphysics (ibid.). At first glance, this appears to be a strong interpretation of Aristotle's "aporetic" method of critical evaluation of both sides of an issue: whereas in Aristotle, the method *in utramque partem* had mostly a negative function with respect to positive knowledge by helping us discard incorrect theories, in these commentaries it appears to lead directly to knowledge. In fact, dialectic in this sense can be useful for finding the truth, insofar as it allows one to recognize it. Alexander writes: "Those who can bring forward the persuasive arguments on both sides ('ad persuadendum in utramque partem argumentari') will ascertain more easily on which side of the contradiction truth lies. In this way a judge knows what is just because he has heard both sides; the same thing happens in philosophical matters" (14b).[344] Nifo reformulates Alexander's explanation using Boethius' distinction of Ciceronian origin between invention and judgment. Although he considers dialectic to be both "inventive and judgmental ('inventiva et iudicativa')", he attributes the judging function more properly to analytics. Thus, invention and judgment are inextricably linked to each other:

> Through dialectic we can find on which side the truth is, insofar as we syllogize on both sides. Through analytics, we can judge that side of the contradiction which is true (…) Just as a judge after having understood both sides will easily recognize justice, so, in philosophical questions, for the most part it is not easy to judge the truth unless we have first brought forward each part of the contradiction. (7.1)

Going well beyond Aristotle's text of the *Topics*, the Latin commentators try to spell out what the two moments of invention and judgment consist of. Both functions are closely linked to the important functions played by exercise, which "disposes us to the invention of truth", Nifo (2.3) writes citing Averroes.[345] Exercise, which "occurs in discussing and disputing ('in disserendo et disputando')" and is linked to the discussion *in utramque partem* (Nifo 6.4), provides us with a great variety of 'loca' (ibid.), from which we can easily find arguments on both sides (see also Ac. Ven. 2a). As far as invention is concerned, therefore, dialectic allows us to evaluate different kinds of candidates for knowledge, since by constructing arguments on both sides of a contradiction we can eventually see where the truth lies. Averroes, who describes this process in terms of sorting out essential from accidental premises, compares this process to what happens in the practical arts (‘artibus factivis’): while a “depurator” “separates the substances of gold and silver from those other substances which are mixed into it, the goldsmith is the person who takes that pure substance which has been separated, extends it, and with it he makes what he wants” (5v). The goldsmith could use the mixed substance, but it would be more difficult “since in the artifacts would enter more of that matter, in which what is *per se* would be mixed with what is accidentally” (5v). According to Averroes, discussion *in utramque partem* is useful for the sciences (physical, divine, and political sciences) with the exception of mathematics: “This is why we rarely find that Aristotle offers a demonstration of something in these three sciences without first having placed before the demonstration, a topical doubt (‘dubium topicum’) of this same thing” (5v). The anonymous commentator of the Academia Veneta specifies an additional way in which what he calls a “probable” discussion *in utramque partem* can be useful, which was already implicit in Nifo: “[Since] probabilities are not false everywhere, from them we can gather something true” (Ac Ven. 2a). Thus, simply by constructing several conclusions, we can raise the probability of hitting upon the truth. Although he explicitly distinguishes between invention and judgment, Alexander mentions another function of dialectical exercises which clearly performs a heuristic role: the practice of dialectic can reinforce our knowledge of the truth, by preparing us to answer objections.[346] He writes: “It is clear that it is useful that we have exercised in advance in [answering] those arguments which can be objected [to our thesis]. For in this way we can know the explanations of those doubts (‘ut dubitationum quoque explicationes possit agnoscere’)” (15a).[347]

While the function of dialectic in the “invention” of truth is rather straightforward, its “judging” function is more difficult to define, especially since judgment has been explicitly associated with the theory of syllogism expounded in the *Analytics*; indeed, the distinction between invention and judgment and the association of invention with the art of dialectic has become part of the tradition of dialectic since Cicero and Boethius. It was reaffirmed by Albert, for example (233a), and cited approvingly by Nifo. How then can dialectic be associated with judgment? Let us rehearse Nifo’s essential passage bearing on this issue: “Just as a judge after having understood both sides will easily recognize justice, so in philosophical questions, for the most part it is not easy to judge the truth unless we have first brought forward each part of the contradiction” (7.1). As the comparison of the judge’s case makes clear, the two functions of invention and judgment cannot be completely separated. According to Nifo, those who base themselves on the *Analytics* “judge” in the sense that they assume that part of a contradiction which *is* true and use it to demonstrate something else, like the goldsmith uses pure gold to construct an object. The dialectician, on the other hand, “judges” in the sense that *he brings about* the judgment of truth. The judgment of truth, then, is not an isolated action of the mind but rather the culmination of a process of "construction and destruction" of arguments. This process *in utramque partem* ends with the direct comparison of two opposite positions, which brings about the final judgment: "He who knows the nature of persuasive [arguments] ('persuasibilia') which can persuade each side, will sometimes better choose the true from the untrue, through their respective comparison ('propter comparationem illorum invicem')" (7.1). Understood in this sense, moreover, dialectic is not just an additional help (Albert's 'adminiculum' 249a–b) but a necessary step for evaluating the truth status of an opinion. This is so because the fact of exercising by discussing opinions *in utramque partem* creates, as Alexander writes, a "firm disposition of the mind", which allows one to judge the truth of opposing statements:

> For such an exercise of the soul which occurs in the disputations ('in sermonibus'), if done with method and reason ('via et ratione facta'), generates a firm disposition of the mind which is peculiar to it ('propriam animi firmam affectionem'). This special disposition of the mind is the power of logic ('logicae potentia'), through the work of which it [the mind] provides both the invention and the judgment of truth. (Rasarius 14b)[348]

Nifo reiterates this claim with slightly different words: through exercise and "the practice of disputation ('exercitium in disputationibus')", a "good condition of the soul ('bona animae valetudo') is created, owing to which dialectic can invent and judge the truth ('inventrix et iudicatrix veritatis')" (7.1). Earlier in the commentary, Nifo had quoted Averroes approvingly on the usefulness of dialectic, reinterpreting his words in light of Alexander's commentary:[349] "Once we know the methods and the 'topoi' ('loca'), we proceed to construct and destroy problems, and then from the use of these things, we acquire a certain force and power ('vis quedam ac potentia'), which will allow us to easily distinguish the true from the false" (2.3). This notion is similar to Albert's dialectical 'habitus',[350] or "acquired disposition" to dialectic, which Albert may have introduced independently from Alexander. According to Albert, however, dialectical exercise brings about a 'habitus' which is not finalized to the "invention of truth", but to the perfection of the practice of dialectic itself. Albert writes that "through [this] exercise an acquired 'habitus' is created, and the knower is so fortified towards the act that he acquires a faculty to perform those same operations from those things which he already knows" (247a; see also 246a–b). Like Albert, Nifo also mentions Victorinus on the link between exercise and the end of the art of dialectic: "Nature has made men *able* for the invention of truth; the art of discussion makes that art *easy*, and usage allows men to *actually exercise* that ability" (Nifo 2.3; see Albert 435a–b). However, according to Nifo, the natural ability which usage allows us to exercise is the ability to find the truth and not the ability to practice dialectic, as Albert understands it.

5.4.2 Dialectic and the principles of the sciences

After describing the third and most important use of dialectic, namely for "the philosophical sciences" ('kata philosophian epistēmai', *Topics,* 101a28), associated with the "aporetic" method of discussion *in utramque partem*, Aristotle cites a further use. Rasarius' Latin translation of *Topics* 101a37–40 reads as follows: "Still [it is useful] for the first principles of each science ('ad prima initia omnium scientiarum').[351] For from the specific principles ('ex propriis principiis') of a given science it is impossible to say something of them since they are the first principles with respect to all the rest. But certainly in order to explain them ('in illis exponendi')[352] we have to use what is probable in each of them" (15a). Unless this passage is considered as a reference to the induction of *Posterior Analytics* – which is very unlikely – this "way to the first principles" is usually considered in the modern literature as a possible, though vague, use of the aporetic method: discussing both sides of an issue, we can if not reach the first principles, at least coming to see them as principles (Bolton 1990 and Smith 1999). In this sense this passage would describe the same "inventive" power of dialectic, which we have examined in the previous section. It is striking, however, that the commentators, especially Alexander and his 16th-century followers, interpret the passage in an entirely different way, namely as the main function of what I have called "disputational" dialectic.

Alexander understands this fourth use of dialectic either as a specification of the third use, and thus relative to the first principles of philosophy, or as an indication of the specific role that dialectic plays in the sciences; whatever the case may be – writes Alexander, "it is the gift ('munus') of dialectic to discuss the principles ('de principiis disserere')" (15a)[353] and this applies to the principles of each science as well as to the principles of philosophy.[354] He interprets this crucial function of dialectic as that of confirming rather than finding first principles. Alexander makes the following comment on Aristotle's statement of the link between dialectic and the principles of each science: "The principles of the sciences which lack another proof ('aliqua probatione indigent') because [they cannot be shown] from true and primary principles, must be certainly exhibited and proved ('ostendi ac probari') through certain probable arguments ('ex probabilibus quibusdam')" (Rasarius 15a).[355] Indeed, according to Alexander, dialectic is in a better position than the sciences by themselves to provide a foundation for first principles, since it uses induction more than syllogism: "It is also peculiar of dialectic to confirm a given thing by induction; and 'fides' is attributed to first principles mostly by induction" (ibid.).[356] Likewise, this means that dialectic can prove the principles of science to someone who denies them: in philosophy as in the sciences, writes Alexander, this can be proved "in a logical way ('logice') that is in a dialectical way ('dialectice')", and some "scientific principles ('principia scientiarum') need this kind of proof ('huiusmodi probationis')" (ibid.).[357] Alexander gives an interesting example of dialectical proof and explains why this kind of proof is necessary. The example involves the following geometrical principle: "A surface is what has only longitude and latitude". This is disputed by some and "the geometer cannot show ('ostendere') with geometrical reasons ('geometricis rationibus') that this holds; but the dialectician does not lack probable reasons ('probabilia'), with which he can confirm it ('haec confirmat')" (15b).[358] He will start with a "probable" statement, namely a statement which is bound to be approved by his adversary: "The surface is the limit ('terminum') of the body"; then he will prove by induction that "the limit is different from that of which it is a limit". He can then deduce that "the surface is different from the body"; since the essence of a body is to have three dimensions, it follows that a surface has only two dimensions.[359]

Nifo, for his part, disregards Alexander's distinction between the principles of philosophy and those of the sciences, as well the inductive confirmation of first principles. Rather, he expands on the idea of using disputation in order to prove them. He writes that dialectic does not help find the principles themselves, but rather "it is useful for the knowledge ('ad cognitionem') of the truth of first principles" (7.2).[360] The reason why first principles cannot be proved to be true within a particular science is that "they are denied by some" (ibid.): therefore "it will be necessary to prove them ('ea probare') through a common faculty ('communem facultatem') which possesses a way ('viam') to everything, and this is dialectic" (ibid.). Dialectic can prove principles when it catches the denier's assent by using "probable" premises. When he explicitly interprets Aristotle's passage, Nifo stresses the connection between the proof of the principles of each science and the "probable" premises used in disputation:

> By 'those which are probable on each point', Aristotle, perhaps understands all the 'loca' through which the principles can be proved against those who deny them (…); and by premises conceded to by the adversaries, he understands those premises which are probable to them, from which dialectical syllogisms are made; for *through all those which pertain to dialectic the principles of the sciences can be proved against those who deny them.* (7.3; my emphasis)[361]

Nifo interprets in this sense Aristotle's conclusion at the end of the discussion of the uses of dialectic at *Topics* 101b2–4, which in Boethius/Lefèvre translation reads: "This is the particular and most specific [task of] dialectic. For since it is inquisitive ('inquisitiva') it possesses a way to the principles of all methods" (Nifo 7.3). Commenting on this passage, Nifo follows Alexander and understands by "the principles of all methods", "the principles of all sciences ('omnium scientiarum')";[362] and by "way", a "*probative* way ('viam probativam')" (7.2). It appears, therefore, that dialectic can be useful for philosophy and the sciences in two different ways: understood in the "aporetic" sense, dialectic is concerned with *finding* not the first principles, but the truth; it leads to "inventing and judging" on which side of a given contradiction the truth lies. When it is understood in the "disputational" sense, however, dialectic *proves* the first principles to those who deny them: indeed, if a dialectical proof depends on those widely accepted ("probable") premises which will bring about the assent of the interlocutor, they belong to the domain of dialectic as the discipline which deals with disputations. Alexander explicitly links this important function of dialectic to disputation. He explains that characterizing dialectic as inquisitive ('ratio indagatrix') indicates that "dialectic is suitable for questions and argumentations ('ad quaestiones argumentationesque esse accomodatam')" (16a):[363] proving the first principles of each science, therefore, is achieved through a dialectical method proceeding by questions and answers. Albert interprets the investigative nature of dialectic as consisting in finding those common principles from which to argue rather than the truth: "Dialectic inquires and finds common principles ('inquisitiva et inventiva communium')" (247a). As far as principles of the particular sciences are concerned ('de his principiis singularum philosophiarum'), therefore, Albert holds that dialectic's specific task is "to verify them persuasively ('persuadenter verificare')" through "a superficial discourse ('non profundato sermone')" (246b–247a).

According to Nifo, who comments on a passage at the beginning of Book VIII, the difference between dialectic and demonstration is that "a dialectician interrogates ('interrogat')" while a "demonstrator exposes and says ('exponit et dicit')"; a dialectician does not care if the premises he uses are true "since it is enough that they are conceded to ('concedantur') by the answerer" (133.3). Accordingly, demonstration is a particular kind of proof, which occurs when the premises used are such that they cannot be denied. For Nifo, then, the difference between scientific demonstration and dialectical proof only concerns their respective *means*, and not their *ends*. Nifo's commentary on *Topics* 105b30–31 – the only passage in the *Topics* where Aristotle associates dialectic with opinion ('doxa') – is particularly interesting from this point of view. Aristotle's passage reads: "For philosophic purposes we must deal with propositions from the point of view of truth, but for purposes of dialectic, with a view to opinion ('dialektikōs de pros doxan')". Nifo comments that Aristotle writes "with a view to opinion", because "dialectic argues through probabilities ('per probabilia')" (20.1). According to Nifo, then, "opinions", therefore, are not the conclusions of dialectical reasonings, but the premises *through* which their conclusions are reached.

5.5 Different types of dialectic and disputation

Aristotle mentions several kinds of dialectic in Book VIII 5 of the *Topics*, in the section devoted to the rules which have to be followed by the answerer in a debate, and offers a more systematic classification of different forms of dialectical debate in the first book of the *Sophistical Refutations*. As we have seen in the first chapter, the main issue addressed in the relevant passage in the eighth book of the *Topics* at 159a25–35 revolves around the meaning of a particular kind of dialectic, namely "peirastic" dialectic, which is exercised through questions and answers for the sake of "experiment and inquiry ('peira kai skepsis')"; this kind of dialectic is then distinguished from three other forms of dialectical reasoning, namely mental training ('gymnasia'), teaching ('didaskalia') and sophistical disputations ('agōnistikai'). Although Aristotle does not hint at any hierarchy among these types of dialectic, the terminology used in describing "peirastic" dialectic – "for the sake of experiment and examination" – clearly indicates the epistemic role of this type of dialectic, which, for this reason, can aspire to being dialectic proper. But the most important feature of "peirastic" dialectic is described later in Book VIII of the *Topics* (161a21), where Aristotle states twice that when they argue "for the sake of exercise and inquiry" the questioner and the answerer have to carry out a common purpose ('koinon ergon'). In the first chapter, we tried to give an interpretation of this "common purpose", although no explicit indication is given by Aristotle. It is now possible to test that interpretation against the way later commentators understand "peirastic" dialectic and the "common purpose" of those who argue "for the sake of experiment and examination"; the terms used in the different Latin translations of Aristotle's texts will also contribute to characterizing this particular form of valuable dialectic better.

We have to acknowledge, indeed, that both the terminology used in the Latin translations and the comments to Aristotle's texts confirm the strong epistemic role attributed to "peirastic" dialectic as well as its status as dialectic *par excellence*. In the Boethius/Lefèvre translation of the *Topics*, 'peira' is translated by 'experientia' or 'experimentum' (Nifo 141.1) while in the *Sophistical Refutations* "peirastic" discussions are translated by 'tentativas' (Nifo 13.2): all three words mean "testing". Rasarius also usually translated 'peira' by expressions which mean "testing", namely 'periculum faciere' or 'tentare' (221a). In one case (*Topics* 161a25) where Aristotle contrasts 'gymnasia' and 'peiras' on the one hand and didactic disputations on the other, Rasarius even translates 'peira' by 'probatio' (227.1), namely a proof, and not simply a test. Accordingly, he translates Alexander's comment on that sentence as "the dialecticians try *to prove* ('probare conantur') with probable reasons ('probabilibus rationibus') what is set before them" (227.2).[364] In so doing, however, he indirectly gives a more positive interpretation of the dialectician's task than either Aristotle himself at *Topics* 161a29 or Alexander, both of whom speak of the necessity to "refute" rather than to "prove" what is posited.

As for the second term of the definition of peirastic dialectic – "for experiment and inquiry" – Boethius translates the Greek term for inquiry ('skepsis') by 'perspectio' (inspection, analysis) and Lefèvre revises it by using the term 'inspectio' (investigation), a term which carries a more active connotation (Nifo 141.1). Also, in his commentary Nifo interestingly explains the expression "for the sake of investigation ('inspectionis gratia')" as "for the sake of invention ('inventionis gratia')" (141.2). Moreover, unlike Boethius and Lefèvre, Rasarius translates 'skepsis' by 'cognitio' namely "knowledge" (221.1). Whereas the terms "investigation" and "inquiry" are more open-ended and refer to the means rather than to the results of the investigation, "knowledge" indicates its final product, and describes the purpose of a epistemically significant dialectic. It is noteworthy that the terms 'peira' and 'skepsis' appear together ('charin peiras kai skepseōs') when Aristotle maintains that for "peirastic" dialectic, as opposed to sophistical dialectic, rules according to which the answerer has to answer have not yet been defined (159a34).[365]

Indeed, in their commentaries on this passage, both Alexander and Nifo associate "peirastic" dialectic closely with exercise ('gymnasia'). This is consistent with the important role the commentators give to exercise in a dialectical context: as already seen, exercise is important for a dialectically-secured knowledge, because it creates the right disposition, or "habit", of the mind. Furthermore, Nifo associates exercise and testing with "dialectical disputation", of the sort exemplified by Socrates and Plato: "By exercise ('exercitatio') and testing ('experientiam') [Aristotle] understands those testing and disputational meetings ('tentativas et disputativas congressiones') such as those of the dialogues where Plato and Socrates dispute dialectically ('dialogis (…) dialectice disputantibus')" (141.2). According to Alexander too, the object of this part of Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics* is precisely to consider those "who (…) in those encounters, dispute for the sake of exercise and testing ('exercitationis et periculi faciendi gratia disputant')" (221.1b):[366] these encounters are specifically called "dialectical" (ibid.).

In the first book of the *Sophistical Refutations* (165a30–165b12) "peirastic" dialectic is distinguished from "dialectical" discussions, as well as from "doctrinal" ('didaskalikoi') and "sophistical" ('eristikoi') disputations. As we have seen, for Aristotle the main distinction between "peirastic" and "dialectical" debates concerns only their immediate respective purposes: "peirastic" discussions have the destructive task of unmasking apparent knowledge, whereas "dialectical" discussions have the more constructive role of deriving a given conclusion from some 'endoxa'. Nifo, for his part, holds that "peirastic ('tentativus')" syllogism is but a species of "dialectical ('dialecticus')" syllogism. He continues by explaining that a "peirastic" syllogism "differs from [a dialectical syllogism] in that it does not derive from premises which are probable *simpliciter*, but from premises which appear to an answerer who feigns to be expert in some science" (14.2), and serves to unmask him. Thus dialectical and "peirastic" (or tentative) syllogisms do not correspond to two different types of dialectic; rather they identify two ways of carrying out genuine dialectical disputations. For the commentators Alexander and Nifo, as well as for Aristotle, therefore, "peirastic" dialectic, which is carried out for the sake of testing and investigation, coincides with true dialectic, and is distinguished from both sophistry and teaching. Sophistical disputations are clearly not dialectical because, as already said, each contender aims at his own victory and not at performing a common task. Averroes has also devoted most of his commentary to this part of Book VIII to distinguishing dialectic from sophistry.[367] As for "didactical" dialogues between teacher and pupil, they are not considered genuinely dialectical either. In the commentary on Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*, Pseudo-Alexander explicitly raises the question as to why Aristotle included such exchanges within dialectic: those discourses which serve to teach ('doctrinales sermones'; 'didaskalikous' in Greek) are demonstrative ('demonstrativae'; 'apodeiktikoi' in Greek), and their premises are not probable in the sense that they are not "proved by all, or by most or by the knowledgeable". In addition, a teacher does not *discuss* but he *demonstrates*: insofar as it derives from the Greek 'dialegesthai', to discuss does not mean "to make syllogisms, for the one who demonstrates ('qui demonstrat'; 'o apodeiknuōn' in Greek) does not discuss ('non disserit'; 'ou dialegetai' in Greek) but makes syllogisms ('syllogismo utitur'; 'syllogithetai' in Greek)" (Rasarius 9; Wallies 17.17–25).

Following Alexander, Nifo explicitly rejects what he considers to be the Medieval interpretation of the "the common purpose" which both the questioner and the answerer have to pursue in a genuine dialectical disputation (*Topics* 161a21–22). According to Nifo, Medieval scholars (the 'iuniores', 146.1) identified the common purpose of the contenders with the exercise of the disputation itself. Indeed, Albert the Great describes the usefulness of dialectic for confrontations ('obviationes') as "making the adversary of truth change his mind ('ut transmutet adversarium veritatis')", but writes that in this case conducting "a dialectical disputation *is* the common task ('disputatio dialectica commune opus est')" of the contenders (247a–b; my emphasis). Here Albert is indicating that following the appropriate rules governing dialectical disputations is sufficient not only to exclude all kinds of Sophists from genuine dialectical debates, but also – and more importantly – to ensure that the disputation achieves its higher epistemic goal, i.e. making the adversary change his mind. By contrast, Alexander does not identify the common purpose of the contenders with carrying out a disputation according to the rules, but with constructing a dialectical syllogism which he identifies as the true "goal of the dialectician ('dialectici metam')" (228.1):[368] their common task consists "in the reasoning ('en tō logō') and in the dialogical exchanges ('en tois dialogois') (Wallies 565.15–16).[369] Alexander further clarifies this point when he writes that the syllogism is the common purpose of the contenders only *to the extent that* it allows them to examine a common subject: "The disputants are those who have a common subject about which they discuss with each other ('de quo inter se disputant') for the sake of exercise" (228.1a–b).[370] Nifo is even more explicit in describing the common task of those who carry out a genuine dialectical disputation, when he compares them to those who build a house or lift a heavy weight. He writes:

> In a dialectical disputation which occurs for the sake of inspection ('conspectionis gratia'), the common task ('commune opus') of the questioner and the answerer is the thesis which, as has been agreed by common consensus, has to be derived ('colligatur') through the syllogism. Therefore, a bad partner will be he who prevents the thesis itself from being concluded. From this it is clear that the common task in a dialectical disputation ('in dialectica disputatione') is not the disputation itself, as all the Medieval authors ('iuniores') believe, because for all those who dispute the disputation is the common operation. Instead, by the common task of a dialectical disputation it is understood what the disputants seek to acquire together ('communiter') through the disputation itself. For the task ('opus') differs from the operation ('operatio'), as the fact ('factum') from the making of the fact ('factione') and the act from the action. (146.1)

Contrary to appearances, then, the answerer, who has to concede or deny assent to the questioner's premises, tests those same premises which will allow the questioner to derive his thesis and therefore helps establish it, albeit indirectly. This explains why, whereas the rules devoted to the questioner in Book VIII of the *Topics* are mere strategic rules designed to capture the opponent's assent, the rules devoted to the answerer have a higher epistemic import. Although the questioner as the proponent of a thesis has the more active task of the two, namely that of deriving a thesis, the respondent has the crucial role of critically assessing the content and epistemological status of the questioner's thesis, by withholding his assent to – or raising objections against – the suggested premises, every time he considers the reasoning defective or the premises not probable enough. This crucial epistemological issue will be taken up in the general conclusions.

5.6 Conclusions: Aristotle's dialectic and knowledge revisited

In the hands of the Italian Aristotelian Agostino Nifo, Aristotle's *Topics* not only enjoy a true intellectual renaissance, but also acquire, so to speak, a new form of perfection: with the help of both Alexander's crucial commentary and Averroes' strong intuitions, Nifo completes and makes fully explicit Aristotle's text, and he does so in a way that is fundamentally faithful to Aristotle's own approach to dialectic. He takes seriously and further develops the essential connection between dialectic and disputation on the one hand, and between dialectic and knowledge on the other, something that both Alexander and Averroes had stressed. Nifo also connects more clearly than Aristotle himself the meaning of "probable" premises – the Aristotelian 'endoxa' – to the function of dialectical exchanges: to obtain the assent of an opponent, with a view to testing and eventually proving a controversial thesis, which is the "common purpose" of the two contenders. As far as knowledge is concerned, Nifo makes "peirastic" dialectic the only genuine form of dialectic and, in so doing, he builds on the Humanists' rejection of sophistry and the scholastic interpretations of Aristotelian dialectic. At the same time, he firmly attaches dialectic to Cicero's and Boethius' function of "invention" and gives it the strong epistemological role of *finding the truth* and not simply of finding *the arguments* necessary to prove or refute a thesis. Accordingly, he interprets Aristotle's third use of dialectic "for the philosophical sciences" as the art of using aporetic dialectic in order to see where the truth lies, and not simply the art of evaluating opposite theses. In so doing he agrees with Alexander and Averroes: like any serious exercise, practicing dialectic *in utramque partem* builds a favorable intellectual disposition of the mind which, given the right circumstances, can carry one to the verge of discovering truth. The example of the judge, who decides where the truth lies after having heard the arguments on both sides, eloquently describes the tight relationship existing between debate and the discovery of the truth. This historical review confirms Robin Smith's suggestion that the purpose of Aristotle's dialectic might be to build the "epistemic sensibilities" necessary for understanding – "recognizing", Nifo would say – the principles of each science (1999a: 19, footnote 11). As far as disputational dialectic is concerned, Nifo expands on Alexander's reading of dialectical reasoning as allowing us to explain and justify the first principles of the sciences by deriving them from commonly accepted premises. Not unlike Averroes who considers dialectic a tool of rational persuasion in an intellectually hostile world, Nifo holds that "peirastic" dialectic in its disputational form allows us to prove the principles of the particular sciences to those who deny them, by forcing them to assent to commonly accepted *ad hoc* premises which will necessarily entail the denied thesis. Thus, by commenting on Aristotle's text and by drawing on sources as varied as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Cicero and Averroes, Nifo constructs a coherent and rather innovative way of understanding dialectic, which is basically consistent with Aristotle's text and further develops its major features.

CHAPTER 6

Dialectic and dialogue

Carlo Sigonio and the "road to truth"

The dialogue literary form enjoys an unprecedented success in the Renaissance and can be considered as one of the characterizing intellectual features of this historical moments as are the revival of rhetoric, poetics and classical Latin.[371] For the most part, Renaissance dialogues represent in a literary way a free exchange of opinions for the open-ended evaluation of different views and are modeled on the Ciceronian method of arguing "on both sides of an issue".[372] This form of dialogue is seen as a liberation from the stern medieval dialogue, where the truth was the judge, and the resolution of the conflict was considered as the only acceptable outcome of the discussion.[373] In the second half of the 16th century, in order to defend and systematize the widespread practice of dialogue writing, and following a series of commentaries and translations of Aristotle's *Poetics*, three treatises on the dialogue form were written, the first in Latin and the other two in the Italian vernacular: Carlo Sigonio's *De dialogo liber* (1562), Sperone Speroni's *Apologia dei dialogi* (1574) and Torquato Tasso's *Dell'arte del dialogo discorso* (1586). Interestingly, all three authors were involved in one way or another with Padua: Sigonio taught the *studia humanitatis* there between 1560 and 1562, after having held the San Marco Lectureship in Venice from 1552 to 1560, and Tasso was one of his students.[374] Speroni, who studied with Pietro Pomponazzi and knew Tasso, also briefly taught in Venice before starting a career as a "professional *letterato* and orator in the employ of the aristocracy, and the municipal administration of Padua" (Snyder 1989: 87). Speroni was involved with the Accademia degli Infiammati, a short-lived Paduan Academy,[375] whereas Sigonio was an important figure in the Academia Veneta as a "Humanist rector". This is the same academy which published both the anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* we have mentioned in Chapter 5, and the Italian translation of Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* by Orazio Toscanella;[376] one of its members was Bernardo Tasso, Torquato's father. All three authors, but especially Sigonio, show great familiarity with Aristotle's work: besides the *Poetics*, they were all well acquainted with the *Topics*, the *Analytics*, and the *Rhetoric*, which Sigonio translated in 1565. While the practice of dialogue writing owes much to the Ciceronian model of polite and elegant conversations among learned or otherwise important historical figures, as far as the theory is concerned "it would be impossible to imagine a Renaissance theory of dialogue without the vital and multiform presence of Italian Aristotelianism" (Snyder 1989: 19), in particular the new attention given to the *Topics*. Indeed, the authors of all these treatises on the dialogue form consider dialectic, in the Aristotelian sense of "disputational" dialectic, to be the art of all dialogical reasoning, which provides the underlying structure of literary dialogues. Insofar as they stress the connection between dialectic and dialogue, these authors also highlight and explicitly discuss the cognitive advantages of dialogical as opposed to solitary reasoning: as Homer writes: "If one thinks alone, the mind is shorter and the thought weaker" (*Iliad* X 225–6). These treatises on the dialogue form, therefore, are an important aspect of the Renaissance recovery of Aristotle's *Topics*, focusing on the relationship between dialectic and its literary representation; to that extent they are a necessary complement to the reconstruction of the tradition of dialectic.

The motivations of Sigonio, Speroni and Tasso for composing treatises on the dialogue form are important insofar as they unequivocally point to two important epistemic functions of dialogues. All of their treatises can indeed be read as elaborate and ingenious defenses of the dialogue form, either from some Renaissance commentators of Aristotle's *Poetics* who wanted to deny it the status of a legitimate art, or from the Inquisition which had sanctioned some of Speroni's and Tasso's dialogues for their contents. Some of Aristotle's rigid philological interpreters, like Ludovico Castelvetro, gave a particular reading of one passage drawn from of Aristotle's *Poetics* (1447b9–10), according to which dialogue was excluded from the domain of "imitation" and therefore could not be considered a legitimate literary work.[377] The reasons for this exclusion are that a dialogue is written in prose and not in verse, that it cannot be represented on the stage, and that its purpose is not to delight and please a crowd of common people, but rather to enlighten a few learned men: "Since, if we admitted that the subject matter of sciences and art could be the object of poetry, we would also admit that poetry either has not been invented in order to delight, or that it had not been invented for the common people, but rather for people expert ('assottigliate') in letters and disputes".[378] As a commentator and editor of Sigonio's *De dialogo liber* writes, a defense of dialogue as a legitimate literary form becomes, somewhat paradoxically, a defense of its epistemic worth: "To defend prose in this context means to clearly vindicate the possibility of a cognitive role for art" (Pignatti 1993: 34). In the treatises we are going to consider, then, not only is dialogue deemed a legitimate form of imitation, but speculative subjects like those generally treated by science are considered as acceptable subject matters for dialogues.[379] Moreover, insofar as dialogue is viewed as the "image of a dialectical disputation" (Sigonio 1562: 14v), rather than of a simple conversation,[380] it shares the important cognitive functions which are generally attributed to oral disputations in the Renaissance.[381] Indeed, Renaissance treatises on the dialogue form consider Aristotle's *Topics* on a par with Plato's dialogues and defend the use of dialogue as a privileged "road to truth" (Armstrong 1976). They thus develop the view that Abelard expressed in his own visionary dialogue, *Sic et non*: "By doubting, we come to questioning ('ad inquisitionem') and by questioning ('inquirendo') we perceive the truth" (1349).[382]

In another way, the dialogue is defended, especially by Speroni, as a particularly plastic form of writing. The author of a dialogue is not supposed to be responsible for the (sometimes provocative) opinions he puts in the mouth of others, but instead aims at exploring the domain of the probable without committing himself to any definite opinion. Anticipating a theme which will be discussed at length later, we may quote Tasso who, in one of his writings, states that the author of dialogues "does not engage himself to tell in all things the truth, but rather is more committed to what is *verisimile* than to what is true" (cit. in Pignatti 1993: 58). The fact that dialogue discusses probable or truthseeming opinions allows its author to take a non-committal attitude towards the views expressed and to keep at a safe distance from the characters represented in his literary work.[383] So, although Speroni often cites Plato in his treatise, he implicitly endorses a different notion of dialectic, one which is linked to the Ciceronian practice of arguing on both sides of an issue. In fact, Cicero's version of aporetic dialectic which served as a model for the Renaissance practice of dialogue writing both presupposes and represents on stage, as it were, a mildly skeptical notion of knowledge. Moreover, Speroni explicitly undermines the cognitive function of dialogue when he writes that dialogue is a "pleasant garden" where a great variety of things offers itself to the delight of readers (274), and that one of its main virtue is to allow for variety and digressions (362). Speroni goes as far as making dialogue into a parody of serious demonstrative science.

This chapter will be devoted to exploring the underlying tension present in Renaissance treatises on the dialogue form: dialogue is considered as a means of progressing towards the truth and as a means of evaluating opposite arguments and reaching probable conclusions. To this end, I shall compare these authors' respective positions concerning the relationships between opinion and science, truth and probability, persuasion and belief, and evaluate them in light of the tradition of dialectic to which they explicitly claim to belong – be it Plato's, Socrates', Aristotle's or Cicero's. These distinctions will be teased apart in order to see whether and how Renaissance authors on the dialogue form can answer the following questions: Can dialogue be a cognitive instrument for seeking the truth and/or proving it? Or is it simply a way of examining opposite opinions and reaching a probable conclusion? If dialogue is a powerful heuristic tool, how does it achieve its aim? Given the similarity of their approach, I shall analyze Sigonio's and Tasso's treatises together,[384] and deal with Speroni's theory separately, because it exemplifies a different model of the relationship between dialogue and knowledge. We shall see that the differences between these two approaches roughly correspond to those between the two forms of dialectic – "disputational" and "aporetic" dialectic – which I have singled out in Aristotle's *Topics*.

However, an important aspect of this Renaissance development, adding a new layer of complexity to our appreciation of the tradition of dialectic, is worth mentioning before we begin. As already said, both Tasso and Sigonio view dialogue as the "image" of a dialectical disputation. It therefore follows that, according to all three authors, dialogue is related not only to dialectic and disputation, but also to poetics considered as a form of representation or – to use a terminology current at the time – a form of "imitation". Tasso states that a writer of dialogues is "almost midway between a poet and a dialectician" (par. 38: 134 of the English translation). A dialogue is clearly a piece of fiction: "Dialogical discourse with its constant flow of questions and answers comes under the competence of dialectic, but it is not to be confused with dialectic" (Snyder 1989: 53). For dialogues are not real encounters between two interlocutors, but are constructed encounters where the protagonist as well as his adversary are merely fictional characters forged by the author. We shall see that whereas for both Sigonio and Tasso the relationship of "imitation" connects dialogue to its real counterpart, namely a dialectical debate, for Speroni it severs that link and makes the dialogue into a fake of the original, a counterfeit of reality.

Finally, we should mention the method our authors followed in writing their treatises. Like in most Renaissance treatises, theoretical statements are followed by citations of historical sources (not necessarily accompanied by their precise references) which either confirm the point made, or illustrate it with examples. Sigonio himself justifies this practice by appealing to the importance of the continuity of a tradition in order to justify a given claim. He writes that he quotes older authors "so that I will come to investigate the truth on the basis of more certain steps ('ut […] ad veritatem certioribus vestigiis indagandam adhibeam')" (9v). This is why Sigonio's treatise, and to a lesser extent Tasso's and Speroni's, are replete with quotes or references drawn from Plato, Aristotle and his Greek commentators (Alexander of Aphrodisias, "the prince of this discipline" (6r), Themistius and Ammonius, Plutarch, Cicero[385] and Galen.[386] Although in the union of "system and history",[387] system clearly predominates and determines the choice of the sources, the historical dimension of these treatises allows us to retrace the lines and boundaries of the tradition which has inspired them and to which they wish to be connected.

6.1 Sigonio and Tasso: dialogue as the "image" of dialectical disputation

As already indicated, the definition of dialogue as the "image of a dialectical disputation" entails a strong commitment to analyzing the dialogue's structure and aims in terms of what Sigonio and Tasso understand by "dialectical disputation", which in turn depends on their notion of dialectic. Rather than basing themselves on the new account of dialectic given by Renaissance authors like Valla and Agricola, both Sigonio and Tasso identify dialectic with the art described in Aristotle's *Topics* and refer to Plato (or Socrates) and Cicero only to illustrate minor points of their theory. In the exposition of these theories of the dialogue form, I will follow the lead of Sigonio's treatise, which is by far the most complete and theoretically aware of the three. He treats each of the following four topics in turn: the historical and intellectual origins of dialogue, its "nature and force", its constitutive parts, and finally its various forms. I will refer to Tasso's treatise either to confirm Sigonio's theory, or to qualify Sigonio's approach in important ways.

6.1.1 The historical and intellectual origins of dialogue

Sigonio thinks that it is important to consider the origins – both historical and intellectual – of dialogue before giving a definition of what a dialogue is and what its forms are ('quid sit dialogus aut qualis', 1r). He identifies the historical origins of dialogue and dialectic with Zeno of Elea, and states that dialogue "has been cultivated (…) by those who followed the Socratic doctrine" (7v). According to Sigonio, Plato surpassed everyone else in this art in the Greek world, and Cicero in the Roman world; he therefore presents his treatise on dialogue as a systematization of these two great dialogue writers in antiquity, and places dialogue under the general heading of dialectic. He explicitly excludes from his sources two other models of dialogue: he refers disparagingly to Lucian's "comic" dialogues (12v) and he disregards the contemporary Renaissance dialogues, most of which followed a Ciceronian pattern. These two exclusions are significant in their own right. On the one hand, Sigonio sees dialogue as being firmly attached to philosophy, indeed as another way of doing philosophy, as opposed to simply amusing his public: dialogues are pieces of serious literature and not simple means of entertainment. Moreover, and unlike most of the great Renaissance writers of dialogues, Sigonio views the search for knowledge in a dialogic form not as an aporetic quest for consensus, as in Ciceronian dialogues, but as a systematized quest for some definite conclusions, albeit provisional.[388] In this respect, and against our contemporary intuitions, Sigonio simply views Cicero's dialogue as a more eloquent and rhetorically effective version of Platonic dialogues (1562: 14v). In so doing, Sigonio minimizes, although does not altogether abolish,[389] the distinction between "disputational" (Socratic) dialogues and "aporetic" (Ciceronian) dialogues.

The intellectual origins of the "ancient custom of dialogue ('antiquus mos dialogi')" (9r)[390] rest on two "habits": the habit to imitate ('consuetudo imitandi') and the habit to reason ('consuetudo ratiocinandi') (1r). To *imitate* in dialogue is not simply to faithfully reproduce in words the character of another person, but "to simulate the discourse of somebody, once having assumed his character, so that those who listen do not think that it is we who are speaking, but rather the person whom we chose to imitate" (1v). When someone writes in dialogue form, he is forced to avail himself of imitation, since he has to simulate the discourse of others. Dialogue, however, is not the result of imitation alone; rather, it is an exercise in philosophy together with imitation (4r). The crucial question addressed in this introductory section, to which Sigonio devotes the whole treatise, is the following: when and why would someone choose to deal with a serious subject in the dialogue form rather than expounding the topic in the form of a treatise?

When Sigonio turns to our "power and habit to reason" (4v), he states that nature gave us two ways of examining the causes of things: "One in which one seeks out what truth in things is within oneself, and another with somebody else. Of which the first consists of an certain silent activity of the mind, the second consists of an open questioning and answering with the person with whom we engage in a disputation" (4v).[391] He states further that by "investigating things" with somebody else "things can be managed and searched through better and in a more satisfactory way ('commodius et melius administrari et exquiriri')" (4v). He supports this claim by quoting a passage from the *Protagoras*, where Plato writes that "somehow we all feel better fortified in this way for any action or speech or thought" (348d). When he tries to spell out the major distinctions between dialogical and solitary reasoning, he lists the following five differences.

1. **The premises** – Dialogical reasoning uses dialectical syllogisms while solitary reasoning uses demonstrative syllogisms. Sigonio explains the difference between the two in thoroughly Aristotelian terms: "Some syllogisms derive from true and specific premises ('ex veris et propriis'), and from them we obtain science; some derive from commonly accepted and common premises ('ex opinabilis et communibus') and give us opinion" (5r). Both adjectives – "true" (as opposed to "commonly accepted") and "specific" (as opposed to "common" to many sciences)[392] – are Aristotelian characterizations of the differences between demonstrative and dialectical premises. It is also very interesting that Sigonio, unlike all other interpreters, does not translate the term 'endoxa' by 'probabilia'; rather he uses the term 'opinabilis' to characterize the nature of the premises of a dialectical reasoning.

This is an indication of the fact that he considers dialectic to be the art of disputation and not a lower form of deductive reasoning. Later Sigonio will analyze the features of dialectical premises in more detail.

2. **The object of the discussion** – In solitary reasoning we defend only one part of a contradiction, the one we assume to be true, whereas in dialogic reasoning "following the practice of the dialecticians, we discuss the two opposite sides of an issue ('in contrarias partes dialecticorum more disseritur')" (5r).[393] The preposition 'dia' in the term 'dialogus' refers, according to Sigonio, to the possibility of conducting a double argumentation. He further states that this is what Aristotle meant when he argued in the *Topics* that dialectic is good for "encounters and disputations ('congressus et disputationes')" (5r). It is interesting to note that when he refers to the purpose of dialectic Sigonio indicates the second function of dialectic in Aristotle's fourfold list (*Topics*, 101a35–40). Unlike Alexander and Nifo, and more in tune with Averroes, Sigonio prefers to identify the most important type of dialectic with the disputational dialectic practiced in "encounters and conversations" rather than with the aporetic dialectic practiced in "the philosophical sciences".

3. **The means** – Dialogue uses "probable" as opposed to "necessary" arguments: dialogue suits all those knowledgeable men "who investigate the power and nature of things ('de vi ac natura rerum') with reciprocal questions not through necessary but through probable arguments" (5r). Notice that here the terms "necessary" and "probable" refer neither to the premises of dialectical syllogism nor to its conclusion but rather to the reasoning itself. Sigonio continues by describing the difference between necessary and probable arguments, which is not identified with their form, but with the effects that either kind of argument has on the opponent. Whereas "necessary" arguments address themselves to the "internal convictions" of the adversary, "probable" arguments lead to an "external victory". Indeed, these two types of argument differ in the means they employ to persuade an opponent: whereas "necessary" arguments produce a "tacit change of mind", "probable" arguments cause an "open confession" (5v).[394] These two related oppositions – between internal and external conviction, and between tacit and open change of mind – is a recurring theme in Sigonio's distinction between necessary and probable arguments. It serves to highlight what I consider to be the main point that Sigonio is pursuing in the introductory part of his essay, namely the difference between lonely and dialogical reasoning, which, according to him, corresponds to the Aristotelian distinction between demonstrative and dialectical syllogisms. Dialogical and lone reasoning do not differ in the subjects to be addressed, since dialectic and dialogue are both concerned with questions of natural philosophy; nor do they differ in their overall structure, since both consist of a rational investigation of arguments and theses. Rather, dialectical and demonstrative reasoning differ with respect to

their ends – public acquiescence and inner conviction, respectively – and with respect to the way in which they achieve these ends – modification of a cognitive state and explicit assent, respectively.[395]

4. **The audience** – The aforementioned differences become more explicit when a fourth distinction is introduced, not directly this time, but through lengthy quotations from authoritative sources about Aristotle's so-called "acroamatic" and "exoteric" works.[396] Quoting Cicero, Sigonio writes, "Aristotle disputes about the same things in two ways" (6r): these two kinds of work do not differ according to "the different nature of the things which are the object of the dispute", but according to the "difference in the way they are treated" (6r). Whereas "acroamatic" works are expository and addressed to the "legitimate cultivators of a discipline" (5v), namely an audience of experts, the "exoteric" works are written in dialogue form and addressed to the "crowd of the ignorant". As a consequence, Aristotle can use in the first "very firm and subtle arguments" (5v) and arguments which are "more apt to investigate the truth sharply" (6r), while in the second he can "prove the same things" by using "certain simpler and plainer reasons" (5v) more "adapted to bring about opinion" (6r), and "some to which a crowd of non-specialists could give its assent" (5v). This last passage specifies what Sigonio means by "the crowd of the ignorant"; this expression does not refer to simple people in general, but to those who are not expert in a given subject. The difference between expository demonstration and dialogical reasoning, as they are carried out in their respective forms of argumentation, reflects a difference of prospective audiences – the first specialist, the second non-specialist – as opposed to a disciplinary difference. This distinction between demonstrative and dialectical arguments in terms of their respective audiences is connected to their use of premises expressing "specific" and "common" principles respectively.[397]

5. **The subject matter** – As in dialectic, the "subject matter" of dialogues consists in "those things which need reasoning and inquiry", namely "which are not perspicuous by themselves, but require the disputation among cultivated men" (13r). Similarly, describing what a "dialectical problem" is, Aristotle states that it has to express a piece of controversial knowledge:

> Its subject is something about which either men have no opinion either way, or most people hold an opinion contrary to that of the wise, or the wise contrary to that of most people, or about which members of all of each of these classes disagree among themselves. (…) Problems also occur when reasonings are in conflict (for they involve a doubt whether something is so or not, because there are strong arguments on both sides. (*Topics* 104b1–17)

In this way, Sigonio hints at the role played by dialectic and dialogue in the "invention" or discovery of that which is not yet known.

6.1.2 The "force and nature" of dialogue (9r)

According to Sigonio, three arts are required to write a dialogue successfully: poetics, rhetoric and dialectic (8r). Poetics ensures "imitation" and saves the "fitness ('decorum')" of characters while rhetoric embellishes the discourse. Dialectic, the most important of the three, provides dialogue with the instruments necessary "in order to sustain the difficult and subtle task of debating, to know the right way ('consuetudo') to inquire and to ask questions, to draw probable conclusions from premises and finally to teach the questioner how to urge the adversary with questions, or to extricate himself from his deceits and his traps" (9r). Although Sigonio recognizes that dialogue is "*a certain image* of a dialectical disputation" (14v), it is more ornate than a "battle and an altercation between dialecticians" (14v). Rhetoric, therefore, is useful, but it is merely an addition to the essential structure and purpose of dialogue – which mirrors a dialectical disputation – and has to be used sparingly in order to let its dialectical nature play itself out in full. Praising Plato, Tasso states that "the part of dialogue where the characters dispute has to possess purity and simplicity of elocution, for it seems that here excessive ornaments constitute an obstacle to the arguments" (par. 35, 132 of the English translation).[398]

Sigonio reports Diogenes Laertius' definition of dialogue (III.48) and translates it as "a series of questions and answers in philosophy or civil matters, which saves the fitness ('decorum') of characters without leaving aside the embellishments of discourse" (9v). Nevertheless, Sigonio finds this definition insufficient, since it is too general and superficial, and does not emphasize the connection between dialogue and dialectical disputation. Indeed, the fact that a dialogue consists of a series of questions and answers is not an accidental literary feature, but depends on a more profound circumstance. Sigonio himself defines dialogue as "a certain dialectical disputation" (13r) as opposed to any ordinary conversation: thus dialogue is composed of questions and answers because it is based on the "power ('potestatem') of dialectic" (12r). A disputation, in turn, is defined as a 'disquisitio rationis' (12v), which means literally a "rational investigation", and consists of a constructed discoursive inquiry by means of questions and answers of the different arguments exchanged by cultivated men on a given topic. Sigonio explicitly states the connection between dialogue and disputation:

> Because a disputation is a rational investigation conducted among learned men by means of questions and answers (a procedure the Greek called 'dialegesthai'), the Ancients maintained that dialogues be composed of questions and answers, and thus they come under the competence of dialectic, which is charged with finding the arguments whereby we confirm or refute anything. (12r)

As a consequence, dialogue fulfills at least one of the main functions attributed to dialectic in the Renaissance: the "invention" of arguments and their arrangement in order to prove a thesis. This is clear from the definition (very Aristotelian in spirit) that Sigonio gives of dialectic: dialectic "is a faculty of finding those arguments with which we confirm or refute something" and it does so by "urging an adversary in such a way that we leave him the choice of accepting only one of two opposing sides" (12v).

Given that dialectic in the specific sense of Aristotle's disputational dialectic plays a major role in Sigonio's definition of dialogue, what can we say about the respective roles he reserves for rhetoric and poetics? Is poetic "imitation" an important part of the construction of dialogue? And what is the role of rhetoric, both as mere embellishment and as a way of finding the possible means of persuasion on any subject, the 'pithanon' of Aristotle's own definition of rhetoric at *Rhetoric* 1355b1? At the other end of the epistemological spectrum, Sigonio needs to distinguish "opinions" reached through dialogical reasoning from scientific knowledge reached through demonstration, and to characterize the specific status of the knowledge reached at the end of a dialogue. Sigonio discusses these two important distinctions by identifying two parts of dialogue, which he calls "preparation ('preparatio')" and "contention ('contentio')".[399] He defines "preparation" as the prologue of a dialogue "which opens the way to the communication of the chosen dispute" (18r) and "contention" as "the soul of dialogue", insofar as it contains "all those verbal means which will allow us to confirm or refute the thesis proposed for the disputation" (18r). The two parts are not physically separated, but correspond to two separate, albeit coexisting, functions of dialogue. Under the first heading, "preparation", Sigonio discusses the proper conditions of imitation ('mimēsis') and the relationship between a real dialectical disputation and its representation in a fictional dialogue. On the other hand, in discussing "contention", Sigonio singles out a place for dialectical reasoning which is different from both scientific demonstration and rhetorical persuasion. He also defines the epistemological status of opinion by distinguishing it from both scientific knowledge and persuasion. These two parts of dialogue will be analyzed in the next two sections.

6.1.3 "Preparation" and imitation

Contrary to Plato, Sigonio thinks it is necessary to introduce the dialogue by a prologue which "opens the way" (18r) to the actual dispute. Its role, however, does not end with the simple presentation of the topics to be discussed. Rather, in order to achieve "imitation", the author has to introduce the characters of the dialogue and justify the place, the historical moment and the subject it deals with in such a way as to respect the principles of 'verisimilis' ('eikos' in Greek) and 'decorum' ('prepōn' in Greek): imitation "is only made possible by observing these two principles" (18r).[400]

Concerning the first condition, Sigonio distinguishes between rhetorical and poetic "probability ('verisimilis')". He defines the former as "what so happens for the most part, but which has nonetheless the power to happen otherwise" (18v), as for example "old people are keen on money". This concept corresponds well to Aristotle's definition of 'eikos' which in the *Rhetoric* (1357a15–16) is usually translated by "probability".[401] According to Sigonio, rhetorical "probability ('verisimilis')", plays a role in those "controversies which are based on conjectures" (18v), namely on opinions which are not considered as established truths.[402] Thus, the probable is what is still uncertain, and as such it is the object of debate and dialectical disputations. On the other hand, poetic "probability ('verisimilis')", which is necessary for imitation, is what provides a counterbalance to the fictional aspect of the dialogue: "The poetic 'verisimilis' has a power and nature such that, when it is present, it ensures that things which are fictional do not appear so" (18v).[403] Here, Sigonio follows closely Aristotle's definition: although in Aristotle's *Poetics* fiction, unlike history, deals with what is possible and not with what is actual, it cannot be completely arbitrary. Rather, the events narrated have to be at least probable ('eikos'), if not necessary ('ananchaion'). Aristotle writes that it is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability ('eikos') and necessity (1451a36–37). Stephen Halliwell rightly remarks that Aristotle's notion of poetic "probability" has less to do with "the quasi-rhetorical element of persuasiveness" of the narrative than with "the inherent credibility and intelligibility of the poetic plot-structure" (1986: 103).

In order to realize the general purpose of poetic 'verisimilis', however, and ensure that what is fictional appears to be true, one needs the second principle of imitation, namely 'decorum', which is defined as "what is fitting ('quod deceat')" (19r). More precisely, in order to be fitting, the narrative has to satisfy a number of requirements. Firstly, the "action must correspond ('conveniens') to the person in a way that has been suggested to us either by nature or by judgment" (19r). In other words, characters in the dialogue must behave and hold opinions which are to be expected from them, either because of what they naturally are (e.g. a young or an old man) or because of what we know about them. More particularly, 'decorum' and hence "the fact of being fitting ('decebit')" will be satisfied by "all that expresses ('exprimet') the characters ('mores') and the emotions of the souls, and corresponds to the things we are dealing with" (19v). Not every such fitting representation, however, will actually respect 'decorum'. Following Aristotle's *Poetics* (1454a15–28), Sigonio places some restrictions on the representation of characters. He describes in his own terms four of the different attributes that, according to Aristotle, fictional characters must possess in order to be fitting and therefore 'verisimilis': (1) they must be "good" because "it is fitting that we imitate virtues and not vices"; (2) they must be appropriate ('convenientes'): for example it is fitting to attribute strength to a man and weakness to a woman; (3) they must be similar ('similes') to what we know of the real persons – Ulysses, for example, has to be represented as prudent and not otherwise –; and, finally and more importantly, (4) they must be "coherent with themselves ('aequabiles')", namely "they cannot dissent from themselves" (20r). All these requirements are designed not only to make the dialogue intelligible, but also to make it credible, that is to make it plausible and believable as a faithful image of a dialectical disputation, and not simply as an arbitrary construction of a single author.

In order to realize both 'decorum' and 'verisimilis', moreover, the author of a dialogue has to assign three different and separate roles to the characters he has chosen to represent: the roles of "confirming and, as it were, teaching", of "refuting", and finally of "listening" (23v). The addition of this last role to the two roles of the questioner and the answerer described in Aristotle's *Topics* is a consequence of the fact that in a written dialogue – as opposed to an oral disputation – the debate between the two main interlocutors has to be softened and made more agile by the presence of a third person. It also reflects the influence of Ciceronian dialogues, where the neutral function of the judge of a dialectical disputation is fulfilled by an active character representing the prospective reader of the text.

The first role, that of "confirming and almost teaching" is usually assigned to the main character; it has to be chosen with care, because readers tend to think that the main character reveals the thought of the author himself (24r). As a matter of fact, adds Sigonio, this character may indeed be the author himself, as in Cicero's *De officiis*. The second role is assigned to a critical interlocutor ('nobis adversantes') (25r): the author will be wary of attributing false theses to him, or of having him walk away in disgrace completely vanquished by the reasons put forth by the main character; rather the author will attribute "probable" theses to him, or theses which have at least a *prima facie* likelihood. On this point, Sigonio quotes a letter to Atticus (XIII.31.5) where Cicero writes that he has represented Antiochus' thoughts on the Skeptical Academy so well through the character Varro that he could not make his own theses prevail. In the event that the author cannot attribute to the opponent probable theses, he should at least ensure that the latter is represented as holding theses that he actually held in reality as Plato did for the Sophists. Lastly, if this is not possible, the adversary should be represented as defending those unlikely theses just for the sake of discussion (25v), and not as if he held them as true.

This charitable set of instructions for the representation of the adversary in a disputation are designed not only to save his face in defeat, but also to ensure that the discussion is equitable and the victory of the main character not too unbalanced. The main character has to appear as having overcome real objections, and not as having destroyed a strawman: the theory he has defended will thus appear all the stronger. Finally, the character representing the "listener" has the function not to dispute but "rather to perceive what is being disputed about" (25v). He must be cultivated (in order to make it likely that he can understand both sides), and above all he has to maintain a particular attitude which Sigonio describes in detail. The "listener", who represents the likely reader and also fulfills the function of a judge, has to be *impartial* but not *indifferent*. He has to weigh ('probare') silently the discourses of both and finally approve ('comprobare') with mental assent ('assentione animi') the one he judges the better of the two (25v–26r). Sigonio strengthens his remarks by invoking the passage from Plato's *Protagoras* where the sophist Prodicus states: "Those who are present at discussions of this kind must divide their attentions between the speakers impartially but not equally. The two things are not the same. They must hear both alike, but not give equal weight to each. More should be given to the wiser, and less to the other. I add my plea, Protagoras and Socrates, that you should be reconciled. Let your conversation be a discussion and not a dispute. A discussion is carried on among friends with good will, but a dispute is between rivals and enemies" (337a–b; Plato 1961: 331).

If we go beyond a superficial reading, therefore, the "preparation" phase of dialogue involves much more than a simple introduction or prologue. It serves to ensure that we do not take for granted that a dialogue is simply the mirror-image of a dialectical disputation; rather, the essential relationship between a dialectical disputation and its literary representation requires that the author abide by certain poetic rules in order to give the impression that the characters engage, as far as possible, in a real debate. Preparation is also meant to ensure that the cognitive result achieved at the end of the disputation represented in the dialogue is not just the result of the author's fictional construction, but can be taken to be the result of a *real discussion* among two or more interlocutors. As he states, "it is necessary that what is in reality ('quod in re est') is expressed also in discourse ('id etiam oratione exprimatur')" (18v): the attention given to this subject shows that Sigonio is well aware of the problematic character of the image-like relationship between a dialectical disputation and its representation in the literary dialogue.

All the precautions taken in the choice of the characters and in the distribution of roles – particularly in the representation of the adversary – may not be enough to completely erase the fictional nature of a constructed dialogue, for this would be simply impossible. They are usually sufficient, however, to make the dialogue a good approximation of a real controversy, especially if the prospective reader can have independent access to the arguments of the dispute represented in the dialogue, and can evaluate the piece of literature against what could reasonably have been its real counterpart.

6.1.4 "Contention": dialectical proof between science and rhetoric

The second part of dialogue is "contention ('contentio')", which means both contest and the juxtaposition of ideas. "Contention", according to Sigonio, "is the place which, because of its nature and power ('vi ac potestate'), includes the whole of dialogue" (34v): what is presented as a mere part of dialogue, therefore, can be assumed to express its whole nature. Sigonio further writes that the main component of 'contentio' is "proof ('probatio')",[404] a term by which he means the resolution of the subject proposed through question and answer.[405] Thus, Sigonio deals with dialectical reasoning as presented in Aristotle's *Topics* under the heading of what Aristotle called "demonstrative proofs" ('pisteis apodeiktikas', Rhet. 1417b21), namely proofs relying on logical means rather than on emotion ('pathos') and character ('ethos').[406] He further identifies the most important part of "proof" with "dialectical confirmation and refutation", which he considers to be the heart of the dialogue, and calls it 'sententia', a term borrowed from yet another Aristotelian distinction, namely that between 'actio', 'sententia' and 'mores' in the *Poetics* (1450a36–b12). Reproducing Aristotle's distinctions, Sigonio defines 'actio' (action) as communication between interlocutors, and 'mores' (characters) as the use of characters in order to strengthen the logical proofs. Nonetheless he devotes all of his attention to 'sententia', which he interprets as the translation of the Greek 'dianoia' (discoursive reasoning) and renders as "thought which is expressed in words" (37r). 'Sententia' , therefore, "embraces the whole genus of argumentation" (37r) and "contains those [premises] from which men prove that something is or is not, or pronounce a universal sentence" (ibid.). This is the reason why 'sententia' characterizes "invention" as opposed to "disposition", and thus for Sigonio represents the "heart" of dialogue. He writes that "since 'sententia' includes confirmation and refutation above all, and we want to imitate the 'sententia' of those who exchange speeches ('sermones conferunt'), we have to show the disputants while confirming or undermining something rationally" (37v). This, Sigonio continues, is what Aristotle describes in his dialectical works, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, and corresponds to the "art of the dialecticians".

Thus, it is not suprising that in this central part of his treatise, Sigonio distinguishes dialectic and dialogue from both science and rhetorical persuasion, two distinctions which are crucial for Sigonio's characterization of the epistemic value of dialogue.

Sigonio begins this discussion by stating that "those who have understood something by acquaintance or by discoursive knowledge ('notitia ac cognitione') have their minds imbued with either *science* or *opinion* or *error* of that thing" (38r). They are a philosopher, a dialectician and a sophist respectively. In turn, they avail themselves of either demonstration, "ratiocination" ('epicheirēma', namely dialectical syllogism), or sophism (39v). Before analyzing the differences between science and opinion, it may be useful to point to an important similarity between the two, which becomes apparent only when Sigonio contrasts "dialectical opinion" ('opinio') with "rhetorical opinion", or persuasion ('fides').[407] Both science and opinion are opposed to persuasion, which is the object of rhetoric, insofar as they require an assent deriving from an "internal motion of the mind ('proprium motus' 39r)". This internal motion is always directed to universals and not particulars, and occurs when the "mind understands things in such a way as they are in themselves" ('cum [mens] res intelligit eo modo, quo in se sunt' (39r). Persuasion, on the other hand, is always directed at particular things and derives from an "external motion of the mind ('alienus motus')", which occurs when the mind "is driven by desire ('ab appetitione impellitur')" (39r).[408] Therefore, the respective purposes of a dialectician and a rhetorician are only deceptively similar: although both dialectic and rhetoric aim at convincing another person, they produce very different kinds of mental states; indeed, "rhetoricians, who share the same argumentation with the dialecticians, have adopted two further means of bringing about conviction ('fidei faciendae instrumenta'): the emotions of the soul and the characters" (39r). That basic similarity between science and opinion suggests that Sigonio considers them as two different species of the same kind of knowledge: indeed, in contrast to rhetorical persuasion, the sort of knowledge provided by both science and opinion is wholly rational, in that it originates in the mind and does not appeal to emotions. Furthermore, it is addressed to the solution of universal matters, as opposed to particular ones.[409]

But, although according to Sigonio "science" and "opinion" are similar when compared to rhetorical persuasion, they differ from each other in important respects:

1. **Their objects** – Sigonio writes that "we know scientifically those things which cannot be otherwise, and opinionwise, those which can either happen or not" (38r).[410] This does not mean that science only can attain the truth whereas opinion

can only attain what resembles the truth; rather, truth – which is equated with "reality ('realitas')" (18v) – is the goal of both scientific and dialectical knowledge. However, whereas dialectic addresses what is contingently true, science deals with what is necessarily true. Sigonio writes that "the same things can be perceived by some as science and by some as opinion" (38v). In order to contrast scientific knowledge with knowledge based on opinion, Sigonio appeals to the different kinds of assent they involve, rather than to their respective purposes. There is *science* when assent is given "without doubting of the opposite proposition ('sine alterius partis dubitatione assentiatur')" (39r), and there is *opinion* when the assent is accompanied by doubt. This is also why in a dialogue, which is concerned with opinion, we consider both sides of an issue. The difference between the two kinds of knowledge, then, is not based on the *degrees of certainty* which different subject matters can attain (as in Medieval dialectic), but rather on *the quality of the assent* that they require. [411] In turn, the "assent accompanied by doubt", which is the hallmark of opinion, depends on the awareness that a piece of knowledge, even when it is true, is not eternal but revisable and provisional.[412]

2. **Kinds of knowledge** – As a consequence, science yields knowledge which is "constant and lasting ('constantem ac perpetuam')", whereas opinion yields knowledge which is "unstable and perishable ('caducam atque instabilem')" (38r). In another passage, the "probability of opinion" is contrasted with the "necessity of science" (40v). Thus the term "probable" as linked to opinion does not refer to a *property of things*, namely "that which happens for the most part", but to a *property of our knowledge of things*. In this respect, the "probability" of opinion does not denote, as in Cicero, a given degree of approximation to the truth of the knowledge reached by dialogue, but the contingency and revisability of dialectical knowledge, as opposed to the necessity and the permanent status of scientific knowledge. Commenting on a passage from the *Posterior Analytics* (88b30–35) where Aristotle contrasts the necessity of scientific knowledge ('epistēmē') with the contingency of opinion ('doxa'), Barnes describes the Aristotelian notion of opinion in a similar way: "By saying that opinion is insecure Aristotle does not say that opinions are always hesitant or lack 'subjective certainty' (…). Rather, security is a matter of stability (…). This may mean that opiners are inherently liable to change their minds" (1975: 189). He cites Plato (*Phaedo* 90c and *Republic* 503c) as further evidence for this meaning of the term opinion.

3. **Premises** – Accordingly, scientific knowledge ('scire') derives from premises "which are true and bring about a conclusion which is firm and eternal", while opinion ('opinari', a Ciceronian term) derives from premises "which are probable and compel us to assent ('ex probabilibus et quae nos assentiri cogant')" (38r). Let us now analyze these two features of dialectical premises in turn, their probable

character on the one hand, and their ability to force assent upon the interlocutor on the other. In the first place, lest one could consider “probable premises” as premises which express “that which comes to be for the most part”, Sigonio explicitly retranslates ‘probabilis’ as ‘opinabilis’ (“ex opinabilis opinio”) (39v) and explains it by giving it the same definition of Aristotle’s ‘endoxa’ in the *Topics*: ‘opinabiles’ are “those things which are approved (‘probantur’) by the opinion of all, or of most, or certainly by the experts” (39v). By contrast, the premises of rhetorical argumentation, what Sigonio calls ‘persuasibilia’[413], are those propositions “to which the vulgar and ignorant crowd would give its assent” (39v); because of their definition, the epistemic function of ‘persuasibilia’ is minimized.[414] Dialectic, on the other hand, is addressed to an audience of qualified people – though not one of highly specialized experts – but, unlike science, it still requires the assent of an audience; it is precisely the nature itself of the audience which guarantees that the assent given to such “probable” (‘opinabilis’) premises has some epistemic value. The premises of dialectical reasoning are not only probable, but such that they force any qualified interlocutor to assent. Once again, by dealing with a literary subject, Sigonio has captured the exact sense of Aristotelian dialectic, especially of what I have called “disputational” dialectic: a dialectical premise has to be such as to force the opponent to assent. Indeed, the reasoned assent of a knowledgeable interlocutor is the crucial necessary condition of dialectical knowledge, since it allows the one who directs the discussion to reach a definite and well-tested conclusion, namely to prove his thesis, although not to demonstrate it scientifically.

The radical difference between opinion and persuasion, and between dialectic and rhetoric, already pointed to the tight connection existing between dialectical opinion and science. In fact, Sigonio goes even further in establishing this connection; he argues that “*the same things* can be perceived by some as science, and by some as opinion (‘easdem res ab aliis scientia ab aliis opinione percipi posse’)”[415] but not *at the same time* as both science *and* opinion (38v), since the fact that a certain piece of knowledge is considered either science or opinion depends on the premises from which it has been derived. He writes: “Such is the power of principles and assumptions (‘vis principiorum ac sumptionum’), that if they are well posited and rightly constituted, it seems that there can be science also of those things which can happen otherwise, and which a short while ago we said could only be perceived by opinion, if they are well concluded from necessary and true propositions” (38v). In other words, what today we consider opinion because it depends upon the assent of an opponent to the premise from which it is derived, could one day be considered to be scientific knowledge, if it becomes self-evident, so to speak, by virtue of true and primitive warranting principles.[416] Thus, the scientific status of a proposition does not depend solely on the discipline involved but also on the argumentative context in which it is embedded: the premises from which it is derived and whether it is derived by solitary or dialogical reasoning.

4. **Attitude** – This term captures one final difference between science and opinion. A dialogue, like a dispute, "arises around those things about which there is doubt" (Tasso, par. 15: 125 of the English translation): Sigonio writes that while a philosopher is someone "who establishes a doctrine which is certain ('qui certam constituat disciplinam')", a dialectician, whom a writer of dialogues has to resemble, is someone "who doubts about everything and almost questions science itself ('ipsam propo scientiam labefactet')" (38v).[417] Unlike the philosopher and the dialectician, however, the rhetorician is not interested in knowledge as such but rather in swaying public opinion with a view to future decision and action: his purpose is thus practical, rather than theoretical. His attitude is not explicitly discussed, but we can surmise that he is not necessarily an unworthy man when he exercises his art correctly and has a moral purpose in mind.

What so far has appeared as a fairly coherent story becomes more complicated. At the end of his discussion on the relationship between science, opinion and persuasion, Sigonio declares indeed that since dialogue is the "image ('effigies') of a dialectical disputation", we do not have to approach it with "necessary reasons in order to achieve science, but with probable reasons in order to achieve opinion" (40r). He continues by referring in this context to the Academic practice of arguing "on both sides of an issue" ('in utramque partem disserere' 40v), explicitly attributing it to the Academic Skeptics Arcesilaus and Carneades (ibid.): "Saying that they knew nothing and only had opinions of everything ('opinari'), [the Skeptics] disputed in a probable way against the opinions held by everybody else ('contra omnium sententias probabiliter disputarent')" (40r).[418] Here the word "probable" has the same meaning as in Cicero, namely that which approximates the truth without attaining it: the Academic skeptics disputed "probably" on both sides of an issue because they despaired of ever reaching a definite conclusion, and were satisfied with the relative comparison and evaluation of opposites. The epistemic stance that Sigonio seems to adopt here differs from the dialectical attitude described above as the awareness of the truth's contingency and provisional character; this raises the question of the existence of a skeptical strain in his thought. Indeed, although this is the only reference to Academic skepticism which contradicts the Aristotelian spirit of Sigonio's entire treatise, we cannot rule out the influence of Cicero's philosophy. I think, however, that Sigonio's reference to the skeptical practice of reasoning *in utramque partem* is not necessarily meant to stress the state of ignorance it leads to. Rather, Sigonio wants to point out the usefulness of dialogue in learning what is not yet known, but eventually can be known. He writes: "In fact it does not belong to someone who declares that he has found the truth to dispute of things on both sides ('in contrarias partes de rebus disputare') but to someone who acknowledges he is uncertain ('ambigere')" (40r) – and, we may add, is still uncertain. In a suggestive passage at the end of the first part of his treatise, where he deals with the origins of the dialogue form, Sigonio quotes Lucian as saying that dialogue is the son of philosophy. Sigonio comments:

> I am not sure if we cannot say with more justice that it [the dialogue] is rather the parent of all doctrine worthy of its name ('honesta'). This is so because it shows us the way ('viam') by which, once we have started by those things which are perceived by opinion, we can more easily reach those which are perceived by the intellect ('mente'), and also from those which rest upon verisimilitude to those which rest upon the truth ('quae veritate nitantur'). (7r)

The emphasis on the use of dialogue for the discovery of truth is in tune with the character of dialogues written in the second part of the 16th century, which were often "closed dialectical dialogues" i.e. dialogues where a writer would use "the techniques of the open dialogue to 'closed' didactic ends" (Cox 1992: 78). This form is particularly well-suited when "a writer wishes to convey opinions opposed to the views of the multitude" (ibid.), where straightforward teaching would not be effective. According to Cox, the relative "closeness" of the dialogue, moreover, goes hand in hand with an increasing emphasis on method and dialectic as opposed to rhetoric: the dialogue form changes from "disordered narrative" to "ornamented order" (ibid.: 84). In late 16th-century dialogues, unlike early Renaissance ones, there is a "lack of sympathy with the relativistic assumptions which inform the structure of dialogues *in utramque partem* (…). Throughout the dialogue the hegemony of dialectic goes unchallenged, while rhetoric is formally banished to an ornamental role" (ibid.). Accordingly, the model followed by writers of dialogues in this period shifts from Cicero to Plato.

6.1.5 The forms and aims of dialogue

Dialogues are ambiguous forms of writing, because, as a recent scholar writes, they allow "almost endless possibilities for creative manipulation of the relations between reader and text" (Cox 1992: 5). Nevertheless, Sigonio and Tasso identify several possible forms of dialogue and classify them according to their stylistic and structural features. The stylistic classification is very clearly discussed by Tasso (par. 5: 122 of the English translation). He distinguishes between "dramatic" and "narrative" dialogues (based on 'mimēsis' and 'diēgēsis' respectively): in "dramatic" dialogues the author is not represented as a character, whereas in "narrative" dialogues he appears as the narrator of the conversation. Therefore, the particular stylistic form of the dialogue is important not only for strictly literary reasons, but also for placing the authorial voice. Indeed, the distinction between dramatic and narrative dialogues hinges on the place and role of the author with respect to his characters: whereas in "dramatic" dialogues the characters interact directly and the author is absent, in "narrative" dialogues the author himself appears in the dialogue as a character, and reports the conversation he has allegedly heard. Dramatic dialogues are considered by Sperone Speroni, for example, as open relativistic dialogues, as opposed to narrative dialogues, where a strong authorial figure allows the dialogue to fulfill a closed pedagogical purpose. Virginia Cox considers "dramatic" dialogues as quintessential democratic forms of writing; these are, according to her, "true" dialogues, where all opinions are expressed and discussed on equal footing (1992: 62).[419] Here, "the writer is renouncing an authorial role, and becoming, like the reader, an admiring eavesdropper on the conversation of others", as is suggested by Sperone Speroni's expression "being silent while reasoning ('tacer ragionando')" (1992: 43).[420] Ciceronian dialogues, imitated as they were in the early Renaissance, represent this ideal of free discussion. The "dramatic" form of dialogue, on the other hand, underlines the objectivity of the discussion rather than its openness. Its dramatic character may cause the reader to perceive the dialogical exchange as if it represented a simple confrontation between two arguments, as opposed to a confrontation between two persons or groups of persons; this strengthens, in the readers' eyes, the conclusions reached.

As for the structural classification of dialogues, Sigonio directly links the aims of dialogue to four different types of dialectic described by Aristotle.[421] According to Sigonio (41r), dialogues are either "expositive ('expositio')", or "inquisitive ('inquisitio')", or else sophistical. "Inquisitive" dialogues, are either "obstetrical 'obstetricus')" (or maieutical) or "tentative ('tentativus')" (42v), which, Sigonio writes, the Greeks called "peirastic" ('peirastikois', Greek in the text) (47r). Without explicitly citing Aristotle, Tasso also classifies dialogues into doctrinal, dialectical, peirastic and contentious (par. 21: 127 of the English translation), and thus reproduces almost exactly Sigonio's fourfold distinction. Sophistical dialogues do not interest our authors. "Expositive" dialogues, which Tasso calls "doctrinal", are considered to be practiced especially by Cicero: they usually involve only two characters, the teacher and the pupil, where the teacher puts forward his thesis at the very outset in a straightforward way, while the pupil asks a few questions which are in turn answered by the teacher.[422] On the contrary, in "inquisitive" dialogues, he who teaches asks the questions and "reveals his own intimate convictions in a more indirect way" with respect to "expositive" or didactic dialogues (41r). Moreover, "expositive" dialogues, well represented by Plato's *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, use syllogism (or 'perpetua oratione'), whereas "inquisitive" dialogues use "induction" (or 'interpellata oratione') (41r). Syllogism and induction are thus defined as two different styles of argumentation – the first continuous, the second interrupted by questions and answers – which in turn create two different kinds of discourse ('sermones'): syllogism being "calm and gentle ('quieto ac remisso')", and induction being "sharp and pugnacious ('acri ac perpugnaci')"(41r). Sigonio also refers to Cicero's analysis of induction (*De inv*. I 51–54) and underscores the constraining character of dialectical premises: "Induction is a discourse ('oratio') which, through things which are not in doubt, catches the assent of the one to whom it is addressed. Through a series of assents, he succeeds in proving ('probare') those things which seemed dubious to him, insofar as they appear similar to those to which he has already given his assent" (44v–45r).

Sigonio finally distinguishes "inquisitive" dialogues into "obstetrical" ('maieutikon') and "tentative" ('peirastikon'); the first shares the task of "constructive" dialectic, the second that of "destructive" dialectic. According to Sigonio, "obstetrical" dialogues have the advantage over "expositive" dialogues that he who conducts the discussion is in a better position to pass judgment on it, since he is only indirectly the producer of knowledge. With Plutarch (*Plat. Quaest.* I 1–3) in mind, Sigonio compares a dialectician to a parent who is better able to judge the abilities of an adopted son than those of a biological one. On the contrary, "tentative" dialogues have the destructive task of "repressing the ignorance and haughtiness of the sophists" (47r). The method they use is the typical dialectical method of disputation described by Aristotle in the *Topics*: "From what has been accepted by the interlocutor with whom we discuss, to draw something which will weaken and undermine his own opinion" (47v).

According to Sigonio, Cicero's style of dialogue writing does not fit neatly into this classification: he mixes exposition by way of long discourses and inquisition by way of short exchanges. He differs from Plato in the character and aim of his inquisitive dialogues, which are neither obstetrical nor tentative. Rather, they are written "according to the way of disputing of the Academics ('ad Academicorum disputandi consuetudinem')" (52r). In discussions *in utramque partem*, mostly with long discourses, "each side is strenuously defended" in turn, and each interlocutor tries to weaken what has been affirmed by the previous one with probable arguments, "in such a way, however, that it is not apparent which discourse is closer to the truth ('ad veritatem propensior sit oratio')" (52v).[423]

From Sigonio's and Tasso's classifications we can draw a few general conclusions on the way Renaissance theorists of the dialogue form interpret its nature and aims. First – and more importantly – didactic or "expository" dialogues are found to be either too direct (Sigonio) or too scholastic (Tasso, par. 25: 128 of the English translation); this explains why the role of dialogue as a teaching aid is not emphasized in 16th-century theories of the dialogue form.[424] On the contrary, "inquisitive" dialogues are considered to be the quintessential, and most important, kind of dialogues, be it in their constructive version ("dialectical" or "obstetrical") or in their destructive one ("tentative" or "peirastic"). Secondly, although Sigonio is aware of a different kind of dialogue, which he calls "Academic" and attributes to Cicero, he treats it as an exception and does not address the question of the different notion of dialectic it involves. We may conclude not only that Aristotle's classification of the different types of dialectic is carried over in the characterization of the main types of dialogue, but also that "peirastic" dialectic looms large in Renaissance theories of the dialogue form. Moreover, it is disputational rather than aporetic dialectic which constitutes the basic structure of dialogue, according to both Sigonio and Tasso, at least.

6.2 Sperone Speroni: "aporetic" dialogue as a playful game

With Sperone Speroni, we have an altogether different image of what a dialogue is, namely a form of comedy (*Apologia* 278), whose declared aim is to produce amusement: "If to imitate is to play, opinion, as it is generated in the dialogue, is a game" (ibid.: 281). This is true despite his reference to Plato as the model of all dialogue writing (ibid.: 267 and 314), and despite his beautiful and vivid metaphorical description of dispute as a means of discovering the truth (ibid.: 283–284). In fact, Speroni's treatise is not a linear exposition of dialogue's structure and aim. Rather, it is a loose description of various themes related to the dialogue form, and a literary work in its own right: it even contains a short dialogue on love. As a result, it does not always provide a coherent picture of what dialogue's purpose and structure are.[425] The circumstances of its composition could explain these ambiguities: written in 1574, the *Apologia dei dialogi* was published posthumously in 1596. Speroni conceived the work as a defense of his own *Dialoghi* (published in 1542) from the Master of the Sacred Palace, who had accused him of heretical views. The *Apologia* then is not a systematic defense of the dialogue form, but can be seen as a strategy "to deal with writing under pressure" (Snyder 1989: 91) in the period of the Counter-Reformation: "A dialogical poetics counters any attack on the meaning of a given dialogue by canceling the very possibility of a thematic – rather than structural – reading" (ibid.: 96).

As in the case of Sigonio's and Tasso's treatises, Speroni develops two interrelated themes: dialogue as a form of discussion among different interlocutors, and dialogue as poetic imitation, which is meant to capture that same debate in a literary way. Speroni writes: "Dialogue imitates the fact of disputing in a probable way of any subject among the persons introduced, and the poet and the painter typically represent and provide an image of it" (*Apologia* 278). Speroni thinks of the relationship between a discussion and a written dialogue as a double form of imitation: while a dialectical discussion is but an image of science, so the literary artifact which represents it is a sort of Platonic image of the image. In the following pages, I shall describe both Speroni's views on the status of the knowledge reached through disputation and his notion of imitation.

6.2.1 Dialogue and opinion as the "portrait of science"

While Sigonio and Tasso consider the opinions reached in a dialogical way as similar in many respects to scientific knowledge, in his *Apologia dei dialogi* Speroni connects dialogue more intimately with rhetoric rather than with science. Dialectic and rhetoric, as opposed to science, are considered "sophistical kinds of knowledge (…) not because they deceive us (…) but because of their lack of certainty" (*Apologia* 386).[426] Speroni rephrases Aristotle's statement about the similarities between rhetoric and dialectic as follows:[427] "Dialectic and rhetoric are two arts capable of proving and persuading the true and the false, the yes and the no of everything; and they are not bad arts because of that" (267). In this sense, Speroni mirrors some of the themes cherished by Renaissance Humanists, in particular the antagonism between rhetoric and philosophy. The union of open discussion and a consensus view of truth well depicts a new reality of courtly and polite conversations among amateurs, in contrast with Aristotelian philosophers, still imbued with the empty debates of scholastic disputations and labeled sophistic by humanist thinkers. In a dialogue which was a model for Renaissance authors (*De vero falsoque bono*), Lorenzo Valla writes: "How much more clear, grave and magnificent were the orators in discussing the subject than the obscure, squalid and lifeless philosophers in debating it!" (1431–1441; cit. in Marsch 1980: 66).

While in dialogue variety flourishes, in science all efforts converge towards unique solutions. Moreover, Speroni writes, the main aim of dialogue is to amuse and distract: "Dialogue speaks in vain, while it wanders ('erra') from game to game without getting closer to the truth; but to wander in such a way is neither wicked nor dishonest" (285). Whereas for Speroni dialogue "is an amusing garden" where one can find "variety and novelty" (274), the old Aristotelian philosophers are considered not only to be dogmatic but also excessively severe: "Brandishing their brief and pointed syllogisms, like knives, they open questions swiftly, carve out their whole truth, and offer it as a meal to the intellect, like an angry warrior who, not content with having killed the enemy, eats his heart" (273).[428] Indeed, Speroni identifies science with Aristotelian demonstrative knowledge, and he represents it as the exact counterpart of dialogue: "Such then is in the sciences and the arts the useful Aristotelian road which leads to knowledge (…). The other is the path of dialogues along which we walk to the gardens and the vineyards, rather than to the good contemplative fields" (273–274).

In science, the author speaks his mind and commits himself to a particular view. In dialogue, on the other hand, there need not be such an engagement: "The author of a dialogue, after silencing his own lonely voice, endows others with various names and customs, with new and different reasonings" (274). Accordingly, Speroni prefers "dramatic" dialogues – practiced by both Plato and Lucianus – to "narrative" dialogues; in the former characters speak directly "without being introduced or interrupted by the author" (1740: 275). The same author "seldom wants to give a final verdict, but remains always between the two, so that each speaker can pride himself on being right when he wins, and rejoice in his knowledge" (275).[429] In Speroni's treatise, moreover, all characters – and not only the most cultivated – are entitled to appear in a dialogue. Despite his frequent references to Plato, Cicero's model of dialogue *in utramque partem* better suits Speroni's ideal. As a commentator writes:

> The Ciceronian attitude, then, sees in dialectic not what Socrates, or, rather, his disciple, Plato saw in it: a royal road to the citadel of ideas, of truth, at which he who is faithful to his Godlike reason will infallibly arrive (…). In the last analysis, what is true is what seems true to whomsoever the dialectician aims to convince, in a word whatever is, or has been so constructed dialectically as to appear to be 'probabile'.
> (Armstrong 1976: 41–42)

Dialogue is invariably linked to the domain of opinion, and it is but a "portrait of science" (281). Science belongs to those who know, while dialogue is practiced by the ignorant. Only science, which is "certain and invariable knowledge" (280), is capable of getting a hold on things themselves; opinion and dialogue address the surface of things, and not their essence: "As the painter of all humanly things does not show us but its ultimate surface, with lines and colors (…); so the writer of dialogues does not penetrate in the written things so as to reach its essence; but goes around it like dancing in such a way that he never teaches" (285). However, although dialogue produces only opinion, merely a pale resemblance of truth and knowledge, dialectic and dialogue must not be considered "bad arts" for that reason (267): unlike sophistry, their purpose is light and polite intellectual entertainment, not cheating.

In addition, science, opinion and persuasion do not deal with the same subjects: opinion does not address itself to the "things of nature", as Aristotelian science does, but to civil matters (at least as long as "it is not a game"!, 280); while rhetorical persuasion, treated by Cicero, deals with rhetorical "causes", that is particular cases, as opposed to general questions (281). Perfect demonstration, probable syllogism and persuasion are ordered in a declining continuum, where one is the "image", or "picture", of the other: "For what reason should one not infer that rhetorical persuasion is a painting and imitation of opinion, as opinion is of science (…)?" (281). Here, Speroni adds a new twist to poetic imitation: imitation is in fact a parody, and to imitate means "aping", the way the ape, or the parrot, imitates man (281).

6.2.2 Imitation, illusion and invention

This leads to the second issue, the notion of poetic "imitation". According to Speroni, dialogue is but an "image" – in the negative sense this time – of the probable discussion it is meant to represent. Whereas for Sigonio imitation is supposed to ensure that a dialogue is a faithful image of what it is supposed to imitate, namely a dialectical disputation, for Speroni imitation is designed to put an unbreachable barrier between the literary construct and its real counterpart. In his view, not only does opinion yield a lesser degree of certainty, but, as incarnated in the dialogue, it loses its serious character and becomes a kind of *divertissement*: "Imitation in dialogue is a comic thing and is poetry without verse. It is therefore a game and a delight, and an idle sort of delight" (276). Speroni's use of the word "painting" in this context is significant: as a picture is always literally false with respect to the reality it intends to represent, so the dialogue shares only appearances with the original. "Poetry is not science, but celestial furor", or at least it includes furor: "Dialogue is a poem as the dialogist is furious: his writing is jest, because he paints but does not incarnate the written things" (284–285).[430]

Unexpectedly, given his conceptions of opinion as sharply separated from truth, and of dialogue as a playful game, Speroni beautifully illustrates the usefulness of dialogue in the discovery of truth. He writes that both the participants and the author of a dialogue must be ignorant, admitting that to be a "very strange truth" (283). As far as the participants are concerned, he writes that "their ignorance is useful to the discovery ('invenzion') of truth, in much the same way as the repeated striking of iron to stone generates fire; although both are cold, heavy and dark, they generate fire, which, after finding the right nutriment, increases in power and becomes flame, which in turn flies straight to the sky and heats the world and lightens it" (ibid.). Just as fire which is forcibly kept in a low position always tries to rise, so the man "tied by ignorance against his will, (…) tries to liberate himself from those knots which prevent him from embracing the truth" (ibid.). Since he cannot achieve this task alone, he asks for the help of others using dialogue. "Through the confrontation over some topic, the one uses his reasons to strike the opinions of the other, not unlike the iron to the stone or the stone to the iron. This occurs through dispute, and although the sought truth will not spring out openly and entirely, we shall inevitably witness some of its sparks, because truth by its nature always shines" (283–284). As they increase in number and find the good "bait" and the right "nourishment" the sparks will transform into flames. The "good bait" are the readers of "human understanding and not malignant mind, for truth does not enter into these" – once again a requirement of virtue and good will is considered necessary for searching the truth. The "right nourishment" on the other hand is "study", which "from the delight of reading and the game of words (…) directs the mind to the understanding hidden behind the laughter" (284).

Thus, the delight provided by dialogue only enhances its function, that of discovering the truth. Speroni, in his own dramatic fashion, describes Sigonio's obstetrical function of dialogue. As in Sigonio, dialogue is seen as the "parent" rather than the "child" of philosophy, a way of traveling from the "probability of opinion" to the "necessity of truth" (7r). With one important difference, however: whereas Speroni stresses the philosophical usefulness of the disputation underlying the dialogue, his conception of dialogue as a literary work of art disqualifies it from being a faithful representation of disputation. Thus, it is his theory of poetical imitation which undermines the more basic similarity between Aristotelian disputation and dialogue: the form of aporetic dialogue, with its appearance of neutrality and (in Speroni's case) its function of jest, shields dialogue from its disputational roots.

6.3 Conclusions: dialogue and invention

Sigonio, Tasso, and to a lesser extent Speroni, give a very Aristotelian rendition of what the function of dialogue is. For these authors, the cognitive role of dialogue depends on its connection with disputational dialectic, which is in turn identified with the art of reasoning by means of an exchange through more than one person, and using commonly accepted premises. Moreover, although Sigonio cites neither Alexander of Aphrodisias nor Nifo, he uses the term "probability" in the original Aristotelian sense of 'endoxa'. Both Sigonio and Tasso also describe dialogue as the literary representation of a serious peirastic dialectical disputation: "Inquisitive" dialogues (as opposed to pedagogical and sophistic dialogues) are quintessential dialogues, in that they represent in literary fashion the acquisition of new knowledge and the confirmation of controversial theses through an exchange of questions and answers. Cicero's aporetic dialectic, with its skeptical overtones, does not figure prominently in Sigonio's and Tasso's treatises. Speroni also describes the epistemic advantages of disputational dialectic using a vivid metaphor involving the flame arising out of ideas striking against one another; however, he holds that the seriousness of dialectic is lost in the process of being transcribed into a literary dialogue: imitation turns the knowledge produced by the dialectical disputation underlying the dialogue into an elegant divertissement and a parody of truth.

Sigonio, Tasso and Speroni all attribute an inventive function to dialogue. But whereas Agricola linked invention to the art of finding and ordering arguments in order to prove a thesis, the authors of these treatises on dialogue stress the other aspect of invention, namely the process of acquiring knowledge itself, and contrast dialectical invention with demonstration. In order to be effective, moreover, this inventive process has to be carried out by more than one person, and thus belongs above all to dialectic and dialogue. Sigonio and Tasso offer an interesting further rendition of the crucial distinction between demonstration and dialectic as they are represented in a treatise and a dialogue respectively: whereas dialogical reasoning and dialectic show us a way of traveling towards the truth, a scientific demonstration, which can be carried out by solitary reasoning, is merely a way to communicate a truth already reached. Also, the result of dialogue is opinion rather than science, since the conclusions of a dialogue are most often "unstable and perishable" (Sigonio 38r) rather than firm and forever certain. Thus the result of dialectical reasoning is not intrinsically inferior to science, but only more modestly tentative and revisable.

By ascribing an inventive function to the dialectical exchange embedded in a dialogue, these authors can be considered as applying to the analysis of dialogue what Aristotle writes in the first book of the *Topics* about dialectic, namely that "being of the nature of an investigation lies along the path to the principles of all disciplines". However, dialectic does not furnish direct access to the ultimate principles of all knowledge. Rather, it indirectly paves the way for the acquisition and establishment of new knowledge. According to the authors on the dialogue form, this is so for several reasons. Firstly, despite the difference between science and opinion, dialogue turns out to be a primary concept for explaining the origins of both. Indeed, in Platonic fashion, Sigonio defines science as a dialogue with oneself, as opposed to an open and public debate where questions and answers are systematically exchanged (4v). Both derive from man's habit of reasoning ('ratiocinatio'). The chief advantage of the open or explicit examination of things is its guarantee that nothing will be left unexamined. As Sigonio stated, in an "open" as opposed to "tacit" way of examining things, "things can be managed and searched through better and in a more satisfactory way" (4v). In the 15th century, in a dialogue devoted to the usefulness of disputation, Leonardo Bruni had already written: "For by the Gods, what is there that is more helpful for learning about and discussing subtle matters than disputation, where a subject is put in our midst so that many eyes can inspect it in such a way that nothing can be glossed over, nothing be hidden, nothing can escape the regard of all present?" (*Dialogus* 46–48; cited in Gilbert 1971: 207).

The second reason why dialectic may lead to new knowledge is that dialogical reasoning plays an important negative testing function by demonstrating which of the adversary's views are false. "Things can be proved by their opposites" writes Quintilian in his *Institutiones oratoriae* (XII 1.34–36): if we can inspect falsehoods and injustices, we will be better able to see truth and virtue "just as one who knows what things are harmful will better apply a remedy" (ibid.). By undermining an adversary's theory, we can at least provisionally enhance our own. As Snyder writes: "The drama of the dialogical discovery of truth offers an exemplum for the reader, demonstrating how to defend or shield oneself successfully – like the winner in the dialogical agon – against the persuasive but deceptive rhetoric of those opposed to the truth" (1989: 208).[431] Myers highlights a paradoxical consequence of refutation: the fact that a dialogue allows a writer to exhibit the refutation of the views opposed to his own is what makes the dialogue a more "closed" form of writing than the treatise, despite the appearance to the contrary: "There is a way in which dialogues stifle rather than promote the dialogical. They mark out and complete the imaginable space of discussion. They lay out the possible positions and then take control of them all" (1992: 238).

Thirdly, a dialogue presupposes an attitude of mind which in itself is conducive to new knowledge. Being open-minded – if not downright ignorant – rather than dogmatic is a prerequisite for participating in a dialogue. Open-mindedness here does not mean indifference with respect to the position to be endorsed, but a readiness to change views, should one's position be undermined by the opponent. The Italian Humanist Lorenzo Valla writes:

> Above all I wish to ask that we not proceed with that troublesome obstinacy of the Stoics. They think it unlawful to abandon a belief once they have adopted it, and never surrender, preferring to be slaughtered rather than conquered in a debate, like raging beasts and tigers that cannot be taken alive. As for me, if someone makes a better point than I do, I yield, and I am grateful besides, for the business of forensic is not for one advocate to defeat another in a debate, but to reveal either the truth or justice by their struggle.
>
> (*De vero falsoque bono*, 1431–1441; cit. in Marsch 1980: 66)

One of the main suggestions offered by Renaissance treatises on the dialogue form is that by proceeding by successive steps, the reasoning embodied in a dialogue speeds the journey along the "road to truth" of which the dialogue offers a literary representation. Through trial and error, refutation, obstetrics and testing, this process allows one to approach – asymptotically, so to speak – a provisional truth. One should not forget, however, that a dialogue not only represents a dialectical disputation, but is also a literary artifact in its own right. Thus, the impression of tentativeness that the reader gets from following a dialogue's tortuous path is obviously the entire work of the dialogue's author, who has skillfully applied the rules of imitation. In this sense a dialogue is a disguised form of a treatise, insofar as its conclusion is already known to the author. Thus, the closing "raises the central contradiction of the form: they are finished works of writing imitating the provisional, tentative, moment-to-moment workings out of speech" (Myers 1992: 238).

CHAPTER 7

Rhetoric, dialectic and epistemology in contemporary argumentation theory

During the long interlude which started with the Scientific Revolution, dialectic virtually disappeared as a full-fledged discipline and was replaced by the search for a reliable scientific method and increasingly formalized logical systems. The art of debate did not give rise to any theoretical development, and references to Aristotle's *Topics* quickly vanished from the intellectual scene. As to the art of persuasion, it was treated under the heading of rhetoric, which was devoted to the art of style and figures of speech.[432] More recently, however, Aristotle's dialectic, in close interaction with rhetoric, has inspired some important developments within the fields of argumentation theory and epistemology. As a conclusion to this study of the tradition of Aristotle's dialectic, it is interesting, therefore, to consider these developments not so much in their own right – a task which goes beyond the scope of this book – but in their relationship to the Aristotelian tradition.

In a groundbreaking study, Stephen Toulmin (1958) stressed the importance of applied, as opposed to formal, logic in epistemology. This is the logic which concerns the sorts of arguments we can use in order to support claims to knowledge in different fields. Toulmin also introduces the notion of "inference warrant": the strength of an argument, be it deductive or inductive, is derived from a general principle that validates the link between the premises and the conclusion. The following argument, for example: "James has blue eyes; therefore he does not have brown eyes" is warranted by the truth of the principle stating that: "Eyes cannot be of two colors". The universal premise of a syllogism of the form: "All the dogs are mammal; Fido is a dog; therefore Fido is a mammal" is thus an inference warrant like many others. This move allows Toulmin to stress the fundamental continuity between necessary and probable forms of "warrants" for inferences, and to soften the distinction between demonstration and valid deductive inferences on the one hand, and other forms of reasoning on the other.[433] Curiously, Toulmin considers Aristotle to be the champion of formal logic and demonstration rather than of applied logic, and does not refer to the tradition of dialectic. Also, he qualifies the project he has carried out as mostly negative: a demonstration of the baselessness of certain traditional distinctions – such as that between applied and formal logic. He modestly claims to be opening up not so much a new field of study, but a more fruitful approach to epistemology and philosophy of science. Toulmin's challenge has been judiciously taken up by some contemporary scholars working in the field of argumentation theory and epistemology. Unlike Toulmin, they claim to be carrying Aristotle's dialectical project forward, and they have focused either on the critical use of argumentation (dialectic), or on the conditions for creating rational conviction by argument (rhetoric). These approaches can be arranged along a continuous spectrum according to two criteria: the relative importance they give to various forms of dialogue, and the aim of dialectical exchanges. Along the first axis – the importance of dialogue – positions vary from stressing the importance of unilateral discourse to giving pride of place to rule-bound debate among two chosen interlocutors, and include various proposals connecting dialectic to several forms of dialogue and informal conversation among two or more unequally qualified interlocutors. Along the second axis – the purpose of a dialectical exchange – positions vary from holding that dialectic serves to test claims to knowledge, highlighting the importance of rationally persuading audiences, or again emphasizing its crucial role in the rational resolution of conflicts of opinion. As should be expected, given our analysis in the course of the book, an understanding of dialectic as aimed at testing general claims to knowledge rather than convincing particular audiences implies giving pride of place to the rule-bound debate between two interlocutors, rather than to discourse and conversation more generally understood. At the opposite pole, identifying the purpose of dialectic with convincing a given audience, in rhetorical fashion, reduces the importance of debate.

The work of Chaim Perelman in the 1960s and 70s initiated an important movement of thought which aimed at saving rhetoric from the oblivion and relative intellectual disgrace, and reinstating it as a useful and irreplaceable discipline. In *The New Rhetoric. A treatise on argumentation* (1969) he and Olbrechts-Tyteca carried out a vast examination of the nature, use and conditions of effectiveness of a large number of informal arguments, independently of their deductive validity or inductive soundness. The idea behind the New Rhetoric project is that argument forms have to be evaluated according to context and that inductive – even fallacious – forms of reasoning are far more important and legitimate in persuasive discourse than has been acknowledged: what he calls dialectic reasoning "aims at persuading and convincing. It does not consist in deductive and constraining inferences, but in arguments which are more or less strong, more or less convincing, and which are never formally expressed" (1997: 16). Perelman claims that these different forms of argumentation are not only useful in persuasion but also valuable insofar as they replace force as means of inducing belief. Moreover, they have the power to move the recipient of an argument to take the right action, rather than simply convincing him that such action is right. Indeed, what Perelman described as a rhetorical approach to argumentation is especially relevant when value choices are at stake: "We observe that in the domains where we have to establish what is preferable, acceptable, reasonable, we reason neither through formally valid deductions, nor through inductions going from the particular to the general; rather we use all sorts of forms of reasoning, which aim at gaining the adherence of minds to the theses which we submit to their assent" (1997: 9–10).

Despite this connection with action, Perelman claims that the domain of argumentation concerns all fields of knowledge, be it theoretical or practical. Perelman characterizes rhetoric and dialectic as thoroughly devoted to what commentators called "invention": the detailed study and the critical evaluation of the most varied argument forms serves the purpose of finding out the most appropriate means of persuasion for the task – and the audience – at hand. Although he claims to take his inspiration from Aristotle's dialectic, he calls his approach the "New Rhetoric" and distinguishes it from demonstration in a way that is reminiscent more of Aristotelian rhetoric than of Aristotelian dialectic. Apart from its role in practical reasoning and action, Perelman's approach to argumentation shares with rhetoric the idea that an argumentative language is not necessarily devoid of any ornamentation and emotional appeal (though it must not be reduced to them). Above all, it gives a prominent role to context and audience in order to evaluate the relevance and strength of an argument. Audience is a central notion in Perelman's project:[434] since the purpose of argument is to induce belief in another, the recipient plays a fundamental role in assessing its effectiveness. Thus, each argumentative field has its own particular model audience, the universal audience being constituted by "the whole of humanity, or at least by those of its members which are competent and reasonable" (ibid.: 28); in this respect, the universal audience is the model audience for philosophical arguments which address themselves exclusively to the faculty of reason as such (ibid.: 31). Perelman views the answerer of a dialectical debate as a special – but restricted and thus less interesting – kind of audience. In the same vein, he considers that demonstration is an argument which we address to ourselves as an audience. Since we can more easily mislead ourselves than we can mislead our audience, demonstration is paradoxically an inferior mode of reasoning (ibid.: 31). Thus, dialectical arguments are only a special (and less interesting case) of the wider class of rhetorical arguments.

To conclude, Perelman's avowedly Aristotelian project is dialectical only in the extended and generic sense of emphasizing invention, stressing the importance of argumentation, and considering the positions of others in building arguments. However, the New Rhetoric differs markedly from Aristotle's position in the *Topics* in two respects. In the first place, as we have already seen, Aristotle does not consider dialectical arguments as means of persuasion but as means of testing – and indirectly establishing – claims to knowledge. The interlocutor in Aristotle's dialectical reasoning cannot be assimilated to Perelman's audience, in any one of its multiple forms – the "universal" audience included: Aristotle's answerer is not the primary target of the questioner's arguments, but rather its constructive and, as it were, involuntary partner. Secondly, Perelman views 'endoxa' as instruments for appealing to the target audience and creating as wide a consensus as possible, rather than as necessary instruments for gaining the opponent's assent, and thereby putting a rational end to criticisms. Thus, in his approach, the audience's 'endoxa' are not the questioner's instrument for attaining the answerer's assent; they are the primary object of the process of persuasion, insofar as they express those beliefs which need to be modified by argumentation. As such, it is their content and not their function which is the focus of attention. Accordingly, Perelman gives no special role to debate as a structured exchange of views, which he considers to be only a special kind of discourse. It is thus not surprising that Perelman – like so many others – interprets Aristotle's 'endoxa' as expressing "generally accepted opinions" (1997: 16), which in Aristotle's *Topics* are only one of the possible sources of 'endoxa', and not even the most representative at that. Also, and quite revealingly, he assimilates Aristotle's 'endoxon' to Arcesilaus' 'eulogon', namely what is "reasonable" (ibid.); by stressing what is "reasonable", Perelman establishes an indirect link to Cicero's mildly skeptical reading of Aristotle's *Topics*. Accordingly, the new rhetoric is destined to "all those who believe in the existence of reasonable choices, preceded by a discussion and deliberation process where the different solutions are compared to one another" (ibid.: 22). In this particular respect, Perelman's rhetorical approach can thus be compared to Agricola's view of dialectic, which encompassed the argumentative and emotional aspects of rhetoric to the exclusion of style and openly sophistical arguments.

More recently, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (henceforth E&G) have developed a dialectical model of argumentation which is closer to Aristotle's approach in the *Topics* and takes the form of a "critical discussion". Argumentation in this sense does not aim at persuading – that is, at creating conviction in a given audience about a particular claim – but at convincing an audience of the "acceptability" of a given standpoint. It involves a process of to-and-fro communication between several parties:[435] "A critical discussion can be described as an exchange of views in which the parties involved in a difference of opinion systematically try to determine whether the standpoint or standpoints at issue are defensible in light of critical doubt or objections (…) . It aims at resolving a difference of opinion" (2004: 52).

According to E&G, dialectical approach involves a "critical" as opposed to a "geometrical" notion of what is reasonable, insofar as argumentation determines only which claims may be considered as "acceptable", not those which must normatively be accepted. On the other hand, critical reasonableness cannot be confused with an anthropological notion of what is reasonable, because the acceptability of a claim does not depend solely on the audience's "frame of reference" and the purpose of discourse cannot be reduced to the ability to create conviction (ibid.: 14–16). In order to evaluate the acceptability of claims in a critical sense, rules of discussion are crucial. However, such rules are not universally valid, but only pragmatically so: they must be adapted to solve the problem at hand, and they must be accepted by all parties involved and secure "problem validity" and "intersubjective validity" respectively. Problem-validity concerns the fact that the content of the propositions exchanged must be relevant for resolving the critical discussion, and inter-subjective validity concerns the rules of the discussion which have commonly been agreed upon: "An argumentation may be regarded as acceptable in the following manner: the argumentation is an effective means of resolving a difference of opinion in accordance with the discussion rules acceptable to the parties involved" (ibid.: 16). The ten rules of ideal discussion which characterize the E&G's approach are meta-rules which help define what the parties can reasonably consider as acceptable rules of discussion in any given context. Not surprisingly, the authors define their own approach as "pragma-dialectical".[436] E&G's theory of dialectic differs from Perelman's insofar as it stresses the "critical" dimension of discourse and the importance of dialogical exchanges: "The theoretical model of a critical discussion is dialectical because it is premised on two parties who try to resolve a difference of opinion by means of a methodical exchange of discussion moves" (2004: 22). Thus it does not aim at persuading but at creating reasonable conviction: "While persuasion implies the immediate effect that the audience reacts to the argumentation in the desired way, conviction can only be reached after some further reflection on the part of the person who is to become convinced" (ibid.: 30).

Even though E&G's concept of dialectic meets the rationale of Aristotle's distinction between rhetoric and dialectic, their construal of dialectic is not entirely Aristotelian for two related reasons. On the one hand, they consider that dialectic presupposes a certain epistemic skepticism with respect to the possibility of establishing the acceptability of certain claims in an absolute way. They thus consider themselves as genuinely Aristotelian when they claim that their own critical approach is dialectical, because "a systematic interaction takes place between moves for and against a particular thesis" (ibid.: 45). As we have seen, for Aristotle this is but one possibility of dialectic: indeed one *can* offer arguments on both sides of an issue, but this is not what one does in a genuine dialectical disputation – an asymmetric debate aimed at establishing or refuting a specific claim. Moreover, E&G claim that the purpose of a dialectical exchange is to solve a difference of opinion, albeit indirectly; the two contenders in a dialectical disputation reach an agreement on the relative acceptability of the different claims at hand: "By following a dialectical procedure, the protagonist of a standpoint and the antagonist attempt to achieve clarity as to whether the protagonist's standpoint can be defended in light of the antagonist's critical reaction" (ibid.: 58). This description of the purpose of dialectic is both more ambitious than Aristotle's and less so. It is pragmatically more ambitious inasmuch as dialectical exchanges are viewed as bringing about a certain amount of pacification which, in rhetorical fashion, leads to rounding off the sharp edges of disputes, although it falls short of establishing consensus. Thus, according to E&G the purpose of dialectic is not to win over the opponent's assent by applying the intellectual coercion produced by the right set of arguments: finding an agreement on the relative acceptability of various claims to knowledge is, in principle at least, a much more cooperative enterprise than coercing one's partner in a disputation into assenting to claims which contradict his own commitments. However, for all its pragmatic power, their approach is epistemically less ambitious than Aristotle's. As we have seen, Aristotelian dialectic is a far cry from skepticism: a dialectical exchange serves the purpose not of reaching reasonable agreement *faute de mieux*, but of seriously testing claims to truth, and eventually approaching it.

One last contemporary approach which explicitly claims to get its inspiration from the tradition of Aristotelian dialectic is Douglas Walton's "new dialectic". His approach is pragmatic not in the technical sense adopted by E&G, but in a more generic sense of considering informal logic and argumentation theory as applied, practical disciplines, which, unlike formal logic, stress the "uses of arguments in everyday conversational exchanges": "Whether an argument is practically good or not depends on how the argument has been used in a particular case to support the goals of dialogue that are appropriate in that case" (1998: 4 and 9). Like Toulmin, Walton stresses that in order to evaluate arguments, we need to consider their uses rather than their forms, although he departs radically from Toulmin in explicitly attributing such concerns to Aristotle. On the other hand, he considers – quite rightly so – that Aristotle, at least in the *Topics,* affirms the necessary connection between argumentation and dialogue, although he gives a rather generic definition of dialogue as "a goal-directed conventional framework in which two speech partners reason together in an orderly way, according to the rules of politeness or normal expectations of cooperative argumentation for the type of exchange they are engaged in" (1998: 3). According to Walton, dialogues, which can be more or less formally organized, have different purposes and such purposes determine the evaluation of the arguments which are put forward: such evaluation is "dialectical" in the sense that it depends on the manner in which an argument is conducive to achieving the purpose of the particular form of dialogue in which it is embedded. It is thus important to identify the purpose of a given dialogue in order to evaluate dialectical arguments.[437] Indeed, Walton identifies six kinds of dialogue, each corresponding to a specific purpose: persuasion dialogues (critical discussions), information-seeking dialogues (interviewing), negotiation dialogues (reaching a practical compromise), inquiry dialogues (scientific inquiry, public inquiries), eristic dialogues (quarrel, good for cathartic purposes), deliberation dialogues (deciding what to do, ethics). Thus, unlike Aristotle, Walton takes to be "dialectical" not those arguments which have a particular structure – i.e. consisting of an exchange of questions and answers and having 'endoxic' premises – but those arguments which figure in a dialogue and thus cannot be evaluated independently of it. As a consequence, he gives dialectical arguments a functional rather than a substantive definition.

The dialogues which are most similar in purpose to Aristotle's dialectical arguments are Walton's "persuasive dialogues". They are divided into two categories: "rigorous persuasion dialogues", which Walton considers to be akin to E&G's "critical discussions", and "permissive persuasion dialogues", which are more similar to everyday conversations. Unlike the latter, the former are more rigorously structured, asymmetrical – only one of two opposite theses is defended in the course of the dialogue – and have a definite positive aim that Walton appropriates from E&G, namely that of "resolving a conflict of opinion". As for "permissive persuasion dialogues", they have a maieutical function: bringing to light commitments which were implicit in each contender's position; their function is thus critical but inherently inconclusive. Arguments in persuasion dialogues have a probative function, where to prove means "to support (a conclusion) by premises which are commitments of the other party (…) [and] where the conclusion has some bearing on the issue of the persuasion dialogue" (ibid.: 42). Thus, "commitment" is a central concept in Walton's analysis of this kind of dialogue; he takes over from Hamblin the notion of "commitment store" (Hamblin: 1970), which he defines as a "store of statements representing the totality of commitments of an arguer during the sequence of a dialogue" (ibid.: 40).[438] Commitments are assertions "to which an arguer is positively committed and has a burden of proof to argue for or support, if requested to do so by the other party" (ibid.: 54). In this respect, commitments are different from concessions, i.e. propositions accepted just "for the sake of argument". Unlike concessions, commitments are more than contingently important in the discussion and cannot be abandoned without compromising the whole argument.

Walton explicitly links commitment to the dialectical notions of presumption and burden of proof: "If a proposition is generally accepted at a particular time, then there would be a presumption in favor of it so that anyone who challenges or critically questions it will have to meet this presumption with appropriately strong arguments that will be acceptable to doubters" (ibid.: 39). That is, a challenger of a presumption has the burden of proof. According to Walton, arguments in a persuasion dialogue are of a presumptive sort: "These arguments don't have to be conclusive to be satisfactory, but they are required to be tentatively or temporarily accepted by the other party, unless that party can find a sufficient reason to reject them or good grounds for criticizing them" (ibid.: 41). Thus "resolving a difference of opinion" – the purpose of persuasion dialogues – involves stopping the process of criticism once a presumption cannot be challenged by the adversary who has the burden of proof. The presumptive conclusion is then accepted as the agreed-upon opinion; a persuasion dialogue appears as an instrument of rational persuasion of an adversary which is consistent with the fact that Walton sees dialectic and rhetoric as closely related. As he states in a recent work, "it needs to be seen that rhetoric is a necessary part of dialectic and that dialectic can also be an extremely useful part of rhetoric": rhetoric is based on argumentation structures, and dialectic is a "powerful new form of applied logic that can be applied to the interpretation and analysis of argumentation in natural language discourse" (2007: 45). Whereas rhetoric deals with any form of effective persuasion, dialectic deals only with "rational persuasion". Thus, even though, unlike Perelman, Walton closely associates dialectic with dialogue, his approach is vulnerable to the same charge of not adopting sufficiently stringent epistemic standards (Siegel and Biro 2008).

In the same work, Walton tries to respond to the charge of dissociating dialogue from the truth as a worthy epistemic goal and analyzes the rationality of the persuasion brought about by dialogue along two dimensions: *standard of evidence* and *depth*. The process of critical discussion gradually shifts the weight of evidence to one side, and the quality of the discussion (the amount and nature of the objections and their responses) shows which of the two positions is more "truthlikely". By the same token, Walton equates the purpose of persuasion dialogues – gaining a "presumption" of truth – with that of finding the proposition which is better supported by evidence: the interlocutor who has gained the presumption of truth for his hypothesis would hold a position which is more truthlikely than that held by his opponent. However, whereas presumption is a dialectical notion related to burden of proof,[439] "truthlikeness" supposes a positive concept of truth, and above all the possibility of measuring the distance between the truth and the position having acquired a presumption of truth, and dialectic, as he understands it, cannot warrant such a measure. Walton might at most maintain – but does not do so – that dialectic can evaluate the balance of truth of two opposing claims, a stance which is more consonant with what he defines as his mildly skeptical epistemic position (2007: 129). In contrast, the notion of "depth" of the discussion reached in a persuasion dialogue is far more promising for understanding the epistemic value of dialectic. According to Walton, persuasion dialogues may also have a maieutical function and thus increase the "depth" of dialogue: "There are two benefits to such a discussion. One is the refinement of one's own view, making it not only more sophisticated, but based on better reasons supporting it. The other is the increased capability to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view" (Walton 2007: 100).[440]

James Freeman has built a sturdier bridge between argumentation theory and epistemology. He has offered a detailed and thorough epistemological analysis of dialectical reasoning, one that stresses its importance for testing claims to knowledge, rather than achieving agreement on controversial issues. Although he does not refer to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics*, he defines dialectic in terms which are quite compatible with the general thrust of Aristotle's position: "By a situation being dialectical, then, we mean that it involves some opposition among its participants over some claim, that it involves interactive questioning for critically testing this claim, and that this process proceeds in a regimented rule-governed manner. The rules define the roles of participants and standards of the critical process" (1991: 20). Both Walton and Freeman strongly link dialectic and dialogue. Walton, however, has a looser interpretation of what a dialectical exchange is. He holds that most dialogues are symmetric and that the art of dialectic concerns very different sorts of dialogues; as we have seen, only Walton's "rigorous persuasion dialogues" – rule-bound and asymmetric in character – can be compared to Aristotelian disputations. Dialectic is thus understood in the generic sense of any situation in which a symmetric exchange of views is involved, and where such an exchange is necessary in order to achieve a particular purpose, which can be as varied as those involved in conducting an interview or an expert evaluation. Freeman, on the contrary, considers tight asymmetric dialogues as the only dialogues worthy of a dialectical analysis.

Moreover, Freeman makes clear that dialectical arguments involve "accepting" rather than "believing" premises. He adopts Jonathan Cohen's distinction between "accepting" and "believing": "To believe a proposition that *p* is to be disposed to feel that *p* is true and that *non-p* is false, whether or not one is prepared to take that p as a premise for further belief or action. To accept that *p* is to take that *p* as a premise 'for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one feels it to be true that *p*'" (Cohen 1992: 4; cit. in Freeman 2005: 3). Like Aristotelian 'endoxa', accepted propositions differ from true or even probable beliefs. Unlike a probable belief, an accepted proposition does not imply an epistemic attitude or the inner feeling that the assertion is true, but rather consists in a kind of commitment to act on it which, in the dialectical context, consists in taking on the burden of proving and defending a given assertion. Thus the commitment that one has *vis-à-vis* an accepted proposition is not epistemic but practical. In this respect, Freeman's analysis of the premises of dialectical argument is similar to Walton's commitments which are also "accepted premises".

However, like E&G, Freeman makes the requirements which apply to the premises used in a discussion more normative than Walton does, by stressing the importance of "acceptable" rather that simply contingently "accepted" premises. Freeman does not define normative acceptability in terms of the certainty, truth or probability of a belief, nor does he confuse it with its actual acceptance or its being based upon persuasive argument. Rather, as Freeman writes, citing Nicolas Rescher (1977) "Presumption is the hallmark of acceptability" (ibid.: 20). In order to describe what presumption is, Freeman also goes back to Richard Whately: "A 'presumption' in favour of any supposition, means, not (…) a preponderance of probability in its favour, but, such a *preoccupation* of the ground, as implies that it must stand good till some sufficient reason is adduced against it ; in short, that the *burden of proof* lies on the side of him who would dispute it" (1857; cit. in Freeman 2005: 23). Like Walton's notion of commitment store, Freeman's notion of acceptable premises is dialectical: "Acceptance then, is not irrevocable commitment. We are not confronted with counterevidence now, else we could not accept the statement. But we may admit the possibility of such evidence" (ibid.: 4).

However, although both Walton and Freeman consider presumption a dialectical notion – insofar as it signifies that one's opponent in the debate has the burden of proof – there are, according to Freeman, general objective criteria that determine a proposition's "acceptability" over and above its actual acceptance as a standing presumption. Also, unlike E&G, he defines acceptability independently of the dialogical context: a premise is acceptable if "one is epistemically justified in accepting the statement" (2005: 73).[441] Thus acceptable presumptive conditions for belief have to satisfy certain objective conditions which can be grouped into three classes: (1) interpersonal belief-generating mechanisms (common knowledge, trust, expert opinion); (2) personal belief-generating mechanisms (senses, memory and reason, intuition of the truth of certain statements); (3) internal plausibility (simplicity, the 'normal'). In general, "we shall be arguing (…) that principles of presumption connect beliefs with the sources that generate those beliefs, as a prime factor in determining whether there is a presumption in favor of a belief" (2005: 42). Presumption for beliefs holds if there is a presumption of warrant for the belief-generating mechanisms.[442] Freeman's notion of presumption is a far more objective notion than Walton's. At the same time, it does not imply any degree of approximation to the truth. Using Rescher's terminology, we can say that acceptable premises are plausible rather than probable premises: the plausibility of a hypothesis is not to be confused with its probability, which expresses the degree to which a hypothesis approximates the truth; rather, "the core of the present conception of plausibility is the notion of the extent of our cognitive inclination towards a proposition in the light of the credentials represented by the bases of its credibility" (Rescher 1977: 38).

By linking their respective notions of commitment and acceptable premises to the dialectical notion of presumption, both Walton and Freeman seem to capture the nature and purpose of Aristotelian 'endoxa' understood as "reputable opinions": the premises of a dialectical argument are not required to be true or even probable, but have to be accepted by a number of qualified people if they are to serve the purpose of obliging an adversary either to admit the conclusion of an argument or to refute one of its premises, and in so doing transfer the burden of proof back to the questioner. However, unlike both Walton and E&G, Freeman introduces normative constraints for the acceptability of dialectical premises which are more sophisticated and detailed than Aristotle's analysis of 'endoxa' as "reputable opinions". In Freeman's analysis, premises are acceptable (and not just accepted) insofar as they depend on a variety of reliable causal mechanisms. Thus Freeman's acceptable opinions are intrinsically more plausible and more independently warranted than Aristotle's "reputable opinions". In order to consider Aristotle's 'endoxa' as generally and objectively "acceptable opinions" rather than simply opinions actually accepted by a given authoritative group of people, we have to suppose further that those qualified groups of people – be they experts or a majority of people – are reasonable agents: insofar as they serve as warrants, the opinions they accept can be considered to be objectively acceptable. I believe that this was Aristotle's assumption, given the important role that he attributes to dialectic "for the philosophical sciences". But, if this is true, we have to admit that Aristotle's analysis of 'endoxa' was quite rudimentary, compared to Freeman's "acceptable premises".

As far as the aim of dialectic is concerned, we must take note that for both Walton and E&G "critical discussions" have an essentially practical rather than epistemic goal. They consist in "resolving a difference of opinion" and minimizing disagreement by determining to what extent each of the theses at issue is "defensible in the light of critical doubt or objections" (E&G 2004: 52) rather than testing knowledge claims, proving them to others in a forceful way or proceeding on the way to truth. Freeman, for his part, seems to adopt a more arduous and ambitious approach to dialectic. Unlike Walton, he links the dialectical notion of presumption and burden of proof to the normative acceptability of claims, rather than to their actual acceptance. Thus, he potentially enhances the epistemic value of the conclusions reached through dialectical arguments. Even more clearly than E&G, Freeman differentiates the dialectical from the rhetorical approach. He believes that the purpose of dialectic is not primarily to persuade an audience, in the sense of bringing about adherence to the conclusion reached through dialectical arguments: persuasion and agreement are but contingent by-products of successful dialectical arguments. Indeed, he agrees with Rescher, whose book on dialectic has inspired his own approach: the purpose of a dialectical argument is to shift the burden of proof and acquire a “presumption of truth” for a given hypothesis which at that point becomes “a plausible pretender to truth” due to the weight of the evidence.[443]

CONCLUSION

The epistemological value of Aristotelian dialectic

As we have seen, in the Renaissance Aristotle's text inspired several important developments, which share some basic presuppositions although they cannot be easily integrated into one entirely coherent and all-encompassing picture. Authors writing in the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* inherited the latter's commitment to making dialectic into a specific and important domain of study, distinct from both rhetoric and scientific demonstration. Insofar as it differs from science, this art can aptly deal with matters, both theoretical and practical, which, though still in doubt and in need of justification, are nonetheless liable to receive a definite answer. Thus, dialectic can take into account the importance of the argumentative context without undermining objectivity and rationality. It does so by focusing on the starting point of the reasoning, 'endoxic' premises, which can be objectively defined as "reputable" opinions, rather than on the particular opinions of the audience which one wants to convince. Unlike rhetoric, therefore, the purpose of dialectic cannot simply be identified with persuasion, but rather implies the process of testing those opinions which are good candidates for knowledge and accepting conclusions which are at least provisionally justified. Dialectic is also intimately tied to "invention", a function of discourse which does not mean intuitive discovery but a reasoned and gradual stepwise process for attaining relatively justified opinions and/or identifying those arguments which are able to prove an opinion. Moreover, dialectic achieves its different aims of testing and discovery by furthering a critical attitude and openness of mind, which are clearly distinguished from a skeptical attitude; it also forges a habit of reasoning well and evaluating arguments effectively, as well as a capacity for recognizing the truth.

However, although they rely on the same intellectual framework, Renaissance developments of Aristotelian dialectic encompass two different tendencies. The first defines dialectic as the art of debate between two interlocutors and attributes a prominent role to reputable opinions, i.e. beliefs warranted by the qualification of the people who hold them. This approach identifies invention either with the discovery of the truth itself, or with the elaboration of contingently justified albeit revisable beliefs. Both Nifo and Sigonio adopt this approach, although they do not give dialectic exactly the same role in either invention or justification. Whereas

Nifo conceives of invention as the ability developed through the practice of dialectic to see the truth when faced with it, Sigonio stresses the indirect role of the dialectical reasoning embedded in a dialogue to arrive at the truth through a gradual process of refutation and testing. Moreover, both Nifo and Sigonio maintain that dialectic can prove a controversial thesis to those who deny it, by deriving it from a set of reputable opinions which a suitable and informed interlocutor is bound to accept. This approach sets dialectic closer to scientific demonstration than to rhetoric, insofar as it stresses the process of obtaining a justified opinion rather the fact of gaining the actual conviction of a particular audience. Understood in this sense, as already mentioned, dialectic might well be that "early Apodeictic, unhampered by bonds of necessity and universality" whose existence has been hypothesized by Barnes (1981: 58). This justification depends on the necessary link between acceptable premises and the conclusion of a dialectical argument, although it is limited by the presumptive nature of the premises which is transferred to the conclusion.[444] However, as Rescher as pointed out, "the logical structure of this justificatory process (…) points towards a cyclic process of revalidation and cognitive upgrading in the course of which presumptive theses used as inputs for the inquiry procedure come to acquire by gradual stages an enhanced epistemic status" (1977: 56–57).

The second approach, chosen mainly by Agricola, does not espouse the characterization of dialectic as the art of debate, but identifies it with the art of convincing an audience by argumentative means. He defines dialectical invention as the art of finding the arguments likely to prove a thesis, namely to convince a particular audience of its well-foundedness, rather than as the art of discovering the truth itself. In this sense, dialectic is a species of rational rhetoric, focusing on the persuasion of a specific audience by argumentative means, but ruling out sophistical tricks and pure emotional appeals. Such a view is certainly in strong continuity with Aristotle's own understanding of the aim and nature of the art of rhetoric, as well as with Cicero's and Boethius' interpretations of Aristotle's *Topics*. However, it is far less in tune Aristotle's own definition of dialectic in the *Topics*. More ecumenically, Aristotelian commentators from Albert the Great in the 12th century to Nifo in the 16th century stress that the dialectical exercise can be an indirect aid to the search for the truth: among other advantages, it reinforces one's position when all relevant objections have been answered to, and builds a habit – an Aristotelian "acquired disposition" – which enables us to recognize the truth when we are faced with it.

We have encountered the same tensions in the various schools of contemporary argumentation theory.[445] Even though they can all legitimately be considered as belonging to the tradition of Aristotle's dialectic, they do so in a different way. Indeed, they all refer to Aristotle's *Topics*, as one of their major ancient sources of inspiration and, above all, they actually draw and expand on particular aspects of dialectic made explicit and developed in the Renaissance. Whereas Perelman actualizes Agricola's rhetorical bent on dialectic, Walton and above all E&G revive the Aristotelian emphasis on dialogical rule-bound exchanges as a special and irreplaceable tool for carrying out critical discussions, among other goals. As for the heuristic value of dialectic, Walton's notion of the "depth of dialogue", which he develops in a recent work (2007), is a very promising alternative to "truthlikeness" as an epistemically worthy objective of the dialectical exercise, and is reminiscent of Renaissance discussions of invention. Walton's rehabilitation of Hamblin's notion of commitment, and his analysis of "persuasion dialogues" in terms of alternatively shifting presumption and burden of proof between the two contenders, give the Aristotelian definition of dialectical argument a more immediate and natural understanding. E&G's analysis of the "acceptability" of premises in terms of both the rules of debate and the dialogical context is a more articulated notion than Aristotle's sketchy notion of "reputable premises". However, in all these authors the epistemological analysis of the purpose of dialectic is either lacking (what is the status of dialectical conclusions?) or quite unAristotelian: according to Aristotle and his past commentators, "peirastic" – the quintessential – dialectic does not aim at "resolving a conflict of opinions", but rather at testing claims to knowledge and in certain cases proving controversial claims to someone who denies them.

In contrast, by focusing on the objective acceptability of premises, Freeman accounts for the epistemic value of dialectical exchanges: its conclusions are not only contextually justified but justified *tout court*, albeit provisionally so. In fact, for Aristotle, the conclusion of a dialectical reasoning is not 'scientia', or irrefutable and firm knowledge of the natural world, but it is not limited to reaching an "acceptable opinion" – an opinion for which there is a presumption of truth – either. Although according to Aristotle, the conclusion of a dialectical argument is the result of a quasi-agonistic activity and of the ability of the arguer to win the debate, it has to be reached in a fair way, namely by respecting a certain number of rules. These ensure that the assent is given to premises only when all objections have been answered to, and that each step in the reasoning is linked to the next by a certain necessity. The result of this reasoned victory, therefore, is an opinion which is well corroborated insofar as it has passed serious testing, and it is at least relatively justified insofar as it involves a certain degree of necessity. However, since the premises used in a dialectical reasoning are not self-evident, but are only temporarily evident to the opponent given the particular state of the intellectual environment, knowledge reached by dialectical reasoning is provisional knowledge, namely knowledge which is open to revision: in Aristotelian terms, it is not science ('epistēmē'), but opinion ('doxa') of a particularly strong kind. In addition, the conclusion of a dialectical argument is strengthened by the fact that it includes the refutation of all the major objections which can be brought against it. Aristotle himself hinted at one further function of dialectical arguments, that of making the subject understandable to a wider population which could not necessarily understand the stricter demonstration (Rhet. 1355a2–b18). Thus, a dialectical argument – at least one of the disputational sort – offers what can be called a "dialectical proof" of its conclusion: it offers provisional conclusions which are nonetheless corroborated and justified. Dialectical arguments have the additional advantage of being easily and immediately understandable to a particular audience: only they can break the power that prejudices and habit have over the mind. Moreover, by mimicking the whole process of invention, a dialectical argument has the advantage of making explicit those assumptions about knowledge and its acquisition which usually remain hidden.

As we have seen, the tradition of Aristotle's dialectic reaches well into the 20th – and the 21st – centuries, after several centuries of relative oblivion. It takes the form of a flourishing school of studies in argumentation theory, according to which dialectic aims both at the rational conviction of an audience and at conducting critical discussions in view of the resolution of conflicts of opinion, along some of the same lines which characterize the Renaissance developments I have reconstructed here. Equally important today is the epistemological analysis of the nature and use of "acceptable premises" in the rational evaluation of arguments and of the conditions which make an opinion a good candidate for secure, though not immutable knowledge: this suggests a strong connection between a dialectical mode of inquiry and a fallibilist epistemology according to which we may say that a subject *knows* that *p*, although it is possible that *non-p*[446].

What is missing from the contemporary scene – not surprisingly, given our different ontological commitments about truth and certainty – is the Aristotelian emphasis, shared by most Renaissance commentators, on the connection between dialectical arguments and the truth, and the corresponding sense of the existence of an ascending "path" to knowledge along which the practice of dialectic is an invaluable aid. In this context Aristotle outlined, somewhat elliptically, two different types of dialectic – aporetic and disputational – and gave some indication of their respective usefulness for investigating the truth as well as finding and/or proving the principles of the special disciplines. Following ancient and Medieval commentators like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes, some Renaissance authors expanded on this epistemologically strong aspect of dialectic and gave various interesting interpretations of its connection to the truth. Besides describing the role of aporetic dialectic in the discovery of new pieces of knowledge, they pointed to the role of disputational dialectic in proving principles to someone who denies them, thus suggesting an inchoate notion of "dialectical proof".

Thus, quite apart from its contribution to finding the truth, the art of Aristotelian dialectic as it has been developed within its long tradition contributes to the realization of many objectives: from rationally persuading selected audiences to testing claims to knowledge, and from establishing valid presumptions of truth to attaining well-corroborated and justified opinions. In today's more circumspect philosophical atmosphere, dialectic, as viewed through the eyes of contemporary epistemology, can probably procure us no more than a "dialectical proof" of controversial claims. That is no small achievement, however, given the difficulty and the importance of the task.

Notes

1. Spranzi (2004).

2. Dascal (2006).

3. On this issue, see Piano Mortari (1978) and Boucher (2009).

4. I am referring here not to the historians of philosophy, but to those interpreters who claimed that Aristotle's text was one of the sources of their own theories; in other words to those authors who genuinely belong to the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics.*

5. A tradition in a synchronic sense is also a set of social and cultural relationships characterizing a given historically determined community. I shall not use the term in this "spatial" sense.

6. For recent examples, see Most (1999), Gibson and Shuttleworth Kraus (2002), Adamson, Baltussen and Stone (2004) and Baltussen (2007).

7. For a criticism of these two positions see Barnes (1991).

8. Dialectic is "a form of argument seeking to produce some insight (*nous*, intuition) as to the truths from which demonstration can possibly start" and leading to the acceptance of first principles (Hamlyn 1990: 476).

9. Smith (1993).

10. See also IX 25 and Sextus Empiricus, *Adv.math*. VII 6 (29 A1 and A10 DK).

11. The translations of Greek texts are from the Loeb editions, unless otherwise indicated; in this chapter, references to Aristotle's works are from the *Topics*, unless Rhet. (*Rhetoric*), SR (*Sophistical Refutations*) or other abbreviations precede the page number.

12. In this respect, dialectic is instantiated both by the method of 'diaireseis' (divisions of ideas, i.e. conceptual distinctions) which Plato developed in the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*, as well as by the aporetic discussion of the *Parmenides.*

13. This, at least, is what can be surmised from Plato's later dialogues and from some of Aristotle's lost early works.

14. For a useful summary of the controversies involving the dating of the *Topics* and its relationship with the *Sophistical Refutations*, see Brunschwig's introduction to the French translation (1967).

15. Interestingly, the *Rhetoric* was excluded from the *Organon* only when the latter was codified in the first century BC, and not before the second century AD. See on this issue Jacques Brunschwig's introduction to Aristotle's *Topics I–IV* (1967: LXXXIV), and Solmsen (1944). The original Aristotelian connection between the *Rhetoric* and the logical treatises was revived by Averroes, and was later developed by Renaissance humanists, as we shall see.

16. According to Brunschwig, "Dialectic, in spite of its possible ouverture to 'encounters' with the 'laymen' remains essentially a greenhouse flower, an art which is grown in the protected milieu of the school; the philosopher can keep his intellectual control over it. (…). Rhetoric, on the other hand, is an outdoor plant (…) It allows contingency into history, politics into logic, passions in discourse" (1994: 94).

17. This seems to be a Socratic term (Ap. 22e), and Aristotle also associates it with dialectic in the *Rhetoric* (1354a6).

18. Barnes (1981: 58); see also Kapp (1942: Chapter 1) and Weil (1975).

19. The two approaches are complementary. As we have already mentioned, Slomkowski (1997) focuses on the central books (II–VII), in which the nature and use of the 'topoi' in argumentation is explained, and explicitly eschews questions related to the meaning and role of dialectic in relation to knowledge.

20. "[Dialectics] takes as its foundations what is relatively more intelligible than what has to be explained – relatively, that is, to the faculties of the audience of the explanation. In this way dialectic is the essential tool in the preliminary work which precedes the establishment of a complete science" (Evans 1977: 6; see also ibid.: 36).

21. Irwin (1988: *passim*) speaks of a "strong" as opposed to a "plain" dialectic; for a critical discussion of these positions, see Bolton (1990: 187).

22. Smith takes seriously Burnyeat's suggestion (1981) that in the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle offers understanding rather than knowledge proper, and argues that dialectic constitutes a preliminary stage of such understanding.

23. As we shall see in the last chapter, these same two readings of dialectic are still alive today – and they are explicitly characterized as Aristotelian: the one in the "new rhetoric" approach to reasoning, the other in the "new dialectic" approach to argumentation theory.

24. In fact, in this passage Aristotle refers to the possibility of practicing dialectic before actually engaging in it. For a critique of Bolton's view, see Brunschwig (1990: 244).

25. See Grimaldi (1980: 91–93) for a similar analysis of this passage.

26. This theme is emphasized over and over again (see for example *Posterior Analytics* I.9). The point is at the center of Evans' discussion: "Dialectic must be distinguished from the sciences in that it does not work with any set view of reality. In this it is opposed both to the many special sciences and to the universal science of ontology" (1977: 5).

27. 'Methodos' thus refers to the treatise on the art of dialectic and not to the art of dialectic itself. See Brunschwig (1967: XXX–XXXIV) for a discussion of the term "method".

28. The translation of the Greek term 'endoxa' in the *Topics* is as critical as it is controversial. Here I am using Brunschwig's rendition of 'endoxa' as "reputable opinions", since it is sufficiently general to include all type of 'endoxa', independently of the characterization of the holder of the opinions, and of their role in reasoning. Barnes, in his revision of the Oxford translation of

Aristotle, *The Complete Works* (Aristotle 1984) also translates "reputable opinions". For a history of the translation of this word see also Evans (1977: 77–78).

29. De Pater (1965) and Jules Tricot's French translation of Aristotle's *Organon*, for example. In the *Rhetoric* it is the word 'eikos' which denotes probabilities (see, for example, 1357b1).

30. Brunschwig (1967: CXIII, note 3).

31. In Book VIII of the *Topics* (159a28–30), Aristotle seems to concede that there can be such a thing as a "didactic" dialogue and a passage from the *Sophistical Refutations* confirms this reading (165a38–39).

32. Aristotle has in mind the tradition of the Socratic 'elenchos', rather than Plato's middle and later dialogues, where the answerer plays a passive role for the most part. In Aristotle's *Topics*, the methodology of the 'dissoi logoi', the practice of opposing one proposition to its contradictory without any real dialogue, is not prominent either. As Brunschwig writes, the *Topics* are foremost a treatise making explicit the rules of oral dialogue: "No written text, even if it is written in dialogical form, can be a thoroughly dialectical text in the proper sense of the word, since the reader's reactions are unknown to the writer, unlike the answerer's to the questioner" (2000: 113). For different models of oral disputation before Aristotle, see Robinson (1931).

33. In my account of a dialectical disputation I follow Brunschwig's introduction to the French translation (1967), insofar as he seems to give the clearest and most natural explanation of Aristotle's position. See also the classical study by Moraux (1968) and Slomkowski (1997: 9–42). Brunschwig has also translated Books V–VIII of the *Topics* (Aristotle 2007).

34. The grammatical form of the thesis which is defended (affirmative or negative) is irrelevant to the role each contender plays.

35. On the notion of a dialectical problem see Lennox (1994).

36. Neither Bolton (1990) nor Evans (1977) sufficiently consider the different functions of a dialectical premise and a dialectical problem. Evans, for example, sees an inconsistency in Aristotle's claims that "matters which are universally agreed cannot form the subject-matter of dialectic and that a question which is endoxic *to all* may be dialectical" (1977: 80). The inconsistency vanishes if one realizes that Aristotle is referring in the first case to a dialectical problem and in the second to a dialectical premise.

37. We shall see that this apparently innocuous function returns in Book VIII, but this time in connection with a much more controversial term: 'peira', namely "examination".

38. See Vlastos (1983).

39. For a treatment of Aristotle's concept of 'aporia' and the aporetic method, see Owens (1951) and Aubenque (1961).

40. "We must as in all other cases, set the phenomena before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the reputable opinions about these affections or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently" (NE 1045b1–7). The aporetic method is also alluded to in the *Physics* (211a7–11).

41. The aporetic function of dialectic, together with its epistemological implications, have been well analyzed by Evans, although he identifies it with the whole of dialectic, thereby completely neglecting the disputational aspect. Barnes (1980) also describes the aporetic method referred to in NE 1145b2–7 as the working through of reputable opinions ('endoxa'), but distinguishes it from the discussion of 'endoxa' in the *Topics*.

42. Barnes draws a different conclusion from the importance of the aporetic method in Aristotle's work: "(…) the most the argument shows is that 'endoxa' tend to be true: it cannot show that truths tend to be 'endoxa' ; and hence it cannot warrant us in limiting to 'ta endoxa' the potential conclusions of our philosophical investigations" (1980: 510).

43. Content-wise, the endoxic premises of dialectical reasoning may very well be completely *ad hoc* with respect to the problem at hand, as long as they are related to the problem by some kind or another of necessary link.

44. Moreau has advanced a similar distinction, although he assimilates, wrongly in my view, 'aporetic' and 'peirastic' dialectic: "In peirastic [aporetic, I would read!] dialectics we don't use the premises as instruments; we aim neither at proving nor at persuading; rather we take as our point of departure some problematic premises, or hypotheses, and if we draw consequences from them, it is in order to compare them with established facts or received opinions, in order to be able to judge retrospectively of the value of the hypotheses." (1968: 83). Owen suggests in a similar vein that Aristotle tends to confuse the two types of dialectics, when in fact they should be distinguished: "So Aristotle takes no pains to distinguish what seem to be two forms of dialectic; rather he tries to assimilate them. Just as he can represent an inquiry of the second sort as a colloquy with dead thinkers (Met. 987a2–3), so, on the other hand, he can claim that the question-match is strictly dialectical only when there is collaboration and a common aim, not a competition which only one can win" (1968: 106). This important point will be discussed later in this chapter.

45. On 'euphyia' see EN 1114a31–b12.

46. Loeb translates: "For such a process one must possess a certain natural ability, and real natural ability consists in being able correctly to choose the true and avoid the false".

47. Both Berti (1997) and Irwin (1989) find an application of this use in *Metaphysics* Γ4, where they identify a dialectical demonstration of the principle of non-contradiction.

48. Irwin admits, however, that Aristotle "seems to have more confidence in dialectic than is warranted by his own views about its capacities" (1988: 178). Dorion (1990) rightly criticizes those positions which hint at a possible link between dialectical arguments and a general science of being.

49. As Bolton (1999) has convincingly argued, 'koina' are not metaphysical principles, but epistemological common principles such as non-contradiction.

50. Brunschwig (2000) maintains that there is a distinction between the third and fourth uses of dialectic, on the basis of the fact that "further" indicates a different function and that the function of dialectic according to the fourth use is particular rather than general. It seems to me, however, that these two arguments can militate as much in favor of a connection between the two uses as against it: the fourth use can thus exemplify a particular application of the third use. The important issue here is more the description of these two last uses rather than their formal relationship.

51. The Greek commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias as well as some Renaissance commentators, as I shall later show, see the fourth use as connected to the third use, although they link the use of dialectic for the principles of each science to a function of "disputational dialectic" and not of the aporetic method.

52. Bolton holds a particular version of this last view, insofar as he gives the aporetic method a specific role in the confirmation of claims to scientific knowledge. He writes: "[dialectic] serves to draw on and thus aid us in collecting the empirically most well-confirmed data which theoretical principles must serve to explain. But by itself it cannot determine the principles which do the explaining" (1990: 235).

53. Also, the *Topics*'s middle Books (II–VII) which deal with the 'topoi' do not apply only to reasoning through question and answer, and they can therefore pertain to what we have called "generic" dialectic. It is in this sense, as we shall see, that Cicero understood dialectic.

54. He similarly distinguishes between 'syllogismos' and 'elenchos' at the beginning of the *Sophistical Refutations* (165a1–4). Smith thinks that refutation is the only goal of dialectic (1997: 129). However, from the description of the strict requirements of peirastic dialectic, it is clear that the focus of any serious dialectic is the acquisition of knowledge, and refutation is only an instrument towards a more constructive purpose.

55. Brunschwig calls a "real lexical earthquake" Aristotle's expression "elenchtic demonstration which occurs once in the *Metaphysics* (1006a11–25) in relation to the proof of the principle of non-contradiction" (2000: 126).

56. On the difference between sophistry and eristic, see SR 171b20–37. The first indicates apparent wisdom, the second apparent victory.

57. The reason why Socrates only asked questions and never answered them is the fact that he made no pretense to knowledge of things he did not know (Ap. 21D). Since Socrates did not pretend to know what he did not know, he did not need to submit to peirastic dialectic (on this issue see also 172a16–21). On the contrary, he needed to ask questions, because he was not proving something but was exercising a critical function: "To demand that the answerer should either affirm or deny is not the function of someone who is displaying ('deiknyntos') something, but of one who is making an examination ('peiras')" (171b1–5).

58. "It is clear, therefore, that it is the function of the dialectician to be able to grasp the various ways in which, on the basis of common principles, a real or apparent refutation, or dialectical or apparently dialectical or peirastic reasoning is brought about" (SR 170b8–11, translation mine).

59. The content of Book VIII of the *Topics* can be divided into three parts: (a) role of the questioner (1–3); (b) role of the answerer (4–10); (c) how to evaluate a disputation (11–13); (d) how to acquire the necessary skills (14).

60. Bolton does so explicitly when he argues that "peirastic dialectic is a procedure for the testing of claims by reference to what is most *endoxon* and most intelligible to us" (1990: 234).

61. Alternatively, as a contrast class for agonistic contenders, he uses the couplet "training and examination ('gymnasia kai peiras')" (159a25–26).

62. Bolton translates ‘gnōrimōterōn’ with “more intelligible” and takes the couplet “more widely held and more intelligible” to be in sharp contrast with simple ‘endoxon’ (1990: 200). He takes the former to characterize a cognitively higher form of dialectic, which he identifies with “peirastic” dialectic. As I have already argued, I believe that serious dialectic is perfectly compatible with any ‘endoxa’, provided that they are used appropriately in the disputation.

63. Post. Anal. 72a26–72b4.

64. This is a common interpretation. See for example Smith (1997: 140) and Brunschwig in his introduction to *Topics II–VII*, from now on Brunschwig (2007).

65. On the identification of “element” with ‘topos’, see also Rhet. II 22.13. For interesting comments on this equation, see de Pater (1965: 110–115).

66. On the different meanings of the word ‘topos’ see de Pater (1965: 92–94).

67. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1146b7), “invention (‘euresis’) is the solution (‘lysis’) of the aporia”.

68. Aristotle holds that the first part is an enterprise common to both the dialectician and the philosopher: “As far as the choice of the ‘topoi’ is concerned, the philosopher and the dialectician are making a similar inquiry, but the subsequent arrangement of material and the framing of questions is the peculiar province of the dialectician; for such a proceeding always involves a relation with another party” (155b7–10).

69. Aristotle uses the same word in the seventh book of the *Topics* (155a38).

70. The passage continues to specify what Aristotle has already described (Rhet. I 2) as ‘pisteis’. The three rhetorical proofs (‘pisteis’) are: reasoning (‘logos’) (“because something has been demonstrated”), the character of the speaker (‘ēthos’) and the affection of the listener (‘pathos’) (III 1.1). The ‘logos’, which rhetoric shares with dialectic, is by far the most important and includes enthymemes (or rhetorical syllogism), maxims and examples. The ‘topoi’, in turn, both general and specific, provide the sources for the discursive parts of proof. For the notion of ‘pistis’ as employed in the *Rhetoric*, see Grimaldi (1980: 349–356).

71. Although they clearly belong to the first stage of invention, it is not clear whether inductive moves like the use of examples and the non-logical ‘pisteis’ (character and affection) can be included under the heading of ‘dianoia’ or discursive reasoning.

72. Definition is the most important of the four. Brunschwig writes: “The division of the topics into the four predicables results from a methodical analysis of the condition which a definition must satisfy” (1967: XLIX). First, it is necessary that each of the elements of a definition belongs to the subject (accident), that the first of these elements is the genus of the subject (genus), that the definitional formula is coextensive with the ‘definiendum’ (*proprium*) and lastly that it designates its essence (definition).

73. See Stump (1978: 167–169).

74. On this point, see Brunschwig (1967: XXXVI–XXXVII).

75. Remember that ‘peira’ also means “test”. In the Renaissance, as we shall see, ‘peirastic’ has been translated into Latin as ‘tentativa’.

76. This, as we shall see, is the interpretation which Nifo explicitly gives of Aristotle's passage.

77. The text of the *Sophistical Refutations* enjoyed a more simple history (Ebbesen 1981). On early Greek commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics*, see Van Ophuijsen (1994).

78. See Stump (1989: Chapter 2).

79. See Green-Pedersen (1984: 88–91) for different commentary forms ("lectio-commentary", "sententia-commentary" and "quaestio-commentary") and for a general discussion of Medieval commentaries on both Boethius' and Aristotle's work on dialectic.

80. Only the so-called *logica vetus* – comprising both Porfirius' *Isagoge*, and Aristotle's *Categories* and *On interpretation* – were known until the 12th century. The *logica nova* included the remaining parts of the *Organon* – the *Prior* and *Second Analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* – which were rediscovered and/or retranslated between the 12th and the 14th centuries.

81. See Green-Pedersen (1984) for a list and some valuable information about these commentaries.

82. On the relationship between Cicero and Aristotle on the issues of dialectic and rhetoric, see Gigon (1959), Fortenbaugh (1989) and Huby (1989). On Cicero's *Topica* see Riposati (1947) and Stump (1978). In a relevant article, Barnes (1997) convincingly argues that Cicero was not acquainted with Aristotle's *Topics* as we know it, which was rearranged by Andronicus of Rhodes only after Cicero's death in 65 BC.

83. On the relationship between Cicero's rhetorical and philosophical views see Michel (1960). Cicero is generally regarded as a moderate Stoic with an overall mildly skeptical Academic conception of knowledge. On Cicero's philosophical outlook see Gigon (1972) and Gersch (1986: 53–57).

84. In his rhetorical work, Cicero divides rhetoric into both the functional Aristotelian distinction of invention, disposition, delivery (to which memory and style were later added) and into the stylistic Isocratean theory of the parts of discourse (introduction, narration, proof, epilogue). Moreover, he introduced Hermagoras' theory of "status ('stasis')" which was to become a standard and permanent acquisition of rhetorical theory (Kennedy 1972). On the development of Aristotle's rhetoric, see Solmsen (1968).

85. In the Middle Ages Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is not associated with the *Topics*. Rather, it is often considered in conjunction with the science of politics and ethics. On Medieval commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* see Robert (1957); on Medieval commentaries to Cicero's rhetorical works, see Ward (1978). As we shall see, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* will be mainly commented on in the 16th century.

86. On the developments of Medieval rhetoric, see Murphy (1974 and 1978), and McKeon (1942).

87. To the best of our knowledge, Cicero was the first to introduce the distinction between invention and judgment in dialectic, whereas in rhetoric the Aristotelian division of this art into its functions of invention, disposition, and elocution was already established. In the *Topics* Aristotle hinted at a function involving invention, but did not contrast it with judgment.

88. Different forms of disputation exist in the Roman world, both oral (among the rhetoricians of the so-called "Second Sophistic") and written (for example the Ciceronian dialogues, or 'disputationes', which we shall discuss later). The rhetorical one-person 'declamatio', however, becomes a more common means of expressing oneself in public speeches, except in the case of juridical debates. Rhetoric is mainly associated with political rather than ethical (and thus philosophical) issues (Cicero, *De Inventione*, I 5.6). On this point, see Murphy (1974).

89. Michaud-Quantin (1969) reconstructs the history and meaning of the terms 'logica' and 'dialectica' from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

90. The definition is closely reminiscent of the mnemonic function that the topics were supposed play in the sophistical tradition.

91. *Topica* (XVIII 71). Aristotle made a similar distinction between "artificial ('technoi')" and "inartificial ('atechnoi')" proofs ('pisteis') in the *Rhetoric* (II 20.26).

92. Boethius will bring their number to seven. On Stoic logic, see Mates (1953), Ierodiakonou (1999) and Gourinat (2000). It is with Cicero that this aspect of Stoic logic is incorporated into the treatment of the topics. Plebe (1959) already traced Stoic logic to Theophrastus' work on rhetorical 'topoi'. On Theophrastus' logic, see Bochenski (1947) and Huby (2006).

93. Cicero, *De inventione* (I 1), and Quintilian, *Institutiones oratoriae* (II 15.34). Rhetoric is an art ('ars') for Cicero and a science ('scientia') for Quintilian; it is a natural ability for both. Quintilian considers it a form of excellence ('virtus') (*Inst. Orat.* II 15.36). In another passage (II 15.10), Quintilian rejects Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as the faculty of discovering everything persuasive in language because it limits rhetoric to invention at the expense of judgment and disposition.

94. The reverse is also true for Cicero, namely dialectic cannot do without the 'ars bene dicendi'. Cicero's dialogues ('disputationes') have a looser dialectical structure than Plato's.

95. 'Oratio' also means deductive argument (see *De inv.* I 57).

96. Rhetorical "necessary demonstrations" (which include the dilemma) are discussed at I 44. "Dialectical" 'loci' equally include both probable and necessary argument forms.

97. In a similar vein, Boethius will distinguish between "argument" and "argumentation", as we shall see.

98. More likely, a dialogue did not lead directly to the separation of truth and falsehood, but only sharpened the mind to an act of the higher order whereby the mind gives its assent to an evident proposition ('phantasia kataleptikē'). Indeed, Stoic logic and epistemology are closely connected.

99. "What then will he [the dialectician] judge? What form of hypothetical judgment or of inference from alternative hypotheses is valid, what proposition is ambiguous, what conclusion follows from any given premise and what is inconsistent with it? If the reason judges this and similar matters, it judges about itself; but the promise which he held out went further, as to judge merely these matters is not enough for all the numerous and important problems contained in philosophy" (Ac. II 28.91).

100. On Academic skepticim, see Hankinson (1995: 74–115) and Chiesara (2003). On the connection between Academic skepticism and Socrates, see Annas (1988 and 1995). On Cicero's specific way of being an Academic skeptic, see Lévy (1992)

101. For Arcesilaus it is the "reasonable" ('eulogon').

102. According to Cicero, the difference between rhetoric and dialectic is not epistemic, namely it is not about the kind of knowledge they yield, but rather it is about their subject, which is general for dialectic and particular for rhetoric. The subject of dialectic is called a "thesis" and translated into Latin with 'causa'. Rhetorical issues are those which are embedded in concrete circumstances and are called "hypotheses" or 'proposita' in Latin. Cicero claims to have inherited this distinction from Hermagoras of Temnos (1962). On this point, see *Topica* (XXI 79–80).

103. It is Academic skepticism, and more specifically Carneades, which has contributed to giving what is "convincing" (the Greek 'pithanon') an important epistemic function going beyond the rhetorical idea of inducing belief.

104. Glucker (1995) reconstructs the history and the reasons for the assimilation of the "probable" as the truthseeming ('verisimilis') to the persuasive ('pithanon').

105. As Long writes: "Cicero can appeal to both *in utramque partem* methodology and to argument in favor of *probabilia* as links between philosophy and rhetoric which have Peripatetic as well as Academic authority" (1995: 58). One should not forget that 'skepsis', especially in its Academic version, is a form of positive research.

106. Aristotle's aporetic dialectic, as we have seen, was not directed *towards* the probable, but rather towards the truth *through* probable opinions.

107. An important use of dialectic in this period deserves mentioning, namely its importance for Christian apologetic and didactic in the fight against heresy for the establishment of a Christian orthodoxy (Reiss 1969). After a debate among Christians about the use and value of pagan dialectic, in which Augustine with his *De doctrina christiana* is a major participant, dialectic was deemed useful, if properly used. But, although the practice of dialectic and argumentative techniques is central to Christian thinking, there does not seem to be any original theorization about it. Augustine's relevant work *De dialectica* was indeed included in the basic curriculum, but was not highly influential until it was printed, together with the rest of his writings, in the Renaissance. On the use of dialectic in apologetic, see also Murphy (1974).

108. Boethius' translations, together with other minor ones, are printed in the collection of the Latin translations of Aristotle's works known as *Aristoteles Latinus*. On his translation activity, see Solmsen (1944) and Shiel (1958).

109. On Boethius' knowledge of the Greek sources, see the articles by Shiel (1958) and Ebbesen (1990). It is doubtful that Boethius had a direct knowledge of Alexander's commentary.

110. On Martianus Capella and the liberal arts, see Stahl and Johnson (1977). It is interesting that at about the same time, the liberal arts curriculum was formalized and the 'trivium' – which comprised grammar, dialectic and rhetoric – became the standard approach to education well into the Midlle Ages. On Boethius' role in the development of the liberal arts curriculum, see the collection of articles by Masi (1981).

111. Later, however, dialectic will slowly gain the upper hand and become the handmaiden of theology – as well as the most beautiful of the two; it was not until the Renaissance that the Humanists revived the old tradition of considering dialectic and rhetoric two closely related arts.

112. Cicero and his contemporaries already debated whether rhetoric was an "art ('technē')" or a "natural ability ('dunamis')". This distinction is grounded in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where rhetoric is attributed both qualifications. Cicero believed that they could not be separated, insofar as art perfects nature (see *De finibus* IV 16–19 and V 43).

113. Besides describing different forms of deductive arguments, the logical disciplines "define" and "divide" (ICT 1045), a faculty which Boethius rightly attributes to Plato's dialectic and which is reminiscent of the clarifying function of dialectic described by Cicero.

114. In DTD Boethius adds rhetorical argumentation to this division; according to him, both dialectical and rhetorical deductions consist of probable arguments.

115. This important distinction was clearly formulated in Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, as we shall see in Chapter V.

116. Argumentation is defined in DTD (1183A) in line with Aristotle's own definition in the *Topics*.

117. Stump translates 'probabilis' with "readily believable" (DTD).

118. This is not a problem, however, since according to Boethius the primary purpose of a demonstration is not to be understood by every man but solely by the knowledgeable.

119. Like Cicero, Boethius distinguishes between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" topics.

120. Boethius combines the Ciceronian inventive meaning of topics ('differentia') with the Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian emphasis on the topics as principles rather than strategies. See on this issue Stump (1989: Chapter 2).

121. See Stump (1978: 179–204).

122. Green-Pedersen (1984: 123–127) and Minio-Paluello (1957).

123. For Medieval theories of the topics see also Bird (1962), Pinborg (1969), and Green-Pedersen (1984).

124. Nifo does not cite Boethius in his commentary. However, Joachim Périon, a Renaissance French Aristotelian, cites Boethius as a follower of Cicero on the partition of dialectic into invention and judgment (*Topicorum libri octo commentationes*, 1541: 317).

125. James of Venice was supposed to have retranslated the *Topics* (Dod 1982: 54). However, we only have excerpts of an anonymous translation completed in the 12th century. Minio-Paluello has analyzed the manuscript history of the text, and has come to the conclusion that "The readings of the *Topics* mentioned so far as evidence of the limited variety in the Latin tradition have all a common source and […] this source is again Boethius" (1972: 307). Both Boethius' and the anonymous translation are published in the collection *Aristoteles latinus* edited by Minio-Paluello (Aristotle 1969, vol. V 1–3; Boethius 1969).

126. The *Sophistical Refutations* were also retranslated by James of Venice and William of Moerbeke in the 13th century, and by Argyropoulos in the 15th century (1479). All three translations are included in the *Aristoteles Latinus* edited by Bernard Dod (Brill, Leiden, 1975, vol. VI 1–3; Boethius 1975). For Medieval commentaries on the *Sophistical Refutations*, see Ebbesen (1981).

127. It is published today as Albert's collected works (*Opera omnia*), partly translated and commented by Wallace (1996). Several Medieval commentaries survive in manuscript form. Besides Albert the Great, Nifo also refers to a Medieval commentator named Adenulph of Anagni, one of eight 13th-century commentators of Aristotle's *Topics*. These commentaries are briefly listed and described by Grabmann (1956: 142–157) and by Green-Pedersen (1973 and 1984: 85–93).

128. Boethius of Dacia (1976). For the translation and a comment on the relevant passages of Boethius of Dacia's commentary see Yrjönsuuri (1993).

129. See the article by Michaud-Quantin (1969).

130. See Stump (1989: 39).

131. On Abelard's logic see the article by Martin (2004).

132. On Peter of Spain's and terminists' approach to dialectic see Stump (1989: 133–159); on his relationship to Boethius' approach to the topics, see Stump (1981).

133. For example, in the following enthymeme: "A mortal rational animal is running ; therefore a man is running", the missing proposition is: "man is a mortal rational animal". The topic relevant to justify the inference is a topic from definition; "whatever is predicated of the definition is predicated of the thing defined". On the use of topics in the conversion of enthymemes into valid syllogisms, see, Stump (1989: 135–156).

134. For an overview of the treatises on consequences, see Stump (1989: Chapter 8, 9 and 10). For a more formal treatment of the use of topics in Medieval logic see Bird (1962).

135. In keeping with the treatment of rhetorical 'loci' in the fourth Book of Boethius' *De differentiis topicis*, in the Middle Ages rhetoric was dissociated from any particular subject matter and from its specific purpose, the persuasion of an audience: "consequently, the Medieval conception and use of rhetoric departed radically from the classical tradition. Rhetoric more or less lost its status as a separate discipline and became an 'ancilla' to a number of other arts (e.g. 'dictamen' or poetry). There were no special subjects for rhetorical discourse; instead there were various forms of discourse to which rhetorical devices could be applied" (Leff 1978, 23). On Medieval approaches to rhetoric, see also McKeon (1942).

136. Especially by Grabmann (1961, vol. II: 13–24 and 213–221).

137. See Kretzmann, Kenny and Pinborg (1982: 21–29).

138. On the Medieval disputation, see Gilby (1949), who gave a detailed example of one such disputation, as well as Little and Pelster (1934), Lawn (1993) and Weijers (2007).

139. See Kretzmann, Kenny and Pinborg (1982: 28).

140. It is not immediately clear why this feature of the disputation is described as having an inventive character. The author, however, in one instance uses the term 'investigatio veritatis' rather than 'cognitio veritatis'. This points to the fact that the weighing of opposite arguments – aporetic dialectic – is not directly conducive to the truth but only prepares the ground for it.

141. On Medieval 'obligationes', see Kretzmann, Kenny and Pinborg (1982: 315–341) and Stump (1989: Chapter 9–12).

142. This is particularly the case for Boethius de Dacia's commentary written in the second half of the 13th century, analyzed by Yrjönsuuri (1993).

143. Dutilh Novaes (2005).

144. See Stump (1989, 84).

145. Some of them served as Galileo's sources in dialectic and logic (Wallace 1992).

146. On this issue, see Breen (1952), Kristeller (1956) and Perreiah (1982).

147. On the Latin translations and editions of Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on the *Topics*, see Cranz (1960).

148. I shall refer in particular to Johannes Eck's brief commentary on the *Topics* (1516–17), to the collective commentary by the Louvain Arts Faculty (1554) and to Joachim Perion's translation and commentary (1541 and 1558).

149. Developing the 'studia humanitates' (grammar, rhetoric and ethics) is only one of the possible ways to participate in this renewal. Rather, humanism "involves above all the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the restoration an interpretation of them and the assimilation of the ideas and values that they contain" (Mann 1996: 2).

150. See Schmitt (1983a) and Garin (1950) on Aristotle's new humanist translations.

151. Secondary sources on Renaissance commentaries on the *Topics*, they are virtually unexistent.

152. See Risse (1964a) on the relationship between Alexandrinism and Averroism in Renaissance logic.

153. *Nova Explanatio Topicorum in Academia Veneta*.

154. In Sigonio's treatise on the dialogue form there are references to Ammonius Hermiae's commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*.

155. Another example of this convergence is the appeal to Plato that Johannes Eck makes in defending a "noble" dialectic, which will be useful for Christian apologetics, against another which is "sterile and vain" (1616–17: 2)

156. The *Poetics* was retranslated from the Greek into Latin (by Giorgio Valla and A. Pazzi de' Medici in 1536) and into Italian (by Bernardo Segni in 1549), and was widely commented on in the Renaissance, as we shall see. For the use of Aristotle's *Poetics* in building a Renaissance theory of literary criticism, see Weinberg (1961). To this day, secondary sources related to the treatises on the dialogue form tend to tackle the issue from the point of view of literary theory and neglect its Aristotelian epistemological underpinnings.

157. He calls them "speculative dialogues".

158. This is the reason why I will give special attention to the beginnings of the new dialectic movement with Valla and Agricola, and will disregard the later protestant school of Philip Melanchton, Johannes Sturm, Johannes Cesarius, on the Lutheran side, and Peter Ramus on the Calvinist side.

159. "Aporetic" dialectic, for its part, appears mainly – though only marginally – in two treatises on the dialogue form (Sigonio's and Speroni's), as well as in Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*.

160. "Rhetoric has been defined or understood as the art of persuasion, of the probable argument, of prose style and composition, or of literary criticism; and each of these different, though related definitions has come to the fore in a different period or context" (Kristeller 1983: 1).

161. There were, Jerrold Seigel argues, several ways of trying to combine eloquence and wisdom, from Cicero to Valla: "From Petrarch's union of the two arts in which philosophical standards regarding man's intellectual and moral life retained considerable independence (…) the humanist program evolved by way of Salutati's waverings into Bruni's more confident affirmation of the orator's philosophical perspective and finally into Valla's outright demand for the subordination of philosophy to rhetoric" (1968: 225).

162. Poliziano wrote the introductions to his lectures on Aristotle's *Topics* and *Posterior Analytics*. Sturm, Eck, Cesarius and Melanchton all wrote treatises on dialectic which were partly influenced by Agricola's pioneer text, *De inventione dialectica*. For an overview of these dialectical treatises, see Risse (1964) and Vasoli (1968).

163. See also Ward (1978). For a list of the editions of Cicero's works in the Renaissance, see Murphy (1981).

164. The most important and only printed Medieval commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was by Aegidius Romanus (Giles of Rome); it was written in the 13th century and printed in 1515 in Venice. On Aegidius' commentary, see Brother (1957) and Murphy (1969).

165. The first pages of all these Latin translations are published by Bernard Schneider in the collection *Aristoteles Latinus*, together with the two main Medieval translations (Aristotle 1978). On the translations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the Renaissance, see Lardet (1989), Brandes (1989) and Cranz (1971).

166. On these, and other, commentaries see Lohr (1988).

167. New treatises on rhetorical theory are comparatively rare, with the exception of George of Trebizond's *Rhetoricorum libri quinque* (1434). On the biography and rhetorical theory of George of Trebizond, a Greek expatriate, see Monfasani's extensive study (1976).

168. Only the second version was published in Milan, Paris and Cologne, until Zippel's edition in 1982 (Valla 1982). It was also reprinted in Basel in 1540 in Valla's *Opera omnia*. Of the three different versions, the first and most radical cost Valla a trial by the Inquisition in 1544. On the different versions of this work, see Zippel (1957).

169. Jardine (1977 and 1983) has devoted great attention to Valla and especially to his alleged skepticism. Among other studies, see above all Seigel (1968), Vasoli (1968 and 1957–8), Camporeale (1972), Gerl (1974) and Mack (1993).

170. Mack, one of the main scholars of Renaissance dialectic, also considers Rudolph Agricola "the key figure in Renaissance dialectic and one of the most important of all writers on the use of language", and defines the *De inventione dialectica* an "underrated work" (1993: 4).

171. The relationship between the two works has been the object of much attention since Lisa Jardine has reaffirmed their connection (1977 and 1983). For a thorough critique of her position, see Monfasani (1990) and Mack (1993).

172. "Valla's work is largely controversial (…). By contrast, Agricola's work is instructional and practical, continually involved with real language and with literature" (Mack 1993: 250).

173. Ong (1958: 95–96) identifies two main waves of success, 1515–1528 and 1538–1543.

174. Phrissemius and Alardus wrote the two most important commentaries to Agricola's text. Latomus wrote an interesting epitome in 1541. Alardus' commentary was also published together with Agricola's text in 1539. Mack's study on Lorenzo Valla and Rudolph Agricola (1993) provides a detailed account of both the content and the *fortuna* of Agricola's main work on dialectic. Gerda Huisman's study (1985) contains a complete bibliography of the editions and translations of the *De inventione dialectica*. Jardine (1990) fills the picture by providing an interesting analysis of the reasons for its success as a textbook. Vasoli (1957–58a) provides some useful information about Agricola's ten-year Italian stay, although in my view he overstresses the role of rhetoric to the detriment of dialectic in Agricola's work.

175. Latomus died in 1544 and his *Epitome* was published in Cologne in 1530 and in Paris in 1534 and went through several editions.

176. Orazio Toscanella also translated George of Trebizond's *De re dialectica* which was published in 1537.

177. The Academia Veneta also planned to publish a dialogue about the *Topics* where Aristotle, Cicero and Agricola discuss their respective approaches to dialectical invention (*Summa librorum, quos in omnibus scientiis (…) in lucem emittat Academia Veneta*, Venice, 1559: 30–31); it seems, however, that it never appeared.

178. The relationship between dialectic and rhetoric is well represented by the different Latin translations of the word 'antistrophos'. Whereas Nifo's translation ('vicaria') follows Aegidius Romanus, and indicates the subordination of rhetoric to dialectic, the majority of commentators translate the term by 'affinis' (Maioragio 1571, Vettori 1548, Riccoboni 1587), and thus stress their common purpose and nature. A fairly complete examination of this issue is provided by Green (1990).

179. Cicero's *Topica* was the most-published work of the Ciceronian rhetorical corpus (see Ward 1983: 154). I found three commentaries on this work: the earlier and not very extensive one by Giorgio Valla published in 1485, another Italian commentary by Pompeio de la Barba published in 1556, and a frequently reprinted edition which includes several commentaries (Boethius, Visorius, Latomus, Melanchton, Hegendorphinus and Gouveanus). In my analysis I shall mainly draw on Visorius' (known also as Jean Le Voyer) commentary (Cicero, *Topica*, 1554; first published in 1542). For a complete listing of these editions see *Fondation Index Aureliensis* (1965) at the entry "Cicero".

180. On the general theme of the union between eloquence and wisdom both in Cicero and in the Renaissance, see Seigel (1968) and Gray (1963).

181. Respectively in *Against the pseudo-logicians*, and in *Ciceronianus* of 1528.

182. Renaissance humanists did not distinguish rhetoric and dialectic as to their respective domains of application: they consider either discipline – in theory at least – to apply equally to both human affairs and natural matters, although rhetoric seems more suitable to treat particular rather than general questions.

183. Nowhere did the Humanists present a systematic critique of any of their adversaries. Perreiah (1982) shows that the their attack was neither well organized nor generalized against all aspects of Aristotelian philosophy. Rather, it was only directed at one particular type of dialectical practice, that which Nifo himself, as we shall see, condemned.

184. A good overview is provided by Garin (1969), Gilbert (1971) and Perreiah (1982).

185. The two terms of "dialectician" and "philosopher" can often be used interchangeably in this context, insofar as Medieval dialectic is the method of philosophy *par excellence*. Indeed, in medieval philosophy the two disciplines form a whole, which humanists want to undo in order to return dialectic to what it formerly was: the art of all forms of discourse, as opposed to the tool for expressing philosophical knowledge as precisely as possible. This project underlies Lorenzo Valla's attempt to distinguish logic from metaphysics.

186. I shall quote from Quirinus Breen's translation of the exchange between Pico and Ermolao Barbaro (Breen 1952). The Latin text, together with the Italian translation, is included in Garin (1952). Melanchton's own answer to Pico was published in 1558 and is included in the *Corpus reformatorum* (1834–1860: IX, 687f).

187. Interestingly, the iconic representations of the liberal arts in the 16th century do not differentiate to any great degree between rhetoric and dialectic. Contrary to earlier representations, dialectic, always carrying a snake, is as beautiful and pleasing a woman as rhetoric is. Their difference lies in the style and nature of their respective beauties, dialectic being more sober and simple and rhetoric more ornate and lavish. On these representations, see D'Ancona (1902).

188. Breen comments: "The main tradition of philosophy is suspicious of the power of words to carry the whole freight of wisdom. Wisdom is a possession; it can be communicated, but only to other wise men, for which rhetorical arrangement, invention, and agreeableness are worse than useless" (1952: 390).

189. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Daniele Barbaro also refers to the similarity between rhetoric and medicine as arts: "Rhetoric conducts and directs the human minds as medicine does with the parts and members of our body" (*In tres libros rhetoricorum Aristotelis commentaria*, 1544: 14).

190. I shall quote from Zippel's 1983 edition (RDP), which includes both the first and the second versions, the second being the only one published in the Renaissance.

191. In his *Dialectica ludicra* (1521) Agostino Nifo will consider Valla's work and criticize it. One of the major differences between the two approaches concerns the importance of syllogism with respect to discourse ('oratio'). Nifo centers his dialectic around syllogism, a "logical connection" which is both mental and spoken; he criticizes Valla for focusing instead on 'oratio', a spoken or written mode of expressing thoughts, and for disregarding mental connections as such. In an article devoted to Nifo's criticism of Valla, Jardine writes that "Nifo's logical analysis becomes a kind of 'deep structure' for 'oratio'", which should be the object of rhetoric rather than dialectic

(1981: 267). Aristotelianism and humanism, however, are not so far apart as it is usually assumed, since "a prominent Aristotelian like Nifo felt obliged to read and take seriously a prominent and intellectually perverse humanist like Valla" (ibid.: 270). In particular, Nifo and Valla shared the belief that "a reformed dialectic must start out from a pure Greek text of Aristotle" (ibid.: 260).

192. On the way in which rhetoric encompasses philosophy in Valla's work, see the study by Gerl (1974).

193. Valla quotes two entire chapters of Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae*. He prefers Quintilian to Cicero, because Cicero did not go far enough in substituting rhetoric for philosophy. On the sections of Valla's text which were borrowed from Quintilian, see Camporeale (1972).

194. This is, as we shall see, what Agricola thinks of the function of "judgment", which he identifies with the figures and modes of syllogisms described in the *Analytics*.

195. Mack writes: "The force of an argument is not derived from its form; the forms of argumentation are skeletons to be worked over in the process of writing" (1993: 85).

196. In another passage, Valla compares dialectic to a shy, frightened and chaste lady, while rhetoric is likened to an attractive and provocative woman (RDP 177). This is an interesting variation on the traditional representation of dialectic, as it appears, among other sources, in Martianus Capella's text. Here the stern and skinny character of dialectic was meant to underscore her intellectual rigor and perceptiveness, whereas in Valla's image, dialectic's modest appearance underlines her intrinsic weakness and faint-heartedness. Rhetoric, on the other hand, which had always been depicted as a beautiful but somewhat dull woman, becomes in Valla the more vivacious and daring of the two.

197. I shall translate into English the very literal Renaissance Italian translation from the Latin (ID), and I shall also indicate the reference of the 1589 Latin edition (DID), reprinted by Minerva in 1967.

198. One is Daniele Barbaro (1544: 4).

199. According to Agricola, dialectic serves as an instrument to avoid "the snares of deceit" (II.2; ID 111, DID 191).

200. A thoughtful treatment of the theme of truth in the Renaissance can be found in Trinkaus (1983). For a challenging account of this theme in connection with Pamenides' and Gorgias' respective positions, see Wardy (1996).

201. According to the humanists, "objects should be treated in a common sense way and (…) everything exists in essentially the same way" (Mack 1993: 39).

202. On this point, see Mack (1993) and Camporeale (1986).

203. Rhetoric remains somewhat inferior to dialectic, however, since its conclusions are not as "firm and stable" and it addresses itself to the common people rather than to a cultivated audience (Maioragio 1571: 2d); above all, while rhetoric "persuades" by using reasoning and affects, dialectic "proves" by using only reasoning (Riccoboni 1587: 32).

204. For an interesting discussion of the meaning of Aristotle's definition of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric, see Brunschwig (1994). This scholar concludes that whereas for

Aristotle dialectic is a house flower, an intellectual art to be practiced in a professional setting, rhetoric is a wild flower, affected by all the contingencies of context and history.

205. Francis Bacon would discuss the limits of the arts of discourse for attaining knowledge about the natural world: the experimental method alone has the ability to get a hold on "things" as opposed to "words". This explains the demise of rhetoric during the scientific revolution.

206. Agricola was well introduced in Italy's humanist circles. In particular he had met Ermolao Barbaro in Ferrata. On Agricola's humanist acquaintances in Italy, see Vasoli (1957–58a).

207. On northern European universities' dialectic curricula, see Heath (1971), Jardine (1974), and Mack (1993). Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, on the contrary, was mainly translated and commented on in Italy. This has prompted one commentator to speak of a "dialectical north" as opposed to a "rhetorical south" (Ward 1983: 156).

208. Both Monfasani (1990) and Mack (1993) maintain that Agricola had read Valla's work in manuscript form, probably in Ferrara. In fact, Agricola never met Valla, who died in 1458, and he himself had died (in 1485) before Valla's text was first published in 1496. Agricola does not cite Valla in his *De inventione dialectica*, but Alardus does so in his commentary (see Mack 1993a).

209. Both Monfasani (1990) and Mack (1993: 244–250) are extremely critical of the association between Valla's and Agricola's texts, in particular with respect to their alleged skepticism. Whereas, according to Jardine, Agricola would have carried a step forward Valla's mild skepticism and emerging "logic of plausibility" (1988: 38), both interpreters argue – conclusively, in my view – that neither was a skeptic.

210. Jardine herself acknowledges that "where Valla's text is compressed, intellectually taxing and frequently obscure, Agricola's is a down-to-earth instruction manual amply provided with worked examples" (1983: 257).

211. This term is meant to translate both Aristotle's 'endoxa' (*Topics*) and 'eikota' (*Rhetoric*).

212. Agricola never wrote a treatise on judgment, the natural adjunct to his *De inventione dialectica*. He certainly thought that judgment was a simple thing, a matter of a few syllogistic laws, and that the subject had been adequately dealt with by traditional logic. As Monfasani has shown (1976), Agricola's textbook on invention was virtually completed by George of Trebizond *De re dialectica*, a work entirely devoted to judgment, which went through several editions in the 16th century.

213. Latomus in his *Epitome* (4v) describes the structure of Agricola's text as composed of four parts: the places, their use, disposition and the affects, the last two being included in the third book.

214. "Valla and Agricola seek a dialectic rich enough to allow him to explore the relative probability of conflicting dogmas while withholding overall assent" (Jardine 1983: 259).

215. On this issue, I also agree with Mack's analysis (1993).

216. *Orator* 69; *De oratore* II 115, 121, 128; *Brutus* 185.

217. Cicero's terminology is itself an indication of the meaning of the word 'docere': we encounter this term only in the *Brutus*, while in the other texts we have 'probare'.

218. Ong further associates invention with a visual and spatial metaphor, and judgment with the judicial procedure.

219. He also regrets that neither Aristotle, Boethius or Themistius described the use of the places in real argument, but "thought it would be enough to name the places" (I.3; ID 11, DID 18).

220. In the Middle Ages, topics were defined as 'habitudines rerum'.

221. He rejects Boethius' maxims calling them either useless (anyone endowed with common sense would find them), or more suitable to necessary rather than probable arguments, which constitute the vast majority of dialectical arguments (I.29; ID 103–104, DID 175–176).

222. Some Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as for example Maioragio's (1571), still exhibit the three-part distinction among demonstration, opinion and persuasion as related to three different domains.

223. According to Agricola, the major problem of Cicero's treatment of the topics is that he has drawn all his examples from "civil reason" (I.3; ID 10, DID 17).

224. Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* such as Vettori's almost unanimously side with Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of the similarity between dialectic and rhetoric, which Alexander develops at the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*. Alexander stresses that since both disciplines use common principles, they are equally applicable to all the arts.

225. Another passage on skepticism is at II.6; ID 122, DID 207.

226. Mack writes that the passages concerned suggest clearly that "his own [Agricola's] position is more moderate than [the skeptic's]" (1993: 179).

227. Sperone Speroni, the author of a discourse on dialogue which we shall analyze in the next chapter, also identifies the purpose of rhetoric with delighting (*Dialogo della rettorica*, 202–242).

228. In this respect, Agricola closely follows Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

229. This image was used in Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (for example Riccoboni 1587: 181) in order to explain the relationship between 'logos' understood as the "body of proofs" and the other two components of rhetoric: 'pathos' and 'ēthos'. On this issue, see Green (1996: 344–345).

230. It is in this sense that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was read in the Renaissance (Green 1994) – in particular by the commentators – namely as a treatise on the role of audience and of affects in the process of persuasion.

231. Agricola's advice mostly concerns the type of proof (deductive or inductive, direct or indirect) one must choose, depending on the type of argumentative situation. He is not concerned with the distinction between the questioner's and the answerer's respective roles, since he does not specifically associate dialectic with debate.

232. According to Riccoboni, "an argumentation is the deployment ('explanatio') of an argument" (1596: 86).

233. Riccoboni also includes disposition in his definition of invention (1587).

234. He is aware that there are two kinds of interrogation, one where the questioner submits his conclusion for approval right away, and one where the intended conclusion is elicited from the listener after a long interrogation (III.15; ID 284, DID 448).

235. For a thorough analysis of the uses of Medieval notions of the probable, see Byrne (1968).

236. In his *Institutiones oratoriae* (V 10.15–18), Quintilian introduces several degrees of 'credibilia' (in the sense of 'eikota') according to the degree of regularity of those things which correspond to the belief. A very firm probable belief is that parents love their children, because it occurs almost always. A less firm probability (or credible thing) is the belief that he who is well today will be well tomorrow. In the second book of his *Repastinatio*, Valla introduces some distinctions similar to Quintilian's.

237. Halliwell (1986) distinguishes in a similar way between objective and subjective probability by referring to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.

238. Interestingly, a commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* published by the Louvain's Arts Faculty in 1554, and otherwise influenced by Agricola's work, gives a definition of probability which combines the idea of being approved as true by a given audience with the weaker quality of the assent bestowed by the mind upon certain propositions: "Are truthseeming those propositions to which our mind assents in a weak way ('debiliter') and with the fear that the opposite might be true" (379). This definition, the commentator continues, seems to exclude the principles and the conclusions of all demonstrations, which are evident to the intellect. However, even these self-evident scientific propositions may be probable, if it is impossible for us "to acquire certain knowledge about them" (ibid.). In this sense, false propositions may sometimes be more probable than true propositions, if they more easily appear true than true propositions do.

239. Mack recognizes the basic distinction between the sense of "approving" and that of "proving". However, in connection with the latter meaning, he introduces several other words, which in my view should be carefully distinguished. He writes: "In this latter group of senses, the word can be used to mean that something is plausible, credible, or believable, that it is capable of proof or demonstrable, or that it has the appearance of truth, that it is likely or probable in a modern sense" (1993: 169).

240. The converse is not true; namely, not all those who teach practice dialectic: someone who tells a story, or answers a simple question concerning the existence of something, is not a dialectician (II.3; ID 113, DID 196).

241. Related to this point is the classical provision designed to exclude any sophistical use of language: dialectic teaches how to avoid "the snares of deceits and tricks"; if someone uses dialectic to teach this "is not the fault of dialectic but of his wickedness" (II.2; ID 111, DID 191). As Aristotle writes in the *Rhetoric*: "For what makes the sophist is not the faculty but the moral purpose" (I.1.14).

242. Mack writes: "Further it seems that the word 'probabiliter' refers not so much to the type of material used in arguing, as to the manner in which the argument is carried on, and to its intended effect" (1993: 173).

243. A very perceptive and useful discussion on this issue can be found in Mack (1993: 169–177).

244. For Agricola, "the *probable* includes arguments which are certain as well as arguments which are only plausible" (Mack 1993: 173).

245. The function of judgment, which consists in checking that the arguments used correspond to certain rules, is equally relevant to both the *Analytics* and the *Topics*, since the syllogisms described in the *Prior Analytics* are only one particular, and not so interesting, case of a much wider range of possible argument forms.

246. The term also appears in the passage where Agricola tries to show how the place can be used to find out the middle term of an argument, namely how two things agree with each other so that one can be used to prove the other: "I call things *agreeing* ('consentaneae'), things of which one can be said about the other. For example, man and substance agree in animal, because every animal is a substance and every man is a substance. Therefore it follows that these agree among themselves, that is every man is a substance" (I.2; ID 5, DID 7; cit. in Mack 1993: 170).

247. Mack adds "linguistic texture" to the difference between exposition and argumentation: "Here the distinction depends on the presence or absence of connections between the sentences, or the density of the material, and on the vehemence of the exposition" (1993: 192). However, I think that this interpretation fails to capture the thrust of Agricola's distinction.

248. Sometimes, says Agricola, the two can coexist in the same discourse (ibid., ID 158, DID 260). The characterization of an argument as an exposition or as an argumentation depends crucially on what is accepted as a fact or a real causal relationship at any given time.

249. All these forms can equally be used in every kind of discourse, be it rhetorical, philosophical or other. They should also be used creatively according to context and not applied by respecting strict rules (II.19; ID 168 and 170, DID 280, 281).

250. In addition, exposition has to be adapted to the purpose at hand, namely it has to be "such that it is suitably connected to what we want to prove through it"; this requirement is mostly a matter of strategic organization of discourse (see II.23), which Agricola considers a rather difficult task.

251. It is in this very sense, as we shall see in the general conclusion, that contemporary thinkers about dialectic, most notably Chaim Perelman, see themselves as Aristotelians.

252. According to Crescini (1965), what underlies both humanist dialectic and the empirical method is the nominalistic emphasis on the concrete as opposed to the abstract.

253. In his revision of Boethius' translation of Aristotle's *Topics*, Lefèvre d'Etaples preserves Boethius' translation of 'endoxa' with 'probabilia' (Nifo, *In libros Elenchorum*, 1567: 2); however, in another passage (ibid.: 4) he modifies Boethius' translation and uses the term 'probata'.

254. In addition to this recovery, there persisted a scholastic and Thomistic tradition on the *Topics*, which still considered that "what Aristotle transmitted in this science [is a subject] which does not present much difficulty, since of such things a subtle reason ('subtilis ratio') is not required" (Albert the Great, *Topica*, 235b).

255. "What Randall did was to force some investigators to look at some of the Italian Aristotelians, not so much in a new light, but to look at them for the first time" (Schmitt 1983: 106).

256. "Undue emphasis *to* a few issues have dominated the literature up to this point (…). Recent studies (…) offer a welcome broadening of approach" (Schmitt 1983: 104–105).

257. I found only generic references to the qualities of his commentaries in the secondary literature. Jardine writes that "Nifo displays a sensitivity of observation, and a responsiveness to nuances of meaning of which any humanist would be proud" (1981: 269). In another work, she only devotes a few pages of her chapter on Renaissance dialectic to Nifo's commentary on the *Topics* (1988: 195–198). Nor does Risse do justice to the originality of Nifo's commentaries when he writes: "This kind of philosophical commentary renounces every appearance of originality, and examines in an exclusively objective way the doctrines which are handed down by tradition. The scientific spirit of the times, rooted in tradition, attains in such commentaries its true triumphs" (1964a: 19).

258. Schmitt (1983) prefers "Venetian" Aristotelianism, Risse (1964a) substitutes "Alexandrinism" with "pure Aristotelianism", and Kristeller (1960: 164) describes Paduan Averroism as "secular Aristotelianism". On Paduan Aristotelianism, see the two volumes by Nardi (1958), Poppi (1970), Giard (1983–1985 and 1986) and Kessler (1990).

259. For a history of Aristotle's humanist translations in the 15th century, see Garin (1950).

260. His translation was also published as the reference text of the important commentary by Eck in 1516–1517. Nevertheless, it was dismissed by Marco degli Oddi, one of the editors of the Junta edition, as "a paraphrasis" and not a "translation" (Cranz 1976: 126).

261. Nifo himself only slightly changed it in the reference text of the first edition of his commentary of 1540. In 1510, Lefèvre d'Etaples also wrote a brief commentary on the *Topics* (*Logica Aristotelis*, reprinted in 1531). On this author and early French Aristotelianism, see Vasoli (1959) and Rice (1970).

262. According to Cranz (1971), there were only two other translations of the *Topics* in the 16th century, those by Jean de Sponde (1583) and Antonius Demochares (1538). On Périon and Pacius as translators of Aristotle, see Schmitt (1983a). For a bibliography of 16th-century translations and commentaries of Aristotle's logical works, see also Risse (1965).

263. Wallies edited the Greek text in 1898. Ebbesen has edited the Latin translations of both works by Guillelmus Dorotheus published in 1541. In his introduction, he has reconstructed the history of Alexander's commentaries. On Michael of Ephesos' commentary see Ebbesen (1981: 268–285).

264. An annotated English translation from the Greek of the first book of Alexander's commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* by Van Ophuijsen was published in 2001.

265. In his contribution to the *Catalogus translationum et commentariourum* devoted to Renaissance Latin translations of Alexander's work, Cranz writes: "The commentary on the *Topica* was first published in 1541, revised in 1547 and retranslated in 1573. (…) The commentary on the *Sophistici Elenchi* was first published in 1541, revised in 1542, and retranslated in 1546 and 1557" (1960: 81). Cranz's important work provides information and bibliographical references on all those editions and translations. The prefaces to the Greek editions and the Latin translations of Alexander's commentaries on Aristotle's work, including the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, are published and analyzed by Cranz (1958).

266. I shall base myself on the English translation of the first book published in 2001 by Van Ophuijsen and refer to Wallies' canonic Greek edition of 1891.

267. On the definition of 'topos' in the Aristotelian school of late antiquity, see Van Ophuijsen (1994).

268. For a detailed critical analysis of this distinction in Alexander and, more generally, in ancient logic, see Barnes (1990).

269. In a famous article, Burnyeat argues that according to Aristotle enthymemes are not syllogisms but arguments constructed from signs and likelihoods; they are "reasonable" as opposed to "necessary" inferences. Aristotle would thus express "the essential insight that an argument which is formally invalid is not necessarily to be condemned as totally useless or irrational" (1994: 35). Independently of what Aristotle really meant, it would seem that, by stressing their necessary nature, Alexander aims at making enthymemes as well as dialectical syllogisms the instrument of some kind of proof rather than persuasion.

270. On Averroes as a commentator of Aristotle, see Taylor (2005).

271. See Wolfson (1973a and 1973b) for the Medieval history of Averroes' texts. Wolfson, referring to the "twice-revealed" Averroes, writes that "by the fourteenth century Averroes came to be recognized as the commentator *par excellence*, and this reputation he continued to enjoy during the fifteenth century" (1973a: 383).

272. This work has recently been translated into French by Maroun Aouad. The edition contains an important introduction and a rich commentary (Averroes 2002).

273. Bibliographical information on this and other translators of Averroes' commentaries are given in Schmitt (1979: 129).

274. "In the period from 1470 to 1542, there appeared ten complete, or nearly complete, editions of the Latin Aristotle accompanied by the commentaries of Averroes" (Cranz 1976: 117): the Laurentius Canotius edition of 1472–75 lacks the *Organon*, which was first included in the 1483 edition edited by Nicoletto Vernia and reedited in 1495–96 by his student Agostino Nifo. Averroes' commentaries on the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, however, were not included until the first Junta edition of 1550–52, since there were no Medieval translations of them. The Junta edition was further expanded and published in 1562 and again in 1573–76. The number of translations of Averroes' 38 works on Aristotle went from 15 in the Middle Ages to 34 in the Renaissance (Schmitt 1979: 140). On the history of the Junta Edition of Aristotle-Averroes, see Cranz (1976) and Schmitt (1979).

275. In the preface to his translations, Abraham de Balmes claims that in accordance with his Hebrew studies and Talmudic gymnastic, he "prefers truth to a despised eloquence" (cit. in Cranz 1976: 124).

276. On this part of the *Short commentary on logic*, see the article by Hasnawi (2001). At the end of first book of the Middle commentary on the Topics, Averroes discusses at length the meaning of 'topos', by referring to the long history of its interpretation.

277. We may wonder whether it is a mere coincidence that Albert the Great also divides Books II–VII of the *Topics* from Book VIII, devoted to the exercise of dialectic, or whether he knew of Averroes' work.

278. On this important concept, see Wolfson (1973c).

279. "It was however as an adjunct to Aristotle that the Averroist works must primarily be viewed" (Schmitt 1979: 124).

280. Whereas pure Aristotelians were more interested in the relationship among the *Analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, Averroists concentrated on the *Posterior Analytics* and on Aristotle's theory of demonstration (Risse 1964a: 17).

281. See for example Zabarella's negative view of rhetoric and poetics (Edwards 1969). Conversely, the humanist tendency to appropriate Aristotle is especially evident in the early 15th-century free translations by humanists like Leonardo Bruni. On this issue, see the interesting chapter entitled "Leonardo Bruni and the new Aristotle" in Seigel's book (1968: 99–136).

282. On the Academia Veneta, see Maylender (1926–1930, vol. 5: 436–446) and Rose (1969). A pamphlet published in Italian in 1558 and in Latin in 1559 (*Summa librorum, quos in omnibus scientiis (…) in lucem emittat Academia Veneta*) outlines the institution's editorial projects. In the section devoted to logic, almost all the books published deal with dialectic and disputation. Among others, the Academia printed the Italian translation of Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* by Orazio Toscanella, which will be examined in the next chapter.

283. I have found no biographical references to the three "Logic rectors" of the Academy, Francesco Tron, Jacomo Zanna and Francesco Barbarico, who, given their official title, might have been the other authors of the commentary.

284. I quote from the 1557 edition, published in Venice with Boethius' Latin translations revised by Lefèvre d'Etaples.

285. There is a continuous tradition linking the University of Padua to Albert's philosophy, as Edward Mahoney (1980) has documented. Albert's commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* was published in Pavia in 1490 and in Venice in 1494 in a volume entitled *Logica*.

286. For information about his life, see Mahoney (1971).

287. On other aspects of Nifo's important debt to Alexander of Aphrodisias, in particular on the question of the immortality of the soul, see Mahoney (1968 and 1982).

288. Edward Cranz mentions two translations which remained in manuscript form, one by Marcus Musurus (the first four books) as early as 1502 and another complete translation dated 1521 by Bartholomaeus Zambertus (1960: 100–107). The first Latin translation by Guillelmus Dorotheus was published after Nifo's death in Venice in 1541 (Cranz 1960).

289. I found no study on this commentary, except for a few pages by Jardine (1988: 195–198). However, she stresses Nifo's contribution to humanist dialectic which, in my view, is only a very marginal aspect of his commentary. She writes that "the detail of his commentary offers a view of Aristotle's explorations of argument forms which allows for the possibility of systematic study of non-demonstrative inferences" (1988: 197).

290. By contrast, he provided his own translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*; the translation, together with a commentary, first appeared in 1526 as *Commentaria in libris Posteriorum Aristotelis* and went through a great number of editions. Very little has been published on Nifo's logical works; his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* is briefly referred to in Risse (1964a: 226–229) and Crescini (1965: 140–144).

291. On this treatise, see Ashworth (1976) and Jardine (1981).

292. On the different forms of Renaissance commentaries, see Bianchi (2000).

293. Although Alexander's commentaries on the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* (pseudo) had been published earlier in Greek (1513 and 1520), in the Renaissance they were mainly read and exploited through the Latin translations. In order to allow a comparison between Alexander's original works and their Renaissance Latin translations, I will also refer in the footnotes to the canonic Wallies edition of the Greek texts of 1891, together with their English translation of 2001.

294. The 'calculatores' mentioned by Nifo are William of Heytesbury, Richard Ferebrigge and Ralph Strode. They were "imported" to Padua by Gaetan of Thiene, one of Paolo Veneto's students. On the introduction of English logic into Italy, see Courtenay (1982) and Bottin (1983).

295. Nifo also voiced such critiques elsewhere. Ashworth (1976) shows that in his short treatise on dialectic, Nifo repeats humanist charges against Medieval dialectic. And, in the same treatise, by taking aims at the humanist Lorenzo Valla's approach to dialectic, Nifo betrays some interest for it. His own compendium of logic appears as an alternative to humanist logic and also aims at addressing the shortcomings of empty Medieval dialectic. For a more general treatment of this topic, see Jardine (1981).

296. "(…) Dialectic is worth taking trouble even for those whose primary pursuit is philosophy, since it contributes to finding the truth ('tēn euresin tēs alētheias') which is the goal of philosophical study ('thēorias')" (1.8–10).

297. In its anonymous commentary, the Academia Veneta adds another critique to Plato's notion of dialectic: "Plato does not separate dialectic from things, and calls a dialectician a metaphysician, who seizes the reason ('rationem') and not only the rules ('regulas') of each essence, and despises the precepts according to which we ought to question and to answer" (1a).

298. Dialectic "is a method of syllogizing" (2.1).

299. Boethius/Lefèvre's Latin translation of Aristotle's text has "something which has been supposed ('positis quibusdam')" rather than "something which has been conceded ('quibusdam concessis')". Nifo's rephrasing is indicative of the importance of the essential link he establishes between dialectic and disputation.

300. "True and primary" in Aristotle.

301. In the *Topics*, Aristotle does not mention the *about which* of the two types of syllogism. Perhaps in the commentary tradition there is a conflation between the *Topics* and the *Posterior Analytics* (88b30ff.), where it is stated that opinion ('doxa') deals with the contingent and science ('epistēmē') with the necessary, that which cannot be otherwise. Only once in the *Topics* (105b30–31) does Aristotle use the word 'doxa' as linked to dialectic and opposed not to the necessity of demonstration but to the truth of philosophy. For an enlightening study of the use of the concept of 'doxa' in late antiquity see Lévy (1993).

302. Usually the Greek 'logos' is translated as 'oratio' both in Boethius and in the Renaissance. However, in the case of the definition of syllogism, Nifo revises the vulgate translation to "logical connection" ('logica connexio'), because according to him, 'oratio' refers only to "the reasoning which is in the voice" and not to "the reasoning which is in the mind" (3.4). 'Logical connection", instead, refers to both, as does 'ratio', the Greek 'logos' (4.1).

303. Boethius translates 'dia' as "*through* that which has been posited"; Alexander gives the same interpretation when he reports Aristotle's definition: "He [Aristotle] says that it is that utterance in which 'certain things having been posited, something different from these suppositions come about by necessity through ('dia') the suppositions" (7.22–24). Rasarius' translation of 'dia' with "from" is more epistemologically neutral.

304. "What Aristotle means by 'having been posited' is having been obtained and agreed to and conceded ('synchōrēthentōn') – i.e. conceded either by the interlocutor, if the syllogism is addressed to another person, or by the author of the syllogism himself, if he is framing a syllogistic proof on his own" (7.27–8.1).

305. See Van Ophuijsen's commentary on this point in his translation of Alexander's commentary (2001: 143, footnote 133). According to Albert the Great, on the contrary, premises do not need to be conceded, "except, perhaps, in a sophistical inference" (238b).

306. "[It] does not make plain that the conclusion in syllogisms is necessary – for not all syllogisms have a necessary conclusion: in many of them the conclusion is contingent ('endechomenon') (…) – but 'by necessity' makes plain that what is proved ('to deiknymenon') through the premises follows from them by necessity" (13.17–21).

307. Accordingly, Albert defines a 'topos' as a "local relationship of things ('habitudo rerum localis')" (234a): for example, in all imperfect syllogisms (where the major premise is missing) the 'locus' establishes and spells out the relationship between the terms occurring in the minor premise and those occurring in the conclusion.

308. "This is why they call these arts capacities, since what is capable in the strict sense is capable of two opposites. There are those who claim they are called capacities because they put their users in a position of capability and superiority, since the many hold such men in admiration as being more capable than others, as well as their [the arts'] possessors are capable of using them both for good and for evil" (4.29–35).

309. Aristotle does so in the *Rhetoric* (1355a–b).

310. Alexander writes, in Rasarius' translation, that both dialectic and rhetoric have the capacity "to prove opposites ('probationem oppositorum')" (6a). The original Greek does not use the term "prove" and says that they have "the capacity to support ('chrēsthai') both of a pair of opposites" (4.20).

311. "Dialectic and rhetoric are similar in the following three respects: they do not have a specific kind of subject, they prove not from specific ('propriis') but from common things ('communibus'), and they both look indifferently at opposites" (2a).

312. As we have seen, Aristotle briefly makes this point in the *Sophistical Refutations* (170b8–11).

313. "Their inquiry is into things common ('peri koina') to several genera: it is just as much the task of the dialectician to attack by argument about questions of music as of medicine, of geometry, physical science, ethics, logic, and about all that is put forward; and their proofs ('deixeis') are through what is common and approved ('dia koinōn kai te endoxōn'), and not peculiar to the issues" (4.2–6).

314. Nifo follows the Ciceronian and Boethian translation of 'endoxa' as 'probabilia'.

315. In parenthesis, I give Rasarius' Latin translation, published together with Alexander's commentary, when it differs from the vulgate translation of Boethius/Lefèvre.

316. The anonymous translation has "to give reasons ('rationem reddentes')" instead of "to sustain a disputation".

317. *Aristotelis opera* (4r.b–c). For Averroes, dialectic is "like the art of fencing" (*Three Short Commentaries:* 55).

318. "'Dialectic' is derived from 'dialegesthai', and 'dialegesthai' consists in questions and answers" (3.8–9).

319. 'Disserere' as it was used by Cicero – e.g. in 'ars bene disserendi' – meant "to argue" as in the Stoic definition of dialectic. In Renaissance writings on dialectic, the term has become a synonym of 'disputare', to engage in a dialogue.

320. He is well aware of the double role of dialectic, which enables one to discuss every problem either by constructing a positive answer, or by destroying the position held by the adversary.

321. Alexander particularly stresses the role of the questioner: "The task of those who interrogate is to bring those who respond to answer those things which go against the opinion ('praeter opinionem') of everybody" (Rasarius, 5b); the English translation of the Greek reads: "It is the task of questioners to lead their respondents into paradoxical answers ('eis paradoxous apokriseis') as well as into contradiction" (3.20–21).

322. The Scholastics had a very different subdivision for Aristotle's *Topics*. Book VIII was considered as describing the use of dialectic for debate ('dialectica obviativa') or exercise ('dialectica exercitativa'). The heart of dialectic ('dialectica inquisitiva') consisted of Books II–VII, where the different 'topoi' were described. See Wallace (1996).

323. The question of the proper place of the *Topics* within Aristotle's *Organon* was still an active debate in the Renaissance: insofar as they prepare the way for demonstration, they should be placed before the *Posterior Analytics* (as Avicenna did), but insofar as they provide a particular kind of "assent" they should be placed after them (Averroes). In the introduction to his translation of the *Organon*, Charpentier discusses this issue at length, and Zimara briefly summarizes the same issue in his *Tabulae delucidationum* ('disputativi sermones', 108). Neither Alexander nor Nifo give much importance to this question. On Zimara's Aristotelianism, see Antoniaci (1983).

324. Rasarius' translation (11a) of *Topics* 100b18–22) where Aristotle discusses the contrast class of 'endoxa', reads: "Are true and perspicuous those which receive their credibility ('fidem habent') not by another but by themselves. For of those principles which generate science we do not have to ask the reason ('ratio'); and all of them have to be perspicuous in virtue of themselves ('per seipsa')".

325. "Insofar, then, as the dialectician syllogizes from the concessions he gets out of his questions, he syllogizes from what is approved, for answerers grant ('synchorein') and concede ('aprokrinein') what is approved ('endoxa') and persuasive ('pithana')" (3.17–19).

326. I found no instance of a different translation in other works.

327. Boethius' original translation had "the most probable ('maxime probabilibus')" instead of "the most approved", which makes the definition circular.

328. The Greek has 'dokounta' (*Topics* 100b22).

329. On Albert's notion of probability, see Gardeil's lengthy article (1991). On Thomas Aquinas' similar concept of dialectical arguments, see Isaac (1950) and Wallace (1996).

330. "The difference between approved ('endoxon') and true is not that what is approved is false – for some things that are approved are also true – but is in the judging ('epikrisis'). With what is true, judging is on the basis of the fact ('pragma') which this truth has reference to, for when this accords with it, then it is true. But with what is approved, the judging is not based on facts but on the audience ('apo tōn akouontōn') and on their suppositions ('hypolēpsis')" (19.22–27). Averroes does not comment on the notion of 'endoxa' in the Middle Commentary, but in the Short Commentary he takes a similar position: "A dialectical argument is a syllogism composed from widespread, generally accepted premises. Now assent about the widespread, generally accepted premises results from the testimony of all or most people, not from the matter being like that in itself – contrary to the way it is with demonstration" (par. 3: 47).

331. Seifert describes this change of meaning of the word "probable" from Aristotle to the Middle Ages (1978: 78–83).

332. "At the same time, since dialectic has been set down as an art of syllogizing through what is approved ('di' endoxōn'), whereas philosophy is held to deal with what is true and with proofs through this – a different subject from what is approved – he shows that dialectic is also useful for philosophy and towards finding the truth, and that the study before use does not lie outside philosophy" (26.30–27.3).

333. In all Latin translations: 'exercitationem'.

334. The Latin translations differ: 'obviationes' [Boethius], 'colloquia' [Lefèvre], 'congressus' [Rasarius].

335. The Latin translations are as follows: 'Ad eas quae secundum philosophiam sunt disciplinas' (Boethius/Lefèvre), and 'ad philosophiae scientias' (Rasarius). The two translators of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *Topics* in the Junta edition speak of the "theoretical sciences" (Abraham de Balmes) and of the "contemplative disciplines" (Mantino) (5v).

336. Rasarius translates: "Cum enim sit ratio indagatrix, ad principia omnium methodorum viam aperit" (15a). Boethius/Lefèvre translates 'investigativa' (Nifo 7.2).

337. This is all the more remarkable since, as far as I can see, it is highly unlikely that he was familiar with either Alexander's or Averroes' commentaries.

338. The expression 'pros tas kata philosophian epistēmas' includes not only philosophy proper, but also the other sciences, for it can also be translated as "for the sciences which make up philosophy".

339. In his commentary, Averroes even uses the expressions 'populares colloquia' or 'vulgares comparationes' to indicate this kind of "conversation" (5B and 5E).

340. "They will easily be redirected through such utterances ('dia toion tōn logōn') if they have posited something incorrectly" (28.9–10).

341. In many contexts, the term "proof ('probatio')" is the genus which includes "demonstration ('demonstratio')" as a species. Seifert writes concerning this distinction: "In this sense, *probare* as it is used in the Scholastic terminology, indicates a more general and less specific concept than the more technical *demonstrare*" (1978: 79).

342. This is the translation of Boethius/Lefèvre. Rasarius translates: "Quod facultate in utranque partem instructi, facilius in quaque re quid verum sit, quid falsum, perspiciemus" (Alexander 14a).

343. "The third way that Aristotle sets out in which the study of dialectic is beneficial, is in its use for philosophy and scientific discernment ('pros philosophian kai ten kat' epistēmēn gnōsin'), that is towards the finding and the discernment of the truth" (28.24–25).

344. "For those who can discern ('dioran') what is persuasive as contributing to opposite conclusions, and can attack by argument ('epicheirein') on either side of a question, will find out more easily on which side of the contradiction the truth lies, as if they had listened to both parties in a lawsuit" (28.26–30).

345. Averroes writes that exercise "prepares [us] for the method of the sciences, and for pursuing them" (5r).

346. We shall come back to this function of discussion in the chapter devoted to the treatises on the dialogue form.

347. "It is already useful to be well-trained in the puzzles that may be raised with respect to it, for thus one could at once have a comprehensive view ('synoran') of the solutions of these puzzles ('lyseis tōn aporoumenōn')" (29.14–15).

348. "For just as exercises of the body, performed according to the rules of the art, produce fitness for the body, so exercises for the mind in argumentations, performed according to method, produce the fitness which is peculiar to the mind ('tēn oikeian euexian tēn psychē'); and the peculiar fitness of the rational soul ('psychē logikē') is the capacity by which it becomes apt at finding and judging what is true ('euretikē te tou alēthous kai kritikē ginetai')" (27.27–31).

349. Averroes only says that exercise together with the knowledge of methods "disposes us to philosophy itself ('disponit ad hanc philosphiam') in the same way in which exercise in equestrian games creates a disposition to war" (5r.a–b).

350. The Medieval notion of 'habitus' translates the Aristotelian term 'exis', a disposition acquired by repetition (NE 1055b6).

351. Rasarius correctly translates 'epistēmē' with 'scientia' (15.1); Boethius' translation has the more general term 'disciplina' (Nifo, 7.1).

352. Boethius' translation revised by Lefèvre has a more neutral term, namely "to understand them ('de illis transfigere')" (Nifo, 7.1).

353. "It belongs to the dialectician to speak about principles ('peri archōn legein')" (30.19).

354. "And if dialectic is useful with a view to the first things ('pros ta prota') and for the principles of each science ('tas kath' ekastēn epistēmēn archas'), it will be so (…) for philosophy and its principles as well" (30.7–9).

355. "So these principles of science which need to be provided with some foundation ('sustasis') must, because they cannot be proved through what is true and primary, be proved and justified ('deiknysthai kai pistousthai') through what is approved – and syllogizing through this is a distinctive property of dialectic (dialektikēs idion')" (29.28–30).

356. "Another distinctive property of it (…) is to provide a foundation for the point at issue through induction, and principles come to be justified ('to piston (…) periginetai') most of all through induction ('di' epagōgēs')" (30.3–5).

357. "Aristotle himself often when proving ('prostithēsi') things in philosophy, adds 'logically' in the sense of 'dialectically', implying that there are also things in philosophy which require this kind of proof" (30.12–13).

358. "Now it is not possible to offer a geometrical proof ('deiknymi') that any of these are real, but the dialectician will have no difficulty in providing a foundation ('systēsai') for them through things approved ('di' endoxōn')" (30.25–28).

359. "For having obtained that 'surface is the limit of the body', which is approved ('endoxon'), and that 'a limit ('peras') is other than that which it is the limit of', and having provided a foundation ('sustēsas') for this by induction, he deduces that 'surface is other than the body' (…); therefore it has just two dimensions length and width" (30.29–31.4).

360. He divides first principles into three categories: common to all sciences and particular to a science, and of these, common to all conclusions and relative to a particular conclusion (7.2). Dialectic proves these last principles especially.

361. The anonymous commentator of the Academia Veneta speaks of "defending the first principles" (2a), while Averroes speaks of "teaching" them (6r).

362. Alexander writes "both sciences and arts" (32.6–7).

363. "And 'examining' ('exetastikē') stands for 'investigative' ('tētētikē') and such as to produce attack arguments against ('epicheirēmatikē')" (32.10).

364. "The dialectician tries to destroy ('anaskeuazein') what has been posited ('to tithemenon') through what is approved ('di' endoxa')" (564.22–23).

365. It is interesting that in the context of setting out the rules for the questioner, as opposed to the rules for the answerer, Aristotle never raises the issue of the different kinds of dialectic, and in particular never discusses the kind of dialectic which is epistemically significant.

366. "Those who dispute for research and exercise ('zētēsis kai gymnasia')" (548.26–27).

367. In his middle commentary on Book VIII of the *Topics*, Averroes emphasizes the importance of practicing the art in a perfect way: "A dialectical man is someone whose purpose is to accustom himself to exercise and he has to avoid this species [the sophist] as much as possible" (138.4).

368. ‘Skopon’ (Wallies 565.16).

369. The Latin translation by Rasarius is less perspicuous: “The common purpose (‘commune propositum’) resides in the disputations and the dialogues (‘disputationibus et dialogis’) (228.1c).

370. “Those who discuss (‘dialegomenoi’), namely those who have discussions for the sake of exercise (‘gymnazesthai’) proceeding by question and answer ** have a common purpose (‘koinon ergon’)” (565.11–14).

371. For an analysis of the practice of dialogue in the Renaissance, see Wyss Morigi (1950), Marsch (1980), Jones-Davies (1984), Burke (1989) and Girardi (1989) and Bigalli and Canziani (1990), besides the classic study by Hirzel (1895). On the role of rhetoric in the establishment of the dialogic practice, see Gray (1963: 512–513).

372. Cicero’s dialogues *in utramque partem* are the main influence on the Renaissance practice of dialogue: “Salutati invokes the Ciceronian notion of ‘disputatio’ as a free discussion rather than scholastic dispute” (Marsch 1980: 5). On the structure of Roman dialogues, see Grimal (1955). This practice is theorized in several of Cicero’s texts, among others *De oratore* (III 80).

373. A good example of an early Renaissance dialogue still modeled on Medieval patterns is Petrarca’s *Secretum* (1347), analyzed in Marsch (1980). On Medieval dialogues, see Reiss (1969).

374. On Sigonio’s life, see the extensive biography by William McCuaig (1989).

375. For a general introduction to Speroni’s life and thought, see Pozzi (1978), who also published an extensive commentary on the first book of the *Apologia dei dialogi* in the same volume. On Speroni’s involvement with this Academy, see Bruni (1967) and Daniele (1989).

376. Orazio Toscanella also wrote a short essay on dialogue writing published in 1567 (1567a). On the Academia Veneta see Maylender (1930) and Rose (1969).

377. *La poetica di Aristotle volgarizzata e esposta*. In that passage Aristotle only affirms that “we can find no common term to apply to the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and to Socratic dialogues”. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1565) Alessandro Piccolomini took a different position. I will not be concerned here with the *querelle* surrounding the reading of Aristotle’s passage; for a good treatment of this controversy, see the long introduction by Pignatti to the Italian translation of Sigonio’s *De dialogo liber* (1993: 13–65).

378. *Poetica d’Aristotele vulgarizzata e esposta* (cit. in Pignatti 1993: 32–33; English translation mine).

379. This is the case for both Tasso and Sigonio, whose reading of the *Poetics*’ passage is similar to that given by Sigonio’s Paduan adversary, Francesco Robortello (1548).

380. Snyder comments: “Dialogue is a textual strategy for discovery, or, better still, it is a textual strategy for embodying dialectical discovery in discourse; as the textual body of dialectic, dialogue sharply differs from the representation of random conversation or the procedures of public rhetoric” (1989: 23–24).

381. See Armstrong (1976). The importance of oral disputation, as distinguished from scholastic disputation, as a model for written dialogue is highlighted by Leonardo Bruni in his *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum* (1406). This is why Luisa Mulas writes that the written dimension of dialogue manages to reproduce the flavor of an oral disputation: "Whereas on the linguistic side dialogues' *mimesis* is modeled on the norms of writing, it exalts a quality typical of oral communication, as opposed to argumentation, namely its 'agonistic character'" (1982: 257). For a brief history of disputation, see Angelelli (1970).

382. Stefano Guazzo, who writes in the mid-16th century, also affirms: "(…) While [scholars] try to prevail over one another with reasons, they come to the perfect knowledge of things; and this is why people use to say that the dispute is the sieve of truth" (*La civil conversazione*, Venice, 1555: 40–41; cit. in Mulas 1982: 258). On this important text, see the perceptive analysis of Guérin (2006).

383. As we shall see, this defense is all the more credible since, according to the classifications current at the time, dialogues are often "dramatic" as opposed to "narrative", and the author's voice disappears altogether, leaving the burden of discussion to the characters represented. Renaissance authors borrow this distinction from Plato (Rep. 393a–b).

384. On Tasso's theory of the dialogue, see Baldassarri (1970).

385. Interestingly, Sigonio cites neither Lorenzo Valla nor Rudolph Agricola as the sources of his understanding of dialectic. Armstrong (1976), however, links Renaissance dialogue to them – wrongly in my view.

386. Galen's works were very popular in the Renaissance. Sigonio cites especially *On the doctrines of Hyppocrates and Plato*, where Galen defines dialectic (1984). On the Latin translations of this work, see Dürling (1961).

387. Snyder writes: "Sigonio argues for the historical or diachronic nature of all textual understanding, since what is written 'now' in dialogue must be in dynamic continuity with what was written 'then' (…). In short, (…) Sigonio insistently seeks to combine system with history" (1989: 82–83).

388. Referring to Sigonio, Snyder writes: "All the doubting, challenging and probing in the testing process leads in the end to either the ratification or the elimination of an argument through the application of dialectic; the speakers are never left in a state of undecidability or 'aporia' at the end of their 'agon'" (1989: 72). In a book devoted to the changing patterns of Renaissance dialogue, Cox maintains that Sigonio's theory of the dialogue represents a shift away from a Ciceronian model of dialogue towards more didactic and "more authoritative and monological forms of dialogue", which took place in the second half of the 16th century (1992: 67).

389. At the end of the treatise, however, he will distinguish Cicero's dialogues from Plato's, and will define the former as Academic dialogues (52v).

390. This characterization of the practice of dialogue as a "custom ('mos')" is significant: dialogue writing is not simply a technique, but rests upon a peculiar disposition towards knowledge.

391. Following an ancient tradition, he defines lone speculation as a dialogue with oneself (5r).

392. Aristotle explicitly opposes specific and common principles in the *Sophistical Refutations*, among others: "And it is the function of the scientific man to examine the refutation which is peculiar to each science (…) whereas it is the function of the dialecticians to examine a refutation which depends on common principles which do not fall under any art" (170a35–40).

393. In the *Rhetoric* (1355a), Aristotle describes the common features of dialectic and rhetoric in similar terms.

394. This does not correspond to Aristotle's distinction between dialectical and demonstrative syllogism which is based on of the nature of their respective premises. As far as the form of the reasoning is concerned, Aristotle distinguishes demonstrative from dialectical inferences according to whether the syllogism adheres to the strict rules described in the *Prior Analytics*, or to looser structures of topical inference. Both inferences, however, are considered to be necessary.

395. Commenting on the value of the dialogue form for Plato's philosophy, Frede writes: "There is perhaps the assumption that the external dialectical debate between questioner and respondent has the following advantage over the internal dialogue of reason with itself in each of us, namely that it is more likely to be guided by rationality, in fact serves as a test of one's rationality" (1992: 218).

396. Sigonio quotes Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, Cicero's *De officiis*, Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on the *Topics*, and Simplicius' commentaries on *De caelo* and *De anima*.

397. As Aristotle writes in the *Rhetoric*: "Our proofs ('pisteis') and arguments ('logoi') must rest on common principles ('koina'), as we said in the *Topics*, when speaking or conversing with the multitude" (1355a27–29).

398. On the other hand, Tasso claims that Cicero "in disputes is sometimes more similar to the orators than to the dialecticians" (par. 26: 129 of the English translation).

399. Tasso also gives a brief classification of the parts of a dialogue. He distinguishes between the "question", which is the subject of the dispute represented in the dialogue and is necessarily something "of which there is doubt", "sentence" (the argument), the "custom" (characters) and "elocution" (style) (par. 27–28: 129 of the English translation).

400. On Sigonio's theory of imitation in the context of his general theory of the dialogue, see Girardi (1986).

401. On the notion of "probability ('eikos')" as opposed to "sign ('semēion')" in the *Rhetoric*, see Grimaldi (1972: 104–115). In the *Timaeus* (29c), Plato also uses the term 'eikos', in the sense of opinions which are conjectural and only approximate the truth.

402. As the next section will show, however, Sigonio, unlike Cicero, does not confound this kind of probability with either the common premises of dialectical syllogisms (the 'endoxa' of Aristotle's *Topics*) or the "possible means of persuasion" (the 'pithana' of the *Rhetoric*).

403. Halliwell summarizes the difference between poetical and rhetorical probability in Aristotle: "Just as the orator constructs arguments with a view to what his audience will understand and be prepared to believe, so the playwright must order the material of his plot-structure in such a way as to convince his audience of its intelligibility as a sequence of human actions" (1986: 101).

404. The first – and less important – part of contention is 'propositio', the statement of the question, where it is shown "what it is that the people we have introduced dispute about and what is sought" (34v). Here Sigonio follows Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1414a30–36) where the philosopher distinguishes between two parts of arrangement: 'prothesis' (the statement of the subject), and 'pistis' (its proof).

405. Note that refutation is also considered part of proof.

406. On logical 'pisteis' in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* see Grimaldi (1972: 53–68), and Lienhard (1974).

407. 'Fides' means persuasion and is the term used by Cicero to translate the Aristotelian 'pistis'. Sigonio, however, was more respectful of the Aristotelian meaning of 'pistis' which includes the means of persuasion, namely different kinds of proof.

408. According to Sigonio, this is so also when reason could be overwhelmed by desire but in fact it is not (ibid.): any situation in which affects may intervene disqualifies arguments from being theoretical in nature.

409. This characterization parallels Aristotle's distinction between dialectic and rhetoric (see *Rhetoric* 1356a20–33).

410. This definition probably refers to Aristotle's discussion of the difference between science ('epistēmē') and opinion ('doxa') in the *Posterior Analytics*.

411. This is probably what Sigonio means when he writes that "not in all things we seek the same subtlety of truth ('eadem subtilitas veritatis'), but in most cases it will be enough if probable arguments ('probabilia') are given" (40r).

412. In the same vein, Tasso considers mathematics a legitimate subject matter of "speculative" dialogues, since "in each science questions can still be asked" (par. 17–18: 126 of the English translation). He refers, somewhat shakily, to the *Posterior Analytics* at 77a36–39, where Aristotle writes: "If a syllogistic question is the same as a proposition stating one half of a contradiction, and every science has its own premises from which are drawn the conclusions proper to that science, then there must be a scientific question corresponding to the premises from which the conclusions proper to science are drawn".

413. They are based on enthymeme, which is an "imperfect ratiocination" where the major universal premise is missing (39v).

414. I disagree with Snyder who states that Sigonio "shows no hesitation in establishing a basis for distinguishing between probable proof and persuasion in terms of rhetoric itself, rather than on logical and philosophical grounds" (1989: 75), namely in terms of a typical rhetorical criterion, the audience. This ambiguity towards rhetoric would bring Sigonio to give a "reader-oriented definition of dialogue" (1989: 77) which would contradict his claim concerning the pure dialectical nature of dialogue. For my part, I think that the distinction between dialectic and rhetoric in terms of different audiences is only the consequence of their main difference in terms of the origins of the assent they require – the mind as opposed to desire. I have shown that although Sigonio often uses the terminology derived from both Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, the content of his treatise is for the most part derived from the *Topics*.

415. I disagree with Pignatti's Italian translation, where he interprets "ab aliis (…) ab aliis", as "by some premises (…) and by some different premises". Instead, I think that a more accurate translation is "by some people (…) and by other people" because it makes more sense both grammatically and according to the sentence that follows.

416. On the other hand, one may choose never to seek scientific necessity. Referring to Aristotle (NE 1094b14–27), Sigonio writes that in a dialogue "not all things have to be dealt with in the same way" (39v), but according to the subject treated; "in fact we do not seek the same subtlety of truth ('subtilitas veritatis') in all things, but in most cases we are satisfied if probabilities are enunciated ('probabilia proferantur')" (39v). Here, in order to back up his claim, he cites several other authorities such as Plato (Tim. 29c) and Galen (De plac. Hipp. et Plat. IX 9.1–2).

417. Literally: "shakes" or "disturbs" science as established knowledge. With respect to these two profiles, a Sophist is someone who "deceives and desires the fame that derives from the victory in the dispute" (38v).

418. At the beginning of his treatise he had already added a definition which is also reminiscent of Aristotle's aporetic dialectic: "He who is learned in this art is armed with a faculty to discuss in a probable way the two opposite sides of an issue ('in contrarias partes probabiliter disserendi')" (12v).

419. Contemporary studies of the literary form of scientific writings increasingly consider dialogues as less hypocritical forms of writing than treatises and reports, because they do not pretend to be objective representations of the truth. See Myers (1992) for a critical discussion of these positions.

420. She admits, however, that this complete detachment is merely a regulative ideal: "In a written work, such a dialogue is, of course, technically impossible, but, with obvious limitations, a book can transcend its inevitably monological nature by a strenuous effort of the writer's dialogical imagination" (1992: 49).

421. *Sophistical Refutations* (165a38–165b12).

422. Tasso writes that "to state the conclusion first" is reminiscent of the scholastic method (par. 25: 128 of the English translation).

423. Snyder gives an entirely different interpretation of what Sigonio's "inquisitive" dialogues are. He equates them with Cicero's dialogues *in utramque partem* and defines them as "a dialectical combat on nearly equal terms between skilled adversaries" (1989: 70). I do not think that the text bears this interpretation.

424. By contrast, in a 17th-century treatise on the dialogue form (*Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*, 1662), Pallavicino Sforza stresses teaching as the only role of dialogues.

425. Cox devotes several pages of her book to Speroni and stresses the complex nature of his theory of dialogue. She writes: "Speroni provides us with two contrasting conceptions of the function of the literary dialogue (…). The first, based on Speroni's analysis of his own dialogues in the 1530s and 40s, corresponds to what I have been calling the 'dialogical' or 'open' dialogue. The second, sketched in more speculatively, though illustrated by an example, is far closer to the model of 'monological', 'closed' dialogue which, at the time when Speroni was writing the *Apologia*, was asserting itself with such vigour" (1992: 71).

426. According to Snyder, dialogue shares the same conception of truth as rhetoric: dialogue is "a way for searching what is generally, but not always true. In this process truth may perhaps be discovered in dialogue, but it will always necessarily remain a relativized truth" (1989: 100).

427. Rhet. 1355a2–6.

428. While speaking about a new conception of humanist disputation, developed in reaction to philosophical Scholasticism, Armstrong maintains that evidence exists for a "dialectical, probabilist, in a word humane approach to the business of philosophical discussion and argumentation" (1976: 45).

429. As Snyder writes: "If it [the dialogue] were to reveal itself as a product of a single writer (…) its claims to represent the processes of thinking and speaking of two or more autonomous subjects would crumble. (…) Dialogue is a disguise or, rather, a fiction of neutrality for the dialogist" (1989: 112–113).

430. For a Renaissance description of "poetic furor", see Lorenzo Giacomini's *Del furor poetico* of 1587 in Weinberg (1970–1974, vol. 3: 421–444).

431. In other words, as already shown by Aristotle, it can help unmask someone who behaves like a Sophist, namely one who pretends to know but does not know. In this respect, dialectic, like rhetoric for that matter, is always opposed to sophistry as an art of faking and cheating. Lorenzo Valla, echoing Aristotle, writes that "nature itself will seem to have been not a mother but a step-mother, if she devised the power of speech as an aid to crime, a foe to innocence and an enemy of the truth" (*De vero falsoque bono*, 1431–1441; cit. in Marsch 1980: 68).

432. This is of course an oversimplification. Several authors in the 18th and 19th century have dealt with crucial epistemological issues under the rubric of "rhetoric". See for example Campbell (1988, first published in 1776) and Whately (1857).

433. Bird (1960) has argued that Toulmin's notion of inference warrants revives the tradition of the topics.

434. Perelman gives the following definition of "audience": "The set of of those whom the rhetorician intends to influence by his argument" (1997: 27).

435. "Argumentation is not just the expression of an individual assessment, but a contribution to a communication process between persons or groups who exchange ideas with one another in order to resolve a difference of opinion" (2004: 55).

436. "Unlike formal dialectics, our approach to argumentation is not only dialectical but also pragmatic. The pragmatic dimension of our approach manifests itself primarily in the fact that the moves that can be made in a discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion are conceived as verbal activities ("speech acts"), carried out within the framework of a specific form of oral and written language use ("speech event") in a context of interaction that takes place against a specific cultural-historical background." (2004: 52). A useful collection of articles on different aspects of the pragma-dialectical approach is edited by Houtlosser and Van Rees (2006).

437. The only distinction Walton considers to be significant in Aristotle's classification of arguments is the one between demonstrative and dialectical arguments; he declares that 'peirastic' arguments are quite obscure, didactic arguments unimportant, and sophistical ones easily reducible to dialectical arguments used in a specific context (1998: 21).

438. Positive commitments are different from "dark-side" commitments, namely those that one is not necessarily aware of. In "rigorous persuasive dialogues", the commitments included in the commitment store must be consistent, and one does not have the right to retract commitments already made in the course of the discussion, that is to revise the commitment store.

439. Burden of proof and its reverse, presumption of truth, are not logical but methodological concepts: they have to do "not with valid or invalid reasoning, but with probative argumentation in dialectical situations", and they are "procedural or regulative principles of rationality in the conduct of argumentation" (Rescher 1977: 30).

440. It is unclear whether according to Walton increasing the depth of dialogue is positively related to the truthlikeness of dialectical conclusion.

441. Freeman introduces a pragmatic condition of his own: the cost of acquiring more information in order to challenge the acceptable claim must be higher than the expected cost of acting on the basis of the acceptable proposition (2005: 64).

442. Freeman (2005) agrees with Plantinga (1993), among others, that knowledge is warranted rather than true belief. Thus, belief-generating mechanisms which determine the acceptability of premises and presumptions generate warranted beliefs for the person holding them in the following cases only: (1) the belief-generating mechanisms function properly; (2) the environment is proper (free from distortions), (3) its design plan aims at the truth; (4) the mechanism is objectively reliable, in terms of probability.

443. Rescher (1977: 35). According to Rescher, dialectical arguments become a model for a "disputational mode of inquiry", which can be carried out within oneself: "The transition from rational *debate* to rational *inquiry* is justified on the basis of the consideration that the aim of inquiry is to arrive at *defensible* results – i.e. claims that can be adequately supported in rational discussion" (1977: 47).

444. For an interesting analysis of the notion of presumption, see Margalit (1983).

445. The same contrast exists between the rhetorical and the controversy-oriented approaches to scientific arguments and the development of science. Whereas rhetorical approaches to science (Prelli 1989; Gross 1990) stress efficient and legitimate ways of creating conviction and furthering the acceptance of scientific claims, controversy-oriented approaches (Dascal 2008) focus on the epistemic importance of exchanging opposing views on a particular issue, as well as on the rules and modalities of adversarial debates. On the relationship between dialectic and theories of controversy, see Van Eemeren and Garssen (2008).

446. See Stanley (2005) for a a defense of a fallibilist epistemology. Fallibilism shold not be confused with contextualism, according to which the truth of knowledge depends on the context in which it is uttered.

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