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The poem Nego of London, British Library, MS Harley 913, as a satire on medieval disputes concerning philosophy and theology

The poem *Nego* of London, British Library, MS Harley 913,

as a satire on medieval disputes concerning philosophy and theology

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　1330年頃、アイルランドで、フランシスコ会の托鉢修道士によって筆写されたと考えられる大英図書館所蔵の写本Harley 913には、哲学と神学に関する論争の諷刺詩*Nego*が収録されている。24行の短い詩ではあるが、13~14世紀のヨーロッパで巻き起こった神学論争と合わせて読むと、作者が、大学教育の一環として行われていた「討論」の無意味さを揶揄していることがわかる。また、ドミニコ会との対立関係も背景にあることがうかがえる。

キーワード：MS Harley 913（写本 Harley 913）、*Nego*、Middle English（中英語）、Latin（ラテン語）、theology（神学）、philosophy（哲学）、disputation（討論）、university education（大学教育）

London, British Library, MS Harley 913, written in about 1330 or a little later[1] by a single scribe, contains texts in Latin, English and French. The manuscript is a compilation of various genres such as satire, parodies, homilies, meditations, riddles and records of the Franciscan order.[2] The contents point to a highly intellectual compiler–probably, a Franciscan friar. He was not only able to read and write in the three current literary languages of his time (Latin, French and English), but was also well-versed in a variety of intellectual works ancient and medieval. In addition to works on the Mass and the Divine Office,[3] his intellectual interests ranged from *De Excidio Trojae Historia* composed by a Greek priest and rhetorician, Dares Phrygius (c. 2nd to 3rd century A.D.), to *Historia adversus Paganos* by the fifth-century theologian and historian, Paulus Orosius, to the contemporary work *Meditacio de Corpore Christi* by the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham.

Yet another work in the same manuscript, a Middle English poem known as *Nego* (“I deny” in Latin)[4], which will be discussed in this paper, indicates his knowledge of the art of disputation as taught in medieval universities. Disputations, or obligations in medieval logic, are scholastic discussions which used to be an essential part of the university curriculum in the middle ages.[5] Obligations are exchanges between two people and are so called because in this form of scholastic disputation, one party is obligated to respond to a proponent according to a very strict set of rules in playing this logical game. In the obligation (Lat. *obligatio*), the respondent replies affirmatively or negatively to a proposition which is not self-contradictory and is assumed for the sake of argument.[6]

Here is an example of a basic disputation: first, a person called an opponent poses a proposition to a respondent and the latter is bound (or obliged) to respond by taking a certain position on the case put forward by the opponent throughout the dispute. The goal of the opponent is to trap the respondent into a contradiction, whereas the respondent tries to avoid the contradiction by responding to each statement proposed by the opponent within the time of the obligation. The respondent's possible

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1) Fletcher suggests MS Harley 913 was transcribed from 1338 to 1342 or a little later (Fletcher, “The date”, 306–10).

2) Fitzmaurice and Little, *Materials*, pp. 121–6 ; Cartlidge, “Festivity”, 49–52.

3) Patrick O'Neill shows how precisely the author followed the ordinary of the Mass in the parody *Missa de Potatoribus* (“Goliardic and Canonical: Two Treatments of the Mass in Harley 913,” in *A Collection of Essays in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies* (Kansai University, 2011), pp. 69–100).

4) The present title *Nego* is supplied by Angela Lucas in her edition, *Anglo-Irish Poems*.

5) Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 19–23.

6) Longeway, “William”, p. 716.

responses are, typically, *concedo* (“I concede”), *nego* (“I deny”) or *dubito* (“I doubt”). Thus, for example:

> Opponent: I pose to you “Every woman jogs.”
>
> Respondent: I admit and I concede “Every woman jogs.”
>
> Opponent: I propose to you “A certain woman does not jog.”
>
> Respondent: I deny “A certain woman does not jog.”
>
> Opponent: I propose to you “A certain woman jogs.”
>
> Respondent: I concede “A certain woman jogs.”
>
> Opponent: I propose to you “Every woman jogs.”
>
> Respondent: I concede “Every woman jogs.”
>
> Opponent: Let the time of obligation stop!

In the poem *Nego*, the Latin responses often found in disputations appear, such as *dubito* and *concedo* as well as *nego*. Here is the whole text,[7] comprising 24 lines (italics are mine):

(1) Hit nis bot trewth i-wend an afte,°	perverted
Forte sette '*nego*' in eni crafte.°	learning
Trewth so draweth to heuen blisse,	
'*Nego*' doth noght so i-wisse.°	certainly
'Forsake' and 'saue' is thef° in lore,°	evildoer teaching
'*Nego*' is pouer clerk in store.°	in reserve
(2) Whan menne horlith° ham here and thare,°	stagger this way and that
'*Nego*' sauith ham fram care.°	anxiety
Awei with '*Nego*' vte of place,°	inappropriately used
Whose wol haue Goddis grace.	
Who so wol a-yens the deuil fighte	
Ther mai '*nego*' sit arighte.°	properly

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7) The text has been edited by the present writer.

（3）Ak loke that we neuer more

'*Nego*' sette in trewe lore,

For who so can° lite hath sone ido,° knows has soon finished

Anone he draweth to '*nego*'.

Now o° clerk seiith '*Nego*', one

And that other '*Dubit*o',

（4）Seiith an other '*Concedo*',

And an other '*Obligo*',

'Verum Falsum' sette ther-to

Than is al the lore ido.° complete

Thus the fals clerkes of har heuid° off the top of their head

Makith men trewth of ham be reuid.° make men be deprived of the truth

The first stanza begins with a statement: "To give a place to *nego* in any learning is to turn truth backwards. Truth draws people to heavenly bliss, whereas *nego* does not." Then the author says in the sixth line: "*Nego* is a poor clerk in reserve", in other words, the word is kept in reserve to be used only whenever necessary; or the word stands for a clerk of low intelligence; or the word is for a poverty-stricken clerk, since there was no money in studying logic in the middle ages. In the second stanza the author explains when the word is useful: "When people stagger here and there, *nego* saves them from anxiety", that is, when people do not know how to respond in a disputation or when their faith is shaken, they use the word *nego* to escape from their predicament. The poet continues, "Away with *nego*, take it out of the way, whoever wants to have God's grace." He then sharply notes that it is appropriate to apply *nego* only when one fights against the devil. In the third stanza the author gives a warning: "Beware of giving *nego* a place in true teaching anymore, because he who knows little and resorts to *nego* is immediately done for." The final lines of this stanza (lines 17 to 18) and the opening two lines of the last stanza, recall the terminology of disputations: "Now one scholar says *nego* ("I deny") and another *dubito* ("I doubt"); another says *concedo* ("I grant") and another *obligo* ("I oblige").

　　Thus, it is clear that this is a poem meant to criticize scholastic disputations.[8] The word *nego*

8）See, for example, Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, p. 213.

which is mentioned so often in so few lines seems to hold the key to understanding the poem. *Nego* appears no less than nine times, as has just been shown above. The author maintains that scholars should not use that word in obligations; otherwise, truth will slip away and they can not obtain God's grace. He also notes that *nego* saves from worries poor scholars who are not confident in disputations. The reason why poor scholars are tempted to resort to *nego* might be found in an account of an obligations disputation by William of Sherwood (1200/5−1266/71). Unlike William Ockham, Sherwood is not very well known now, but he once enjoyed a reputation so high that Roger Bacon praised him as a finer logician than Albertus Magnus.[9] Sherwood wrote a commentary (now lost) on the Sentences of Peter Lombard and another on Theological Distinctions. His *Introductiones in Logicam* (c. 1250) is among the earliest discussions of obligations now available. Sherwood explains the procedure of an obligations disputation: an opponent begins the disputation by putting forward a proposition which the respondent obligates himself to defend as true if the proposition is false, or as false if the proposition is true, or as of uncertain truth-value.[10] In other words, the respondent is obliged to deny or doubt the proposition whether it is true or false. Therefore if one has no idea how to respond (as in line seven) because one does not know whether the proposition is right or wrong, it is certainly much safer to say *nego* than to give any other response to the proposition. In this way one could evade the anxiety of having to properly consider one's response (as in line eight).

Another word used frequently in the poem is "truth". It is found four times (once in Latin), including occurrences in the rhetorically important opening and closing lines. Both lines express the author's deep concern about how "trewth" has been abused by scholars who put their faith in pedantic, hairsplitting scholastic disputations. This concern reflects the fact that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries obligations were degenerating into disputations for disputation's sake. There were even such outrageous cases of *positio* (postulation) such as "You grant that Socrates is a donkey" or "Socrates is white or you must grant that Socrates is white". In other words, the opponent "obligates" the respondent to grant/concede a proposition even if false, as demanded by the term *obligo* in line 20 of the poem. Elenore Stump would explain this state of affairs as follows:

Scholars have commented that, though there are numerous extant treatises on obligations, there

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9) Longeway, "William", p. 713.

10) Stump, "William", 251.

is apparently no extant record of even a single actual disputation carried out according to the rules of obligations treatises. This fact, the basic rules of obligations, and the requirement that the respondent's original position be false, all strongly suggest that scholastic interest in obligations is not focused on dialectical disputation or the strategies for its conduct.… Rather the material of these treatises seems to have a much stronger affinity with scholastic work on consequences or insolubilia.[11]

Insolubilia or "insolubles" are paradoxes such as "This proposition is false" or "You do not know this proposition". Stump thus observes the strong relationship of scholastic obligations to paradoxes.[12] She also gives examples of thirteenth and fourteenth-century manuscripts containing treatises on obligations paired with treatises on *insolubilia*. From these examples, she concludes that

"… the initial interest in obligations was just in the various paradoxes themselves, apart from any well-developed, broader philosophical concern, so that it is not impossible that discussion of obligations arose at least in part as a result of scholastic interest in fallacies." [13]

Thus, in the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries when dialectic disputations came to be applied to discussions of theology, conservative medieval thinkers saw in this process an irreconcilable conflict between reason and faith.[14] Along with the contemporary interest in fallacies, "double truth" also became a big issue. A group of professors, particularly those of the faculty of arts at the University of Paris, started to direct their attention to Aristotle's metaphysical, cosmological and ethical writings in addition to his logical works which had been part of the university curriculum. These scholars, who were called Latin Averroists, were severely criticized on the grounds that Averroes' doctrines were not compatible with Catholic orthodoxy.[15] As a fervent follower and commentator of Aristotle's works, Averroes (or Abu Walid Mohammed Ibn Roschd; 1126-1198) had defended in his treatise *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* the right of human reason to investigate issues of theology. Although

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11) Stump, "William", 252.

12) Stump, "William", 252-3.

13) Stump, "William", 253.

14) Kretzmann, *The Cambrige History*, p. 522.

15) Leaman, *Averroes*, pp. 169-9.

he meant that there are two different ways, philosophical and theological, to reach a single truth, his work was misunderstood as advocating a theory of "double truth", that is, something which can be true according to reason but may not be so in the realm of religious beliefs, and vice versa.[16] As the antagonism between the two camps intensified, a zealous Latin Averroist, Siger of Brabant (1235–1282), attempted to reconcile them by maintaining that when arguments based on natural reason seem to be almost irrefutable but faith contradicts them, we must accept many things on faith which human reason leads us to deny. Thus, Siger gives preference to the truth of faith even if it conflicts with the conclusion of philosophy.[17] He considered that faith surpasses all human reason.[18] Siger did not use the term "double truth", but his arguments generally implied that the two kinds of truth could co-exist. He had hoped to settle the controversy with this explanation, but unfortunately it only added fuel to the fire with the result that many Averroist doctrines were condemned as heresy by Church authorities in the thirteenth century.[19] An Arabid-Aristotelian concept of "double truth" was one of the doctrines condemned at the University of Paris as a heterodox idea in 1270 and 1277.[20]

The author of the poem *Nego* seems to maintain that if, as Siger argued, "we must accept many things on faith which human reason leads us to deny" "when … faith contradicts them", then there is no merit in scholastic disputations; rather they do harm. Ultimately, what seems to underlie the author's criticism of such disputations is his awareness of the theory of double truth. That is probably why the word "trewth" often appears in his short work. He uses the paradoxical term *Verum Falsum* in line 21, which in the context of disputations is interpreted as "True or False"[21], but which for the author might have had other meanings: "a true falsehood", "a false truth", "the truth is wrong" or "the falsehood is true". These sound self-contradictory but whichever (if any) meaning of this oxymoronic expression we accept, its presence imparts a cynical tone to the poem. The Latin collocation reflects

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16) Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 49; Leaman, *Averroes*, p. 169.

17) Voegelin, *History*, pp. 188–9.

18) Kretzmann, *The Cambridge History*, p. 618.

19) Kretzmann, *The Cambridge History*, p. 88.

20) Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 102. He comments, "…though the condemnation of 1277 was directed principally against Siger and Boethius, it affected, and was meant to affect, some propositions held by Aquinas and certain other theologians. It would appear that the intention was to associate the Christian Aristotelianism of Aquinas with the heterodox Aristotelianism expounded in the faculty of arts, and so to compass the ruin of both. Possibly the hostility of the secular clergy against the regular clergy played some part in the affair. In any case St. Thomas had already made it quite clear that he was no Averroist" (p. 106).

21) Turville-Petre interprets *verum falsum* as "true/false" (*Poems*, p. 133).

contemporary philosophers' belief that there is a truth which is false, that is to say, there are two truths/falsehoods, one true and the other false.

In lines 21 and 22, the author tells the reader to add "Verum Falsum" to "Nego", "Dubito", "Concedo" and "Obligo" which are mentioned in the previous lines; "then", he says, "all the learning is complete." However, it all depends on how one interprets these Latin verbs: "Concedo" means "I grant" when applied to the context of philosophical disputations, but in another context it also means "I depart from" or "I give up". In the same way, the verb "*obligo*" means "I impede" as well as "I make [somebody do something] by agreement under certain conditions" in dialectic obligations. Thus the passage can be interpreted in multiple ways: "I deny false truth; I doubt false truth; I give up false truth; I impede false truth". Incidentally, a similar approach is found in lines 11–12: "Who so wol a-yens the deuil fighte / Ther may 'nego' sit aright", where the author suggests a case in which a word normally inappropriate to "trewe lore" could be judged suitable, presumably because of the opponent's legendary deceit.

It is very curious that '"forsake" and "saue"' in line five appear, not in their Latin equivalent, but in English. The reason may have something to do with word-play. The set of verbs '"forsake" and "saue"' can be interpreted in two ways: (a) "to reject" (a verb) and "except" (a preposition) respectively,[22] where both words (and meanings), if latinized, would be appropriate to dialectic discussion, while also conveying the negative denotations of *nego*; and (b) '"to abandon" and "to save"', where the two words have opposite meanings if both are taken as verbs. Since it is impossible to "abandon" and to "save" at the same time, these words may signify a type of contradiction just like double truth. Note how in line five, 'Forsake' and 'saue' have as their predicative verb the singular "is (thef in lore)", indicating that they are being treated as a single collocation.

To sum up, the author of this Middle English poem may have had in mind the currency of dialectic disputations of a kind which introduce nothing but paradoxes and the Arabid-Aristotelian ideas of Averroes. He deplores this state of affairs, commenting that those dialecticians who believe in double truth not only cannot receive God's grace (line 10) but also that they trick people with their logic and thereby deprive them of the truth (lines 23 to 24). Note how in lines 13–14 the author uses the personal pronoun "we" when he issues the warning "loke that we neuer more '*nego*' sette in trewe lore". Apparently, he himself had studied (and perhaps taught) at an institution of tertiary education

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22) Turville-Petre takes *forsak* as "deny" and *saue* "but, on the contrary" (*Poems*, p. 133).

where such disputations were conducted. Although short, his poem represents the skillful composition of an intellect concerned about contemporary championing of futile scholastic disputations and the theory of the double truth.

As mentioned above, MS Harley 913 contains works relating to the Franciscan order, including one by the Franciscan, John Peckam (c. 1230–1292). Peckham got into a dispute in 1270 with the renowned Dominican theologian, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), over the unity of the substantial form in man. Thereafter conflict between Franciscans and Dominicans theologian, became so intense that the two orders adopted diametrically opposing positions on the issue of the proper use of Aristotelian natural philosophy. The Franciscans preferred the more traditional sources, such as Augustine, whereas the Dominicans, drawing on Aristotle, equated God with the prime mover and final cause. Another Franciscan, Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), who tended to follow the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition. argued (in the words of Marcia L. Colish) that reason needs the assistance of faith in reaching many of the conclusions which for St. Thomas are simply rational truths".[23] Perhaps its author was a Franciscan friar behind whose composition lay the rivalry between the Franciscan and Dominican orders.[24]

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23) Colish, *Medieval Foundations*, p. 204.

24) Cotter remarks that the poem *Nego* "reveals a Franciscan view of study. It is a biting satire that condemns the hair-splitting of scholastic disputes. It is not a criticism of study as such but rather of empty disputations which unlearned clerics engage in to hide their ignorance. Learning is practical, that is, it is meant to serve the truth, and truth draws us to the bliss of heaven" (*The Friars Minor*, p. 121). The present article is a product of research financially supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) for 2015 from the Japanese government.

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