

THE BRANIFF GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

Master's Thesis:

John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*

by

SAMUEL MARTIN KIMZEY

B.A., BLUEFIELD COLLEGE, 2020

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Dallas in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Humanities (Concentration in Classical Education).

FALL 2023

Approved by the Examining Committee:

First Reader: Dr. Michael West

University of Dallas, Braniff Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Second Reader: Dr. Andrew Seeley

Augustine Institute, Boethius Institute for the Advancement of Liberal Education

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
A Note on Translation.....	v
Historical Background and Introduction.....	1
The Cornifician Challenge.....	7
Introduction to John of Salisbury's Defense – the Arts of Eloquence.....	17
The Defense of Grammar	30
The Defense of Logic	45
The Defense of Rhetoric?	71
Eloquence and Virtue.....	77
Conclusion	88
Bibliography	98

Abstract

John of Salisbury wrote the *Metalogicon* as a defense of the liberal arts of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), which he calls the ‘arts of eloquence’. He wrote in response to the so-called ‘Cornificians’, detractors in his own century who criticized the liberal arts as a waste of time and instead proposed their own ‘shortcut’ curriculum. Based on how John of Salisbury presents them in his work, the Cornificians seem to have been concerned with *seeming* wise rather than with developing true wisdom through habitual study and practice of the liberal arts and philosophy. In response, John argues that the liberal arts are necessary as a foundation for the whole of education since the arts build upon the God-given capacities of nature to enable us to make progress in various disciplines with efficient, repeatable, and teachable excellence. The arts of the *trivium*, which he calls the arts of eloquence, are the first of the liberal arts, and John defends their role as necessary for the entirety of education and the pursuit of human knowledge and virtue. *Grammar* is the art of communicating through linguistic signs, *logic* is the art of reasoning, and *rhetoric* is the art of persuasion. John captures an insightful paradox in his account of the trivium. He calls the trivium the ‘arts of eloquence’, while eloquence is usually understood to be the product of the art of rhetoric. Yet he also refers to the whole trivium as ‘logic’ (I.13), and his title (*Metalogicon*, meaning ‘on or about logical studies’) supports this. While this may seem like an apparent contradiction, John recognizes that the distinct art of logic is the central and foundational art of the trivium, since it is the application of the logical method to any subject-matter which yields an art in the first place. Even in the trivium, logic underlies grammar and rhetoric. Yet logic is not ultimately an end in itself, as John argues against some of his critics, but an instrument for the pursuit of knowledge in every discipline and ultimately the knowledge of God. In this ordering, logic then is fulfilled in eloquence, which implies skillful

and winsome rhetoric within a community, rather than merely correct analysis in the intellect.

For John of Salisbury, the arts of eloquence are the foundation of a liberal education which frees the soul to pursue knowledge of all the disciplines and to ultimately know God and yield the gracious fruit of virtuous living.

A Note on Translation

There are only two complete English translations of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* in its entirety: one produced by Daniel McGarry in 1955, and a more recent one produced by J.B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan in 2013. To read a full account of how these translations are derived from the Latin manuscripts, see "The Textual Tradition of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*" by Keats-Rohan.¹ To summarize, McGarry's translation is based upon the Latin manuscript compiled by C.J. Webb in 1929, while Hall and Keats-Rohan published their own Latin manuscript in 1991 (as part of the *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis* series) and then produced their English translation in 2013 based upon their Latin corpus.² Keats-Rohan argues that Webb's Latin manuscript made many errors in compilation and transmission of the text based upon prioritizing certain codices over others that are actually more reliable. The full explanation can be read in the "Textual Tradition" article by Keats-Rohan. Hall and Keats-Rohan set out to correct Webb's errors and to produce the most accurate Latin manuscript, and their subsequent English translation is based upon their Latin manuscript, whereas McGarry's English translation is based upon Webb's text. I have made use of both translations in my research and writing, but I decided to consistently use the Hall and Keats-Rohan translation for quotations for the sake of its accuracy. All quotations in this thesis from the *Metalogicon* are from the Hall and Keats-Rohan translation except in a few cases which are noted.

¹ Katharine S. B. Keats-Rohan, "The Textual Tradition of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*", in *Revue d'histoire des textes*, no. 16 (1986): 229 – 282, doi : 10.3406/rht.1988.1299.

² John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, translated and edited by Daniel D. McGarry (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2015).

John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, translated and edited by J. B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, *Corpus Christianorum in translation*, Vol. 12 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013).

Joannis Saresberiensis, *Metalogicon*, edited by J. B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*, XCVIII (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1991).

Historical Background and Introduction³

John of Salisbury was born at Salisbury (Old Sarum) in England between 1115 and 1120. We know very little of his parents or family. He likely studied at the cathedral school in Old Sarum and later the cathedral school in Exeter. His professional academic education began in earnest when he crossed the channel to France in 1136. For the next twelve years, he engaged himself in studying under the best masters in France.

First, he studied under Peter Abelard – whom John calls the “Peripatetic of Le Pallet” – at Mont Saint Genevieve in the outskirts of Paris. John claims that Abelard taught him the “first rudiments of this art” of logic.⁴ When Peter Abelard departed Paris, John came under the tutelage of Alberic (likely of Rheims) and Robert of Melun, an Englishman.⁵ After two years of studying logic under these masters at Mont Saint Genevieve, John went to Chartres to study under the “grammarian from Conches” (William of Conches) for three years.⁶ Chartres was a

³ The factual information of John of Salisbury’s life is taken from overlapping biographical accounts in several sources: McGarry’s introduction to his translation of the *Metalogicon*, xvi – xviii; Daniel D. McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, *Speculum* 23, no. 4 (1948): 664, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2850447>; Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems in Medieval Philosophy*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Press, 1960), 91 – 92; Clement C. J. Webb, “John of Salisbury”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2, no. 2 (1892): 92 – 93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4543597>; Reginald L. Poole, “The Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres”, *English Historical Review* 35, no. 139 (1920): 321 – 323, 333 – 336, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/551501>; Cary J. Nederman, *John of Salisbury* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 2 – 37; Brian D. FitzGerald, “Medieval Theories of Education”, *Oxford Review of Education* 36, no. 5 (2010): 580, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25753519>; Sister M. Anthony Brown, “John of Salisbury”, *Franciscan Studies* 19, no. 3/4 (1959): 241 – 297, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41974691>; Cédric Geraud and Constant Mews, “John of Salisbury and the Schools of the Twelfth Century” in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, ed. by Christophe Grellard and Frédérique Lachaud (Boston: Brill, 2014, <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/1877186?accountid=7106>), 31 – 62; and from John of Salisbury’s own narration of his studies in *Metalogicon*, I.5 and II.10.

⁴ *Metalogicon*, II.10.

⁵ There is debate over the identity of “Master Alberic” mentioned in *Metalogicon* II.10. John mentions “Alberic of Rheims” in I.5, and Poole and McGarry suggest that it is Alberic of Rheims (Poole, “Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres”, 321; McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 664). Brown is undecided as to whether or not this is the same Alberic as that of Rheims (Brown, “John of Salisbury”, 243).

⁶ *Metalogicon*, II.10.

There is debate over where precisely John studied during these three years, some arguing that he was in Chartres while others arguing that he remained in Paris. Poole argues that John studied in Chartres from 1138 – 1140

vibrant intellectual center of scholastic education in the twelfth century, and this was largely due to the teaching of the medieval Platonist Bernard of Chartres, who headed the cathedral school. While Bernard of Chartres had already died by the time John of Salisbury studied at Chartres, John still imbibed the methods and spirit of Bernard, which he later praises in the *Metalogicon*. Notably, Theodoric (Thierry) of Chartres, who did serve as one of John's schoolmasters, was the brother of Bernard. Also, Gilbert of Poitiers (de la Porree) was chancellor at the Chartres school, which is perhaps where John first met him.⁷

At this point, John's chronology is not the most detailed or precise. He says that after his time studying under William of Conches, he became the disciple of Richard l'Eveque, whom he writes was "a man of well-nigh universal expertise."⁸ John also references studying the quadrivium from Hardewin the German, rhetoric from Theodoric (Thierry) of Chartres, and more rhetoric from Peter Helias. During this time, he also himself taught logic to William of Soissons, as well as befriending Adam of Petit Pont, who was a fellow teacher of logic. Around 1140, John returned to Paris where he studied under Gilbert of Poitiers (de la Porree). Gilbert had previously been the chancellor of the school at Chartres, but was at this point in Paris. However, Gilbert was soon transferred to become the bishop of Poitiers, and John completed his education in Paris with theological studies under Robert Pullen and Simon of Poissy. During the latter years of his studies, John also tutored the children of noblemen to support himself financially.

during the three years he references under William of Conches (Poole, "Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres", 335). Cédric Geraud and Constant Mews admit that we may not be able to establish the answer with certainty, but they think it probable that John did study at Chartres during this time: "The place where John most likely learned about Bernard of Chartres was Chartres itself" ("John of Salisbury and the Schools of the Twelfth Century", 44; see 39 – 46). I have followed these authors in asserting that John was in Chartres during these years 1138 – 1140.

⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.5 and also McGarry's notes on I.5 on p. 21; Webb, "John of Salisbury", 96; Poole, "Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres", 325 – 327.

⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.10.

Summarizing the years of his education that he completed between 1136 – 1148, John writes: “In this way roughly twelve years elapsed during which I was occupied by a variety of studies.”⁹ Through these years of study, he had gained a very thorough grounding in the arts of the trivium and the quadrivium, as well as the theological training requisite for his ordination to the priesthood.

John attended the Council of Rheims in 1148, where he witnessed the controversy between his own favorite teacher Gilbert of Poitiers and the esteemed abbot Bernard of Clairvaux. Gilbert was questioned by the council for supposedly heterodox statements and teachings he had made, and more broadly for his spirit of employing philosophical reason in the pursuit of theology, which Bernard of Clairvaux eschewed. Gilbert was eventually exonerated by the council, and through the interaction at the council, John himself obtained a letter of recommendation from Bernard of Clairvaux to Theobald, the archbishop of Canterbury. Upon this recommendation, John became a diplomatic legate for Archbishop Theobald, traveling to Rome to represent England in the papal court.

In 1154, John became the secretary to Archbishop Theobald, and his role entailed writing correspondence for the archbishop, as well as making many diplomatic trips. When Theobald died in 1161, John continued in this secretarial role for the following archbishop, Thomas Becket. Under the rule of King Henry II in England, John suffered exile along with Thomas Becket. Returning with Becket to England in 1170, John witnessed the murder of Thomas Becket by Henry’s knights in Canterbury Cathedral on December 29, 1170.

⁹ *Metalogicon*, II.10.

In 1176, John of Salisbury was summoned to France to become the bishop of Chartres, where he served until his death on October 25, 1180. He was buried at Lady Chapel of the Abbey of Josaphat de Leves near Chartres. It was perhaps fitting that John of Salisbury, one of the most preeminently educated scholars of his century, should conclude his life's work as bishop in the seat where he had originally studied under the greatest scholastic masters in his day.

John's major philosophical writings were completed during his tenure as secretary to the archbishop of Canterbury. He began his political work, the *Policraticus*, in 1156 and his educational work, the *Metalogicon*, in 1158. In 1159, both of these works were sent to Thomas Becket (then the king's chancellor) to whom they were addressed. John also wrote a *Life of St. Anselm* upon commission from Thomas Becket, as well as a *Life of Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury* after Becket's murder. During his time as legate at the papal court, John had written a *Historia Pontificalis*, which chronicled the activity of the papal court from 1148 – 1152. John also wrote two philosophical poems, both called *Entheticus* (distinguished as *minor* and *major*). The minor is prefaced as an introduction to his *Policraticus*, while the major is a lengthy elegiac-metered poem of 1,852 verses. John also left behind three hundred and twenty-five letters.

Considering John of Salisbury's breadth and depth of education, as well as the quality of his writings, Sister M. Anthony Brown offers this account of him:

He has been called the most widely read man of his age and the most learned classical scholar of the period. We are told that his mind revealed encyclopedic learning and a catholic taste, and that his memory was more richly stored than any but the largest medieval libraries. His works are characterized as examples of taste and style and he is recognized as being the most accomplished Latin stylist of the twelfth century.¹⁰

¹⁰ Brown, "John of Salisbury", 241.

As evidence of this universal learning and vast memory, the *Metalogicon* is full of references and citations from all the best of the classical pagan authors, as well as from the Scriptures and church fathers and doctors. He demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the greatest philosophers and theologians, both ancient and contemporary. His sources include the sacred Scriptures as well as a formidable list of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Porphyry, Cicero, Catullus, Julius Caesar, Sallust, Livy, Terence, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Martial, Seneca, Quintilian, both Plinys, Suetonius, Apuleius, Marcianus Capella, the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Boethius, Cassiodorus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Isidore of Seville, Gregory the Great, Benedict of Nursia, Bede, Alcuin of York, John Scotus Eriugena, Anselm of Canterbury, and many others. He also cites authorities and scholars contemporary to him – Bernard of Chartres, Theodoric (Thierry) of Chartres, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard, Gilbert of Poitiers (de la Porree), Adam of Petit Pont, William of Conches, and others.¹¹

In this comprehensive reading and drawing insights from all his predecessors, John of Salisbury resembles another great philosopher-statesman, Cicero, whom John greatly admired and looked to as a model. Like Cicero, John considered himself an Academic philosopher – a moderate skeptic wary of yielding dominance to one philosophical school, but rather accepting plausible truth from any philosophical school where it can be found. Clement Webb writes:

For this Academic position [John of Salisbury] claims the authority of Cicero, his boundless admiration for whom is eminently characteristic of his intellectual temperament. In Cicero the cultured statesman, the interest of whose leisure lay in an intelligent survey of the various speculations of great thinkers on the world and on life,

¹¹ Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 96; McGarry, “Educational Philosophy in the *Metalogicon*”, 661 – 662.

Laure Hermand-Schebat explores in great detail the extent to which John had actually read the sources by the classical authors. For the classical authors, he did not have access to all their works and could not read Greek. Nevertheless, he had read many of the classical works in Latin (or the Latin translations), and he was familiar with others through excerpts or through later quotations by other authors. Even if he had not read all the classical authors in their entirety or in their original language (i.e., Greek), this need not diminish our appreciation of the extent of John’s learning and integration of so many authors. Laure Hermand-Schebat, “John of Salisbury and Classical Antiquity” in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, 180 – 214.

John of Salisbury recognised a kindred spirit. Like Cicero, he is an eclectic, not attached to any one system, but picking and choosing everywhere what pleases him best...¹²

Taking Cicero as an example, John too sought to glean from all his philosophical predecessors – both pagan and Christian – and to pass on that synthesis of received wisdom.

The *Metalogicon* truly is a synthesis of wisdom received from the tradition John inherited. The title is from Greek, as was fashionable among scholarly works in the twelfth century, and it means ‘about, or on behalf of, logical studies’.¹³ As the title suggests, it is a broad synthesis of many authors in the tradition on the topic of logical studies, but the work is polemical in origin and nature. John writes against an intellectual opponent whom he terms ‘Cornificius’ and his followers ‘Cornificians’. Thus, to truly understand the arguments that John makes in the *Metalogicon*, we must first understand what challenge was being posed by the Cornificians to the received liberal tradition of education.¹⁴ Following this, we can begin to

¹² Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 94. See also Ronald E. Pepin, “John of Salisbury as a Writer” in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, 178; Herman-Schebat, “John of Salisbury and Classical Antiquity”, 195 – 196; David Bloch, “John of Salisbury on Science and Knowledge”, in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, 289; Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 53; and McGarry: “He was an Eclectic, acknowledging truth wherever he found it, refusing to concede it as the exclusive monopoly of any school or age” (“Educational Philosophy in the *Metalogicon*”, 664).

¹³ McGarry, introduction to *Metalogicon*, xxi; McGarry, “Educational Philosophy in the *Metalogicon*”, 660; Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 105 – 106; Pepin, “John of Salisbury as a Writer”, 150.

¹⁴ It is worth including a footnote from the outset here describing my use of the terms *liberal* and *classical* with regard to education and the tradition. I prefer the use of *liberal* to describe the tradition of education begun in the classical world, transmitted through the Christian church, and revived in our own era because it captures the philosophy inherent within this education: the philosophy of liberating the soul through education. I prefer the use of *classical* to make historical descriptions of the classical world or the classical tradition (the tradition of philosophy and writings originating in the classical world of Ancient Greece and Rome). Also, in my conclusion of this thesis, I use the term *classical* in the way it is commonly used today – such as in speaking of the ‘classical school movement’ or ‘classical, Christian education’. To summarize, I use *liberal education* to speak of the kind of education that is unified by a certain philosophy of liberating souls through education (which is classical in origin), but I use *classical* to refer to historical descriptions, whether those of the ancient world or those in our own era in which the name *classical* is applied to the revival of liberal education.

For example, see Jeffrey Lehman, *Socratic Conversation: Bringing the Dialogues of Plato and the Socratic Tradition into Today's Classroom* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021), 218.

explore why and how John of Salisbury defends the arts of eloquence (as he calls them) as the foundation of liberal education.

The Cornifician Challenge

To understand the purpose and arguments of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*, we must first describe what we know about his primary critics and opponents – the 'Cornificians' as he calls them. John himself admits in his prologue that responding to Cornificius is the primary aim of his writing, and that the work takes its shape in response to the Cornifician arguments.

For it was when their activities [of logicians] were being scathingly derided as futile, and my rival with almost daily abuse was challenging me in my modest reluctance, that I finally took up the issue and determined to reply to the calumnies which he had manufactured, in the order in which they came to light. The consequence has been that I have been obliged to follow the order in which he pressed his charges, and in general to say nothing about more important matters until his objections were removed. For it was he who was at pains to make the points concerning which he intended the discourse to advance.¹⁵

Since, by his own admission, the *Metalogicon* is polemical in origin and nature, it behooves us to understand what detractors he was setting himself against.

What then can we learn about this Cornificius and his followers? First, 'Cornificius' was not the opponent's real name. The name is taken from Donatus' *Vita Vergilii*, and Cornificius was the name of a detractor and critic of Vergil and more broadly of the liberal arts.¹⁶ John applies this fictional name to his opponent for the sake of pursuing rational debate, rather than mere mudslinging: "With such thoughts as these in mind, therefore, I have suppressed all indication of his notorious name lest I be felt not so much to have attended to the correcting of

¹⁵ *Metalogicon*, Prologue (page 5).

¹⁶ McGarry, introduction to *Metalogicon*, xxi; also McGarry, footnote on *Metalogicon*, I.1 on p. 11; Giraud and Mews, "John of Salisbury and the Schools of the Twelfth Century", 47 – 48.

error as much as to have besmirched a hated individual.”¹⁷ This Cornificius is also mentioned in the *Entheticus Minor*, the elegiac poem that opens the *Policraticus*, and John seems to be criticizing the same individual in that passage.¹⁸ Outside of the references we find to Cornificius in the writing of John of Salisbury, we know almost nothing about Cornificius or his followers. Cary J. Nederman suggests several historical candidates for Cornificius, including Bishop Arnulf of Lisieux and even Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁹ Nederman and others also suggest that Cornificius may not be a single person, but instead a conjunction of people represented by a single name; Cornificius would thus represent the “several faces” of this challenge to education.²⁰ However, these are speculations at best. The clearest knowledge we have of Cornificius and his followers is the portrait we have of them from John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon*, and what we know about them is based almost entirely upon the description John gives. There is still much we can discern and infer from his account, even if we do not have other historical accounts or evidence to rely upon.

John opens Book I of the *Metalogicon* with six chapters describing the Cornificians and their arguments. He gives a synopsis of his opponent:

Against the peerless gift bestowed by mother nature and by grace, this relentless disputant stirs up an ancient misrepresentation condemned by the judgment of our forebears and, seeking support for his ignorance from every quarter, he hopes that it will redound to his glory if he sees many people like himself, that is, ignorant...²¹

¹⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.2.

¹⁸ Brown, “John of Salisbury”, 283.

¹⁹ Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 66 – 68.

²⁰ Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 66. See also Fitzgerald, “Medieval Theories of Education”, 580; Geraud and Mews, “John of Salisbury and the Schools of the Twelfth Century”, 48; Pepin, “John of Salisbury as a Writer”, 157.

²¹ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

This gift “bestowed by mother nature and by grace” that John describes is the gift of *eloquence*. Cornificius neither possesses it himself, nor does he foster its development in his students and followers. John further writes:

I consequently wonder (not adequately, for that is impossible) about the intention of the man who says that one does not need to study to acquire eloquence and asserts that, like sight to the man who is not blind, and hearing to the man who is not deaf, it comes by the free gift of nature to the man who is not mute, but the more fully if nature’s gift is strengthened by exercise, there being in his view no benefit bestowed by the study of the art of rhetoric, or less at all events than might be demanded in return for the labour of study.²²

John admits that he cannot discern the true motives of Cornificius, but he does present the Cornifician arguments. The comparison to the bodily senses elucidates his meaning: just as sight or hearing do not need to be cultivated by training but merely arise as gifts of nature that grow through exercise, so eloquence and other kinds of knowledge need not be taught and practiced rigorously through the liberal tradition of education. Those gifted to possess such eloquence by nature need not waste time practicing under schoolmasters, and those to whom nature denies eloquence are wasting their time learning a skill they can never master. Cornificius argued that the study of eloquence is at best unnecessary, and at worst futile: “If nature supplies it unbidden or voluntarily, hard work and dedication are superfluous; but if she denies it, they are ineffective and futile.”²³ This view is perhaps equivalent to some opinions today that certain people simply have or do not have certain skillsets, such as mathematics or music, and that development of those talents and disciplines is primarily a gift of nature, rather than a result of learning and study.

²² *Metalogicon*, I.1.

²³ *Metalogicon*, I.6. See also Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 98 – 99; McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 659 – 660.

John certainly does not agree with this judgment, and he will critique it later on. His assessment of the Cornificians is that they are concerned with *seeming* wise rather than developing true wisdom through habitual study and practice. He writes that Cornificius “has a flock of mindless followers, made up especially of persons who, being inert and idle, seek the appearance rather than the reality of wisdom.”²⁴ Cornificius “fattens up his own audience with fables and other fatuities and, if what he promises is true, he will make those audiences eloquent without benefit of theory and philosophers without effort, taking a short cut. What he now passes on to his pupils is what he himself received from his teachers, and he instructs them as he himself was instructed.”²⁵ It is clear here that John is not merely criticizing one eccentric heckler, but an individual who represented a detracting movement within European education in that century. Cornificius had received this kind of instruction and philosophy from his own masters, and he was passing it on to his pupils. John describes the Cornifician movement within education:

For everyone was obsessed by his own inventions or those of his teachers. But even this was not allowed for long, since the members of the audiences themselves within a short space of time were bundled on by the pressure of their fellows in error and, spurning what they had heard from their teachers, themselves hammered out and established new schools. Then, all of a sudden, they turned into consummate philosophers, the pupil who had arrive illiterate generally not dallying longer in the class than the short space of time it takes little chicks to grow feathers. Having thus spent an equal amount of time in class or nest respectively, the newly fledged masters and the newly fledged chicks alike flew away.²⁶

John is highlighting a growing movement represented by Cornificius that saw no value in the classical emphasis on developing eloquence or in instruction in the liberal arts. Instead, the Cornificians were peddling their own brand of education with their promised “shortcut”, which

²⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.2.

²⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.3.

²⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.3.

John claims is woefully ignorant. John continues his description: “Novelty was introduced everywhere, with innovations in grammar, changes in dialectic, rhetoric declared irrelevant, and the rules of previous teachers expelled from the very sanctuary of philosophy to make way for the promulgation of new systems throughout the *quadrivium*.”²⁷ The Cornificians abridged, altered, or discarded the teaching of the traditional liberal arts (the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*), which were historically considered the foundation of a liberal education.²⁸ Later in the work, John comments:

Subsequently, however, [popular] opinion did damage to the truth, and people preferred the semblance of philosophy to the reality, and the professors of the arts guaranteed their listeners that they would put across the whole of philosophy in less than three or even two years ... From that time on less time and care have been expended in the study of grammar. The result has been that those who profess all the arts, both liberal and practical, do not even know the first of them, without which it is pointless for one to move on to the rest.²⁹

While eschewing real study and practice of the liberal arts, these Cornificians considered themselves to be practiced in the liberal arts and sciences merely by professing them. John summarily calls the Cornificians “overnight philosophers” who “along with Cornificius, have nothing but contempt not merely for our *trivium* but also for our *quadrivium* in its every aspect.”³⁰

According to John, the Cornificians had substituted alternative goals of education. John writes that the Cornificians prioritized financial gain as the end of education: “[It] is wealth alone

²⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.3.

²⁸ See also McGarry: “According to John of Salisbury, a killing blight of reaction against sound and thorough learning, which had already attacked education in France, was threatening to spell death for the promising blossoms of scholarship in her cultural satellite, England. Here a group, dubbed by John ‘Cornificians’, had inaugurated a skeleton liberal arts curriculum, wherein grammar and logic, trimmed to the vanishing point, were skimmed through in hasty survey fashion. While the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric bore the brunt of their attacks, they likewise impugned the quadrivium and the liberal arts in general, with the whole body of ‘philosophy’ or organized learning” (“Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 659 – 660).

²⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.24.

³⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.4.

which they consider the fruit of wisdom.”³¹ He describes that they have substituted for the historical quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy) their own so-called ‘quadrivium’ of lucrative pursuits – service to the church, medicine, court positions, and mercantile business.³² Daniel McGarry summarizes: “They would accordingly reduce attention to grammar, rhetoric, logic, and the other liberal arts almost to the point of extinction, and substitute accelerated accreditation leading to undelayed entrance upon lucrative occupations. The Cornifician theory had evidently been gaining considerable ground.”³³ The liberal arts, which claim to teach knowledge for its own sake and to free the human soul, gave way before these more lucrative, utilitarian studies. Rather than seeing the liberal arts as the proper preparation for any advanced learning within other disciplines, the Cornificians abridged or discarded them to prioritize skillsets and disciplines they believed to be more immediately productive and profitable.

To give the Cornificians a fair presentation, we must attempt to understand their position sympathetically, even if we come to see its problems and dangers which John rebukes. In the Cornifician perspective, it seems the primary goal of education must be to equip students to serve in society and to better themselves in such occupations as the church, medicine, court service, or trade. Excessive time spent studying the liberal arts and philosophy delays students’ entrance into the arena of the ‘real world’ where they will spend most of their lives anyway. And shouldn’t the goals and form of education be crafted to the students’ life trajectories, rather than

³¹ *Metalogicon*, I.4.

³² *Metalogicon*, I.4.

³³ McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 659 – 660. See also Cédric Geraud and Constant Mews: “Above all, these Cornificians elevate speed and *ingenium* as a privileged source of knowledge. In contrast to the educational cursus followed by John, they advocate an accelerated path of study allowing two or three years for encompassing the whole of philosophy. Worse, these self-professed ‘philosophers’ advocate worldly success and take riches alone to be the fruit of wisdom” (“John of Salisbury and the Schools of the Twelfth Century”, 48).

making all students go through a rigorous curriculum of liberal arts and philosophy that takes considerably longer than the abridged curriculum the Cornificians were proposing? This seems to have been what motivated the Cornificians in the twelfth century, even as it has continued to motivate many would-be educational reformers in every century since.

Yet, in the Cornifician educational re-make, John charges Cornificius with being self-taught and unwilling to submit himself to the masters, both the living teachers and the greatest authors of the past. On the contrary, John of Salisbury had studied under the greatest masters of his own century (many of whom the Cornificians criticized), and he had drunk deeply from the best authors of the classical and Christian tradition, as evidenced in his frequent quotations and reliance upon those authors. He writes, “The detraction by [the Cornificians] I bear with equanimity, acknowledging that I had as teachers a number of the aforementioned men, and likewise heard lectures from the pupils of others of them, and learned from them the little that I know; for I, unlike Cornificius, am not self-taught...”³⁴ This may seem at first glance like a personal attack on Cornificius. However, the larger criticism John makes is that the entire Cornifician enterprise of ‘remodeling’ education is essentially an exercise in rejecting the traditions and the rigor they call for, and instead substituting a ‘shortcut’ to knowledge. This ‘shortcut’ is in name only, for it yields the appearance of wisdom without the true substance of the well-educated. The fact that Cornificius and his followers are poorly educated in the liberal arts is not just grounds for personal embarrassment; more significantly, it is indicative that their educational system is promising the impossible – wisdom, yet with none of the labor and time required to cultivate it through study.

³⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.5.

Before looking at John's defense of the liberal arts, let us make clear a few more points of the Cornifician arguments and teaching. We have already seen that they attributed eloquence to the gift of nature alone, rather than seeing it as a habit of the soul that can be cultivated through education, study, and practice. However, they also simplistically alleged that eloquence serves no purpose for philosophy. John recounts the Cornifician perspective: "Finally, eloquence has nothing whatever to do with philosophy ... precepts imparting eloquence do not confer wisdom, or even the love of wisdom, and very often are of no use in attaining it. For it is not words but objects that are sought by philosophy, or rather by the end of philosophy, which is wisdom."³⁵ In their view, eloquence does not necessarily confer wisdom, so it is not necessary. John later adds:

The house of Cornificius, however, brings no charges against eloquence, which is necessary to all and commended by all, but argues that the skills of those who promise eloquence are useless. Its views are thus designed ... to destroy logic. For logic, they assert, is the deceitful profession of windbags, one which has wasted the talents of many and not only blocked the way to the study of philosophy but prevented all good enterprises from having a rational outcome.³⁶

As will be explained in the next section, John here likely uses the term "logic" to refer to the whole trivium (the arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric). Rather than seeing the liberal arts, and particularly the arts of the trivium, as the foundation for philosophy, the Cornificians saw them as extraneous, unnecessary, and even as an impediment. They may have seen the cultivation of speech as a kind of covering for the substance of facts (hence the "not words but objects that are sought" in the above quotation). The kind of covering that speech provides can be distracting, at best, and manipulative, at worst, and thus is not to be pursued.

While simultaneously rejecting or abridging the study of the liberal arts, John of Salisbury presents the Cornificians as having an over-emphasis on logic for its own sake in a

³⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.6.

³⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.9.

corrupted way.³⁷ This rendered them over-loquacious disputants who “at all times and in all places debate equally about all things...”.³⁸ John already alleged that the Cornificians thought they possessed the arts merely by naming them, and he wants to show that they are not really masters of the liberal arts: “[My intention is] to make clear that logic is not possessed by those persons who bellow at the cross-roads and teach in the highways, spending on this subject, which is all that they profess, not a mere ten or twenty years, but the whole of their lives.”³⁹ John argues that the Cornificians have no ability to differentiate between what should be disputed and what should not be (i.e., what is evident), between what has magnitude and what is minor or insignificant. They cannot discern and distinguish. Rather, they think logic is just quoting the opinions of everyone: “They list the opinions of everybody, and in their poverty of judgment record and recall what has been spoken or written down by even the most worthless persons. They advance every proposition, because they do not know how to prefer the better ones.”⁴⁰ The Cornificians claim to be teachers of logic, but they are distracted with disputing useless questions and are “as far removed from the subject-matter of the logical craftsman as they are from his

³⁷ At this point, I should briefly address one question of interpreting the *Metalogicon*. It is unclear whether John is referring to the Cornificians alone throughout his work or to other scholastic teachers of logic, or to a combination of both. His criticisms (regarding logic) can be grouped into two broad groupings: 1) against those who ignore the importance of logic and think it worthless – which is the acknowledged Cornifician position from the outset of the work; and 2) against those who elevate logic for its own sake and become lost in useless questions and excessive disputations (which in II.10 he acknowledges is a fault of some of his contemporary scholars and teachers). It is not clear in the *Metalogicon* if John intends all these criticisms to refer to the Cornificians, or if the second group of criticisms is aimed at non-Cornifician teachers of his own era (“those persons who bellow at the cross-roads and teach in the highways, spending on this subject, which is all they profess, not a mere ten or twenty years, but the whole of their lives”, II.7). Throughout the *Metalogicon*, John certainly weaves back and forth between the two without much distinction or clarification. Several scholars suggest different opinions but do not present a definitive answer – see Brown, “John of Salisbury”, 290 – 291; Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 97 – 98; McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 674; FitzGerald, “Medieval Theories of Education”, 581; Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 74. I have chosen to treat John’s arguments against his opponents interchangeably without trying to sort out if some arguments are made against the Cornificians and others are made against an alternative group of opponents. In any case, John’s position against them is unified and balanced, regardless of which extreme his opponents take.

³⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.8.

³⁹ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

⁴⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

function.”⁴¹ We will look much more extensively into John’s defense of logic, but one of the key errors of the Cornificians seems to have been isolating logic from the other liberal arts and disciplines of knowledge.

Related to their misplaced emphasis and misunderstanding of logic, the Cornificians were also failing to treat “what is introductory in a suitable manner.”⁴² The truly educated teacher understands what is properly introductory and what is more complex. The Cornificians, however, evidenced their lack of true education and understanding by their failure to do this. Referencing the gospel of Matthew and the poet Horace, John describes their errors thus: “First the fact that they place insupportable burdens on the shoulders of their young listeners. Then the fact that in their teaching they abandon the proper sequence and take the very greatest care that each individual matter shall not remain in the place to which it has fitly been assigned.”⁴³ Their shallowness and emptiness was clear in their failure to grasp the whole of a body of knowledge and to rightly designate and divide its introductory matter and its more complex matter.

To summarize, the Cornificians were a movement of detractors who argued that eloquence and the products of the other liberal arts were gifts of nature, and thus were not to be attained through diligent study and training. In the words of Clement Webb, they “combined real ignorance with great pretentiousness, and despised accurate study of the elements, yet never proceeded to a real grasp of that for which such study is the only preparation...”⁴⁴ They

⁴¹ *Metalogicon*, II.15.

⁴² *Metalogicon*, II.20; the quotation here is actually McGarry’s rendering of this line. Hall and Keats-Rohan have the same passage as: “These remarks ought, I think, to be sufficient to show that Porphyry is unreliably dealt with, *and beginners unhelpfully treated...*” (emphasis mine).

⁴³ *Metalogicon*, II.19. McGarry indicates on p. 118 of his translation that the Horace reference is from *Ars Poetica*, 92.

⁴⁴ Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 98. See also Wendy Turgeon: “‘Cornificius’ became the 12th century symbol of the poorly trained scholar who tended to talk and argue about more than he actually knew. Cornificians always supported the importance of logic and rhetoric but, it was claimed, they did not fully understand these subjects and wanted only the quick ability to seem reasonable and sway the common (or rich) man.” Wendy

proposed a shortcut to philosophy and wisdom, which was more about seeming wise than about developing wisdom through study. John of Salisbury argues throughout that they do not possess what they claim to teach, and that their educational model seeks to perpetuate its own lack of learning. And ironically, while discrediting traditional Aristotelian logic as the method of the sciences, they seem to have had an excessive interest in logic for its own sake, rather than as an instrument of pursuing truth. This had rendered them sophistic teachers who were skilled at disputation yet without any true discernment. Interestingly, Clement Webb compares the Cornificians to the sophists of classical Greece who presumed to be wise but were not truly interested in knowledge and virtue; the comparison is insightful.⁴⁵ Like his forbears – Socrates and Plato – John of Salisbury in the *Metalogicon* takes up the perennial task of confronting the sophists of his own generation and defending true education.

Introduction to John of Salisbury’s Defense – The Arts of Eloquence

John takes the first six chapters of Book I to set the stage, so to speak, for his arguments by first presenting the challenges of the Cornificians. In the seventh chapter, he turns to his own primary concern, which is defending the arts of eloquence. The Cornificians have attacked eloquence as a useless study. John first must define *eloquence*:

For eloquence is the faculty of giving apt expression to thoughts which the mind desires to be set forth. What is hidden in the heart is somehow brought forth into the light and presented to the public by eloquence. The eloquent man is not anyone and everyone who speaks, or who somehow or other expresses what he wishes to express, but only the one who aptly sets forth the judgment of his mind.⁴⁶

Turgeon, “John of Salisbury: An Argument for Philosophy within Education”, *Analytic Teaching* 18, no. 2 (1999): 46, <https://journal.viterbo.edu/index.php/at/article/view/682/466> (accessed August 18, 2023).

⁴⁵ Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 98.

⁴⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.7. McGarry’s translation of the same passage is also helpful: “What is eloquence but the faculty of appropriate and effective verbal expression? As such, it brings to light and in a way publishes what would otherwise be hidden in the inner recesses of man’s consciousness. Not everyone who speaks, nor even one who says what he wants to in some fashion, is eloquent. He alone is eloquent who fittingly and efficaciously

To put John's words into a succinct definition, we could say that *eloquence* is the faculty of appropriate and effective verbal expression which reveals the inner reasoning of the mind and allows a man to express himself as he intends. John also describes what eloquence accomplishes in the one who studies it: "That man, then, who possesses facility in aptly expressing his thoughts in words is an eloquent man. And the faculty of doing this is very rightly called eloquence, than which I cannot readily see anything more beneficial when put to use, more effective in the gaining of wealth, more reliable in the pursuit of influence, and more apt to the winning of glory."⁴⁷ John will spend the rest of the *Metalogicon* making the case for teaching and studying the arts of eloquence, but here he already gives a premature critique of the Cornificians by taking a page from their own arguments. If they seek an education for *utility*, what could be more *useful* than to study and master eloquence? The goals of "the gaining of wealth", "the pursuit of influence", and "the winning of glory", which John has already charged the Cornificians with pursuing as their highest end, are unattainable apart from eloquence. John directly challenges Cornificius: "Consequently, the man who despises so great a boon [as eloquence] is most clearly mad; the man, however, who cherishes – or rather pretends that he cherishes – but does not cultivate this blessing is all too negligent and comes very close to madness."⁴⁸ The Cornificians are guilty on both counts – of despising eloquence, as well as claiming an eloquence and education which they have not really cultivated and do not possess.

expresses himself as he intends." Hall indicates on p. 138 of his translation that John's definition of eloquence here is borrowed from Cicero's *De Oratore*, I.4.15

⁴⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.7.

⁴⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.7.

John is not merely interested, though, in refuting the Cornificians. He wants to show that the arts of eloquence are the foundation of a liberal education. In the very opening of the first chapter of Book I, he writes:

It is universally agreed among those who are truly wise that nature, the most benign parent and governor of all things in order most due, raised up man among the rest of her animate creatures by the privilege of reason and marked him out by the use of speech, the intention of her gracious concern and considered ordinance being that man, weighed down and dragged to the depths as he was by the burden of his impure nature and the sluggishness of his body's mass, might thus be lifted up on wings and ascend to the heights and ... outstrip all other creatures in gaining the prize of true blessedness.⁴⁹

As John writes, mankind is defined by *reason*, which is expressed through *speech*. He says that these are distinctive to man *as man*, and that they are the “wings” which allow him to rise above the other animals and gain the “prize of true blessedness.” Eloquence, which John has defined as the faculty of appropriate and effective verbal expression, is foundational because it is the perfection of man's reason and speech. John calls eloquence the “delightful and fruitful union of reason and speech.”⁵⁰ Thus, eloquence is the perfection of that which is distinctive to man as man and which liberates him by fulfilling his nature.

Before looking at the arts of eloquence, we must first examine John's explication of the relationship between *nature* and *art*. The Cornificians had charged that there is no art of eloquence, but that it is merely a spontaneous gift of nature. In this view, there is a disjunction between nature and art, and the Cornificians correspondingly downplayed or scorned all of the liberal arts. John, however, sets out to present a proper understanding of the real relationship between nature and art.

⁴⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

⁵⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

What is *nature*? While he uses very affectionate and reverent language to describe nature (“nature, the most benign parent and governor of all things in order most due”), John does not treat nature as divine. He recognizes that the “most certain nature of all things is the divine will , since it is from this source that created nature flows, and in whatever it does it has God as the author of the deed...”.⁵¹ God is the first reality, and through creation His will establishes the created natures that all things possess. With this clarified, John defines nature: “Thus, the force implanted in each thing at its origin as the source of its action or aptitude is indeed nature, but created nature.”⁵² John clarifies that nature does not refer to the *privations* of nature that we witness (“in which nature degenerates from its author”), due to the corruption of sin in the world.⁵³ Rather, the dynamic, preserving, and enabling force “implanted in each thing at its origin” that functions as the “source of its action or aptitude” is its *nature*. Every created thing has a nature which defines its potencies (which, in turn, define its activities) and its mode of growth, flourishing, and perfection. Each thing is limited and specifically defined by its nature.

John goes on, though, to show that nature is not alone. He writes, “So then, let that generative force implanted in things at their origin be potent and efficacious; assuredly, just as it may be marred or impeded by imperfection, so may it be restored or aided by support of various kinds ... Care, therefore, is not superfluous but is an aid to nature, making easier that which might possibly be done somehow or other.”⁵⁴ John cites the example of lameness in animals that have the natural aptitude for locomotion. In such an example, taking care to avoid accidents and injury that would lead to lameness is obviously an example of care assisting nature and making easier something (i.e., walking) which was already possible through the creature’s nature. John

⁵¹ *Metalogicon*, I.8.

⁵² *Metalogicon*, I.8.

⁵³ *Metalogicon*, I.8.

⁵⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.8.

expounds further to show that he is talking about all natural capacities, including knowledge and habits, not merely bodily capabilities:

If it were necessary to employ further examples, all of them would make clear that diligence is not in vain when nature is rather dull, and that there can never be too much care, as though it were superfluous, even if nature be more kindly disposed to some enterprise. Even though nature generally has the upper hand, with some tendency in the one direction or the other, still, just as it is easily damaged by neglect, so it very often becomes tractable when cared for and cultivated ... Nature is of avail, certainly, but either never or only rarely to the extent of gaining the heights without study; for nothing is so strong or so robust as not to be sapped by neglect, nothing so erect as not to be cast down by it; just as on the other hand a level of attainment, no matter how lowly, is raised and maintained by care and diligence. Therefore, if nature is propitious, she ought not to be disparaged but cultivated so as to be of ready assistance, but, if adverse, she requires cultivation all the more diligently...⁵⁵

John's insight here cuts to the heart of the age-old debate of supposed 'nature versus nurture' and moves past its apparent disjunction. He recognizes that every created being has a natural capacity within which it grows and acts, but the expression of its activity within that capacity is determined largely by diligent attention, cultivation, and care (or the lack of these). He presents the paradox beautifully: no natural endowment is so robust that it should not be attended to carefully, and no amount of diligent attention is wasted, even if the natural endowment in a particular individual seems meagre at best.⁵⁶

Having established nature, John explains *art*. He provides a beautiful definition of art:

Art is a system which compendiously facilitates the doing of things which are by their nature possible. No system affords or promises the achievement of things which are impossible, but offers a short cut to things which are possible instead of what one may term the roundabout route taken by nature, and, if I may so put it, engenders the control

⁵⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.8.

⁵⁶ Sigbjørn Sønnesyn summarizes well: "John argues that human nature, although bountifully endowed with potential, is in need of both God's grace and human endeavour in order to realize this potential ... It is through its nature that a thing of any kind acquires the aptitudes and capabilities that belong to its kind, and it is through its nature that it is impelled to act according to these aptitudes and powers. But nature is not conceived along the mechanistic lines more familiar to the modern mind, and its causality is certainly not restricted to efficient causation alone. Nature needed to be developed, and directed towards its proper end." Sigbjørn Sønnesyn, "*Qui Recta Quae Docet Sequitur, Uere Philosophus Est: The Ethics of John of Salisbury*", in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, 316.

of things which are difficult. The Greeks in consequence call it a *method* (*methodon*), as being a compendious system to avoid the protracted and winding circuit followed by nature, to the end that what ought to be done may be done more correctly and more easily. For nature, despite her vigour, does not attain to the facility of art unless she be instructed; nevertheless she is the parent of all the arts and grants them reason as their nurse so that they may make progress and reach perfection (emphasis mine).⁵⁷

What John (and the classical tradition he relies upon) refers to as ‘art’ might be helpfully expressed in our modern culture as *craft* or *convention* – practices, rules, or habits that do not exist immediately within nature, but are developed from it to expedite certain natural goods. An art requires reason’s application to nature for the purpose of making some product or doing some task. For example, the art of *navigation* builds upon nature’s gift of sensation and locomotion in rational animals like us but develops a rational method to avoid the “protracted and winding circuit followed by nature” so we can consistently, predictably, and efficiently arrive where we intend to go.

Art is not contrary to nature as if the two were opposed to one another. John even calls nature the “parent of all the arts” in the above passage. There is no art that does not arise in some way from nature’s predispositions within us. Nevertheless, an art moves beyond the simplicity of nature, enabling us to do what we could not do without that art (or at least what would be very rare and difficult without it). John writes, “For it is folly to labour and to contend with protracted difficulties in a matter which can otherwise be disposed of with ease and rapidity. Such is generally the fate of the negligent, and of those who regard the wasting of time as of no consequence. The theoretical knowledge of all good enterprises is therefore to be welcomed and cultivated ...”.⁵⁸ Human reason develops arts to maximize efficiency (so we do not waste time doing things that could be done more simply, quickly, and effectively), to develop excellence (so

⁵⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.11.

⁵⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.10.

that we can make and do things in the *best* way possible), and to preserve the accumulation of human knowledge and skill (so each generation does not have to reinvent the wheel or any other human accomplishments). An art enables us to do something repeatedly and consistently, rather than relying upon chance, and it enables us to do something excellently and in good order.

To use another specific example – considering the art of *music* – the musical intervals are natural, mathematical phenomena that occur in the cosmos. Nevertheless, the likelihood of creating beautiful music by nature, time, and chance is very rare and is not repeatable, consistent, ordered, or teachable. Reason enables us to develop the art of music (or harmonics), which allows us to take those harmonies from nature and re-create them consistently in certain deliberate and beautifully arranged patterns and orders that we call music. Similarly, every person has a voice and can sing to some extent, but very few would learn to read and sing music beautifully apart from the rational method devised in the art of music. And rational practices of the art are established (such as musical notation, Solfege singing, major and minor scales, conventional chord progressions, uniform construction and tuning of musical instruments, and so on) for the sake of preserving knowledge acquired through reason and creating a framework in which the practice of the art can flourish. The origins of music are certainly natural and intrinsic in mankind and in the cosmos, but the development of music as we know it certainly is due to the rational art of music, which has been cultivated over time and must be acquired by study and practice in each individual person who wishes to be a musician. Music is just one example, but every other art could be considered in a similar way.

John further explains how an art is derived from nature in an individual learner:

[Innate ability or intelligence] thus stems from nature and is aided by study and by exercise, to the end that what was difficult on a first attempt may by constant practice be made easier and, when, the rules for doing this have been grasped, become very easy

indeed, unless it be impeded by the sloth of desuetude and negligence. The origin of all the arts is this: nature first established engenders the practice and exercise of study, then practice and exercise engender art, and art in its turn the capability now under discussion.⁵⁹

In the individual learner, our natural ability is honed through study and exercise according to the rules of the art, which are laid down by reason (and likely passed to us through those who have gone before us). A faculty that is trained through understanding and exercise becomes something of a *second nature* within us, providing a new set of capacities within us from which we can build and grow. These capacities are not somehow apart from nature; just like our original capacities, they too are in our nature. Nevertheless, these capacities would not be opened to us if we had not developed them through the rational art.⁶⁰ John writes, “If intelligence is in good order and permissibly exercised, it will not only have sufficient capacity to assimilate the arts, but will find an appropriate and unimpeded approach to things which somehow by their nature are inaccessible, and will be absolutely reliable in learning and teaching whatever is needful or expedient.”⁶¹ Interestingly, Cornificius had boasted that “he will make those audiences eloquent without benefit of theory and philosophers without effort, taking a short cut” – through truncating the curriculum and studies – yet John here claims that the art itself is the ‘shortcut’, though not in the same sense Cornificius intends.⁶² Every art is a kind of ‘shortcut’, enabling us

⁵⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.11.

⁶⁰ This is reminiscent of Aristotle’s distinction between first and second potencies in *De Anima*, II.5. The *first potency* is the natural potency (or capacity) for knowledge that man possesses as a rational animal. The *second potency* is the habitual knowledge possessed through an art (i.e., grammar) which subsequently allows its possessor to actively engage in that art whenever he wills (“he can reflect when he wants to, if nothing external prevents him”, 417a.25). The second potency opens up new capacities for him that would not have been available upon command except for the development of the habit through the art. Aristotle, *De Anima*, translated by J. A. Smith, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. I, Revised Oxford Translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Cary Nederman provides helpful commentary: “The essence of John’s Aristotelian outlook is that the capacities ceded to man by ‘first nature’ need to be completed by the formation of a second, acquired nature” (Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 70). Brian FitzGerald also adds that “a key feature of John’s pedagogical theory is the role of the Aristotelian *habitus*: knowledge is not truly possessed until it becomes fixed through regular practice” (FitzGerald, “Medieval Theories of Education”, 581).

⁶¹ *Metalogicon*, I.11.

⁶² *Metalogicon*, I.3, 11.

to quickly, efficiently, excellently, and repetitively accomplish or make what would be very laborious and rare otherwise. However, the arts are shortcuts that are in accord with the order and inclination of nature, rather than the superficial, arbitrary, and inadequate ‘shortcut’ offered by the Cornificians.

As shown so far, John considers that there is a close relationship between nature and art. All of the arts arise out of nature, through the application of reason to nature. Returning then to the topic of *eloquence*, the arts of eloquence are those arts that perfect and produce the skill of eloquence in man. John has already claimed in the opening chapter that “nature, the most benign parent and governor of all things in order most due, raised up man among the rest of her animate creatures by the privilege of reason and marked him out by the use of speech...”.⁶³ Thus, the powers of reason and the capacity for speech are gifts of nature that all men possess (barring certain privations due to the fallenness of the world through sin), yet eloquence is the perfection of reason’s activity – that “faculty of giving apt expression to thoughts” by which what is “hidden in the heart is somehow brought forth into the light and presented to the public...”.⁶⁴ The arts of eloquence allow us to communicate and to understand one another through our reason; otherwise, the gift of reason would remain “hidden in the heart.” Daniel McGarry calls eloquence the “externalizing complement of reason.”⁶⁵ The arts of eloquence, like any arts, open up new possibilities and capacities within our nature which would have been closed to us otherwise.

⁶³ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

⁶⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.7. McGarry notes on p. 26 of his translation that the Latin *in abdito cordis* uses the noun *cor*; *cordis* (“heart”) as the seat of consciousness; he renders this line “hidden in the inner recesses of man’s consciousness”.

⁶⁵ McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 668 – 669.

What then are these arts of eloquence? John argues that *logic* is the art of eloquence, but he distinguishes this in two senses. In its broadest sense, logic is “the formal system of speech and argument.”⁶⁶ This definition John borrows from Boethius (in his *Commentary on the Topics of Cicero*), and John is referring to language arts collectively – the entirety of those arts which develop human eloquence. This would be the *trivium* – the three arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.⁶⁷ John acknowledges that sometimes “the force of the word is contracted and confined simply to types of argument.”⁶⁸ This restricted sense of the term ‘logic’ is describing the second art of the trivium specifically – the art of logical reasoning – to be distinguished from the use of the term ‘logic’ in referring to the language arts most broadly. John’s title of *Metalogicon*, meaning ‘for, or on behalf of, logical studies’, is referring to the trivium most broadly, even though he also spends a significant amount of time defending the specific art of logical reasoning. At this point in his introductory chapters, though, John acknowledges that he is referring to ‘logic’ as the trivium – the arts of eloquence: “But extending its signification as widely as possible we may for the present assign to it the superintendence of all forms of utterance, so that at no point is it proved to be useless, for even in its more general mode it has in its totality been seen to be very useful and indeed necessary.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.10. McGarry indicates on p. 32 of his translation that this quotation from Boethius comes from his *Commentary on the Topics of Cicero*, 1.

⁶⁷ It is worth noting that the trivium – like all of the liberal arts – are both *arts* and *sciences*. We typically speak of the trivial *arts* because they are primarily concerned with making a certain skill in the mind of the learner, but they also yield their own sciences – bodies of organized, reasoned knowledge looking into the nature of their subject-matter.

⁶⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.10.

⁶⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.10.

Daniel McGarry also confirms this: “The term ‘logic’ is here employed in its broad sense as including all the arts relative to ‘words’ from their mental conception to their oral or written expression. In other words, ‘logic’ is synonymous with the whole trivium, and includes grammar and rhetoric, as well as logic proper” (McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 660).

John briefly explains why the trivium and the quadrivium are considered to be the *liberal arts*, which are the foundation of liberal education from the Greco-Roman world through the centuries down to John of Salisbury's own time:

There are many kinds of arts, but those that present themselves first of all to the intelligence of the philosophical mind are the liberal arts. All of these are confined within the systems either of the *trivium* or of the *quadrivium* and, in the times of our forebears, who studied them diligently, possessed such efficacy, we are told, as to open up all manner of reading, lift up the intellect to all pursuits, and suffice to elucidate the difficulties in all questions which are susceptible of proof. No teacher was needed by those men as they opened books or answered questions, when the force of every locution was made plain to them by the system of the *trivium* and the secrets of nature in her every aspect were unfolded by the laws of the *quadrivium*.⁷⁰

The trivium and quadrivium are *liberating* arts because they render the other arts possible to the mind of the learner. We have argued already that the development of arts opens up capabilities to us that would not be possible apart from the study and practice of those arts, and the trivium and the quadrivium are the exemplar here. They are *propaedeutic* arts, meaning that they engender and give rise to the development of other arts. They make the mind free to acquire other arts and sciences it could not attain apart from the preparatory cultivation of the liberal arts. John writes:

[The] liberal arts are so called either because it was in them that the ancients took pains to have their children (*liberos*) educated, or because they seek to win liberty for a man so that, liberated from cares, he may have time for wisdom; and they do indeed very often liberate him from those cares in which wisdom declines to have a part; necessary cares too they often exclude, so that mental activity may pursue a less impeded path to philosophy.⁷¹

In the classical tradition, the liberal arts are thus the foundation of philosophy.

According to the classical tradition which John inherited and sought to preserve, the liberal arts are the first foundation of education, but they should open up the gateway to higher and further studies. The student should proceed to natural philosophy (what we would today call

⁷⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.12.

⁷¹ *Metalogicon*, I.12.

natural science) and moral philosophy (history, literature, ethics, politics). The final and superlative aim of education is metaphysical philosophy and theology, which together make up the highest study and which consider the whole of reality.⁷² On this order of liberal studies, Daniel McGarry writes,

While [John's] prime object in composing the *Metalogicon* was to defend the 'logical' studies of the trivium, he repeatedly makes clear that he considers these but the commencement and foundation of learning ... The complete curriculum includes not only the trivium and quadrivium, but also natural and moral philosophy. The whole expanse of organized learning is embraced, for him, in such terms as 'the arts' or 'philosophy.'⁷³

John is concerned with defending the arts of eloquence (the trivium) because these – along with their counterpart, the quadrivium – form the proper stepping stone to the whole of philosophy and knowledge.

Yet to return to the Cornifician challenge, the Cornificians “have nothing but contempt not merely for our *trivium* but for our *quadrivium* in its every aspect.”⁷⁴ The Cornificians attacked the foundational arts of liberal education, particularly the arts of eloquence (the trivium). John considers that, by attacking the liberal arts and the arts of eloquence specifically, Cornificius is threatening the whole of philosophy and education:

[His] attack may seem to be directed at eloquence alone, but in fact he roots up all liberal studies, assails every undertaking throughout the whole of philosophy, tears apart the

⁷² Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 99; McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 669 – 674; Brown, “John of Salisbury”, 292.

John of Salisbury does not technically lay out an order of studies in the *Metalogicon*, but he hints at the above order in I.24. John's description anticipates the fuller, more detailed version of this account of the order of studies which Thomas Aquinas developed and expressed in his writings (see his preface to *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* and also his commentary on the *Ethics*, Book VI, Lecture 7).

Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, translated by Vincent Guagliardo, O.P., Charles Hess, O.P., and Richard Taylor (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), Internet Archive Open Library, https://archive.org/details/commentary-on-the-book-of-causes-aquinas_202106/page/n3/mode/2up (accessed September 8, 2023), Preface.

Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum Ethicorum Aristotelis*, translated by C. I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/Ethics.htm> (accessed September 8, 2023), Book VI, Lecture 7.

⁷³ McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 669.

⁷⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.4.

bonds of human society and leaves no place for charity ... It is not one city or even a few cities, therefore, but all cities simultaneously, and the whole civic life, that our friend Cornificius attacks when he launches his ignorant and shameless assault on the formal study of eloquence.⁷⁵

The Cornifician attacks on the trivium and the liberal arts more broadly are an attack on the foundation of education, which in turn is the basis of civilization. In John's view, everything is at stake here in the defense of the arts of eloquence. The Cornificians' detractions misunderstand the fundamental relationship between nature and art, and thus they threaten the progress and achievement that is possible through the development of all the arts and sciences.

Before moving on, one question to note here is why John praises eloquence so highly and particularly offers it as one of the highest aims – even if not the sole or highest – of education. What about *virtue* or *faith* or *wisdom*? Isn't there a strong thread of the classical tradition that has posited education as *moral formation*? Is there any connection between eloquence and virtue? The liberal arts are supposed to free a man, in part by developing eloquence through the trivium, but how is this connected to his growth in virtue? This question is worth probing and answering – certainly in part because that was a key objection from the Cornificians. John had described their position: “Evidently, precepts imparting eloquence do not confer wisdom, or even the love of wisdom, and very often are of no use in attaining to it. For it is not words but objects that are sought by philosophy, or rather by the end of philosophy, which is wisdom.”⁷⁶ This is a formidable objection, and a worthy question. However, John does not dedicate a section to it in the *Metalogicon*, nor does he answer it fully here in the introductory chapters of his work. He does speak to this question, though, and he does not leave this objection unanswered. For the sake of organization, I will set aside this question for now until after we have examined John's

⁷⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

⁷⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.6. Hall translates the Latin *res* as “objects”, while Daniel McGarry translates the Latin *res* as “facts”. The Latin word *res* connotes deeds, acts, the things themselves – as opposed to *verba* (words).

defense of the arts of the trivium. After looking at the arguments he makes through the rest of the *Metalogicon*, we will return to this question and seek to explain how he understands the connection between eloquence and virtue.

The Defense of Grammar

As we follow John of Salisbury's defense of the arts of eloquence, let us begin where he begins – the defense of grammar. In chapters thirteen through twenty-five of Book I, John undertakes to defend grammar as the true foundation of a liberal education. He begins with defining grammar and situating it within the liberal arts:

The first of all these arts is logic, at least that part of logic which is concerned with the first principles of speech, to give the word logic (as has already been said) its widest possible extension and not simply confine it to the science of debate. For the science of correct speech and correct writing, and the origin of all the liberal disciplines, is grammar. Grammar is also the cradle of philosophy in its entirety and, so to say, the first nurse of every study involving letters...⁷⁷

John begins by situating the art of grammar as included within 'logic' with its broadest meaning, which is the trivium (or the arts of eloquence). Within the trivium, grammar specifically is the "science of correct speech and correct writing" – a definition that John quotes from Isidore of Seville.⁷⁸ As John recounts, "it is after these first principles both of writing and of speech that grammar receives her name. For *gramma* is a letter or line, and literal comes from the fact that grammar teaches letters, the word letters being understood to refer both to the shapes given to single sounds and to the elements, that is, the sounds represented by the shapes."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.13.

⁷⁸ Hall on p. 149 of his translation and McGarry on p. 36 of his translation both indicate that this quotation comes from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, I.5.

⁷⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.13.

Here we catch a glimpse of John's philosophy of language and even his epistemology. Language consists of signs. Individual letters stand for sounds, which are composed into words, and words are composed into sentences. Those sounds and words, in turn, stand for things in reality. John writes:

[So] it is this discipline first which comes to the aid of those aspiring to advance in wisdom, instructing their tongue and introducing wisdom both through the ears and through the eyes, so that speech may thus proceed. For words introduced through the ear strike and arouse the intellect which, in Augustine's words, is the hand of the soul, so to say, being able to grasp things and take hold of objects. Letters on the other hand, that is to say shapes, are indicative first of sounds and then of the things which they place before the soul through the windows of the eyes; and often without sound they speak the words of those absent. This art [of grammar], then, transmits the first principles of speech and instructs the judgment of eyes and ears, with the consequence that one can no more easily engage in philosophy without this art than can a man who has always been blind and deaf rise to eminence among philosophers.⁸⁰

Language employs auditory and visual signs to represent things to our intellect, which understands the signs (words) to refer to things in reality or sometimes to concepts in another person's mind. The words are signs because they always refer to something else. They "strike and arouse the intellect", drawing us to consider that to which they refer. For example, the word 'apple' refers to actual physical apples, which we know through our senses. It can also refer to the mental concept of an apple, which arises from sensation, is preserved by memory, and is abstracted by the intellect. Some words like 'love' or 'justice' can only refer to concepts understood by the intellect (not by sensation), since they don't have an immediate, sensible referent in the world.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.13. Both Hall (on p. 150 of his translation) and McGarry (on p. 38 of his translation) indicate that they do not have a source for this apparent quotation or reference from Augustine. Even if John of Salisbury is mistaken in attributing this exact image or reference to Augustine, the philosophy he is presenting is Augustinian and matches Augustine's philosophy of language, teaching, and epistemology in *De Magistro* (which I explain in the following paragraphs).

⁸¹ To clarify, 'love' and 'justice' are real things in the world and can be experienced. However, they are not discrete, sensible entities, even though we can see real instances of love or justice. Those instances we witness are

To clarify, language does not *cause* knowledge. John of Salisbury's account here in the *Metalogicon* is not as long or as detailed as that of Augustine's *De Magistro* ('On the Teacher'), but John relies upon the philosophy of language and knowledge that Augustine presents therein. John (following Augustine) says that words "strike and arouse our intellect", which is not the same thing as *causing* knowledge. Knowledge is caused from within the soul through the soul's cognitive powers, which include both the lower mode of sensation (which only knows physical particulars) and through the higher mode of intellect (which grasps the universal concepts of things and which knows immaterial realities). To demonstrate that words do not cause knowledge of anything, one need only speak to a student in a language the student does not understand; no knowledge will result from hearing unintelligible signs. However, if one can understand the signs of language, those signs draw our cognitive powers toward knowledge through pointing to things in the world around us or through drawing us to consider concepts of things. As Augustine says in *De Magistro*, "To give them as much credit as possible, words have force only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they don't display them for us to know. Yet someone who presents what I want to know to my eyes, or to any of my bodily senses, or even to my mind itself, does teach me something ... Therefore, knowledge of words is made complete once the things are known."⁸² John's account is much briefer than Augustine's, but he relies upon the Augustinian philosophy of language and knowledge.

Returning specifically to grammar, John explains that the grammatical art "transmits the first principles of speech and instructs the judgment of eyes and ears...".⁸³ Without being trained

instances of the universals 'love' and 'justice' (and other such similar concepts), which are understood by the intellect as mental concepts.

⁸² Augustine, *The Teacher in Against the Academicians* and *The Teacher*, translated by Peter King (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 11.36.1 – 9.

⁸³ *Metalogicon*, I.13.

in the proper use of language, one cannot employ language or understand it effectively with other people. As demonstrated above, language does not cause knowledge, yet it does aid as a catalyst for knowledge, particularly when it allows us to know another person's thoughts – something which would be entirely impossible apart from language. In his introductory chapters of the *Metalogicon*, John has already said that eloquence gives “apt expression to thoughts which the mind desires to be set forth. What is hidden in the heart is somehow brought forth into the light and presented to the public by eloquence.”⁸⁴ This is one of the key functions of grammar – to allow a person to express his thoughts effectively and to understand others' expressions.

John next considers the question of nature and art, but specifically with respect to grammar. Is grammar *natural*? Does it arise from nature? John's answer to this question is insightful:

But, for all that this art [of grammar] answers to our needs, it is thought not to stem from nature, for natural things are the same among all men, whereas this art is not the same among all men. It was inferred above that nature is the mother of the arts, but this art, although deriving to some extent, or rather in very large part, from men's disposition, nevertheless imitates nature, and in part takes its origin from nature, endeavouring as far as it is able in all things to conform to nature.⁸⁵

John acknowledges that grammar, strictly speaking, is *not* natural. The development of formal language depends on human reason improving nature's gift, and thus it does entail some degree of arbitrary rule-setting. As an invention of man (“deriving ... from men's disposition”), grammar is *conventional*, not purely *natural*. Yet John astutely points out that grammar *imitates* nature “and in part takes its origin from nature.” Just as art builds upon and derives from nature but is developed through reason, so the art of grammar derives its origin from nature but is

⁸⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.7.

⁸⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.14.

developed through human conventions. Nevertheless, grammar imitates nature since it is a reflection of the metaphysical structure and order of the cosmos.

This metaphysical structure and order of reality is something that we *discover*, not *create*. Grammar entails much arbitrary convention, yet it reflects and reveals a structure of the cosmos that we all intuitively recognize to be true. For example, some things are *substantives* (nouns) and others are not. Using Aristotelian categories, substantives are called such because they are *substances*, having some kind of self-subsistent existence and continuity while undergoing change. All other kinds of things are *accidents*, which are changeable traits that must inhere within a substance. These accidents include things such as quantities, qualities, relations, actions, passions, postures, times, places, and conditions. In our experience of the cosmos, we do not arbitrarily determine which things are substantives and which things are not; rather, we encounter things that exist as discrete entities (substantives) and things that do not. We find ourselves existing in this already-structured world as part of it with certain inherent modes of existing and certain boundaries to ourselves and to the role of all things in the world. We cannot cause ourselves (or anything else) to exist, nor can we change the manner or mode of our existence or the existence of things around us. For example, a tree or a dog or a person is a substantive; the color or height or even actions of the tree, dog, or person do not have the same kind of existence, but have a kind of subsidiary existence within and through the substantive. These determinations are true prior to any judgment of human language.

While this may seem very far afield from the average grammar lesson, it is the structure that underlies grammar. John writes, “The primary meanings of nouns, too, and of other types of word, although evolved at man’s discretion, are in a way subject to nature, which they imitate

with probability to the extent of their capacity.”⁸⁶ Grammar distinguishes the names we can give things and what is the proper mode of speaking about them; in other words, we cannot name things and predicate things however we would like. We must speak of things in accord with a kind of structure that already shapes reality (prior to our judgment or speech), and which grammar seeks to imitate and reflect.

Grammar therefore imitates nature in that our grammatical constructions and parts of speech are influenced and shaped by the metaphysical structure of reality. By distinguishing *nouns* as a separate kind of thing, grammar reflects the difference between what is a substantive and what is not. In grammar, nouns refer to substantives or anything named in the way of a substantive.⁸⁷ *Adjectives* reflect the accidents which inhere within substances (or, in grammar, in grammatical substantives) and qualify them: “For just as accidents clothe and give form to substance, so, in what one may call a proportional ratio, do adjectives give form to substantives [nouns].”⁸⁸ Adjectives admit of comparison, but nouns do not; this interestingly parallels Aristotle’s observation that substances do not admit of comparison or variation of degree.⁸⁹ Thus, no tree, dog, or person (or any other substance) is *more* its substance than any other tree, dog, or person is. Yet accidents (such as qualities) do admit of comparison and variation of degree, which is why adjectives can admit of comparison.

Verbs express movement and change of substances:

⁸⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.14.

⁸⁷ It might require clarification that not all grammatical substantives (i.e., nouns) correspond to real substantives (Aristotle’s *primary substances*). For example, *color* is a quality (under Aristotle’s *Categories*), but it can be used as a grammatical substantive (noun) when one says, ‘The *color* of the sky is blue.’ This is why John says that a noun is “substantive if it signifies a substance or something considered as a substance” (*Metalogicon*, I.15). McGarry translates this: a noun “signifies a substance or in a substantial way.”

⁸⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.14.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Categories*, 2b.20 – 25; 3b.30 – 35 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1, edited by Jonathan Barnes.

Because a substance presented to a sense or to reason cannot exist without the motion with which it moves in time as it does something or has something done to it, verbs were excogitated to designate the movements in time of that which does something or has something done to it. Consequently, because motion does not exist without time, neither could the verb exist without an additional signification of time [i.e., tense].⁹⁰

The activities of substances and the changes they undergo are represented by verbs in grammar.

And verbs express the existence of changeable things *in time*, which is why verbs must entail a tense. Further, we can qualify these kinds of actions and changes, so we need a grammatical construction to represent that – *adverbs*. John writes that “just as that motion is not always uniform but has many colours, so to say, when now one thing and now another acts or is acted upon in different ways on different occasions, so adverbs, like adjectives, came forward, to express the differences of time.”⁹¹

John summarizes the metaphysics represented in grammatical conventions:

That word therefore which declines through the cases and has no share in time was called *nomen* [noun], being substantive if it signifies a substance or something considered as a substance, but adjective if it signifies something in respect to its form, so that by means of the adjective it is possible to express that which is inherent in a substance or something after its likeness. That word, on the other hand, which signifies temporal motion, but in terms of actual time, is called the verb, which is active if it signifies motion on the part of the one acting, but passive if of one being acted upon.⁹²

John here mentions the primary parts of speech considered in grammar. We could draw out this thread of reasoning to contemplate what are traditionally considered *syncategorematic* words – articles, prepositions, conjunctions. These are words that have nothing to which they refer *apart from context*. Used in grammatical context, they can refer to real meanings and point to real relationships, but words like ‘the’, ‘but’, ‘to’, and many more do not refer to anything apart from context and apart from other *categorematic* words (words that represent real categories of

⁹⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.14.

⁹¹ *Metalogicon*, I.14.

⁹² *Metalogicon*, I.15.

existence). Nevertheless, John's meaning is already clear, which is that the conventions of grammar take their pattern from the actual structure of reality. Human cultures determine the structures of language, but they do not determine the structure of reality, and thus our language must in some way parallel and imitate the structure of reality. The grammatical art is conventional, but it does imitate nature.

John moves to consider the limits and boundaries of grammar as an art. Grammar, as he has already defined, is concerned with "correct speech and correct writing." Thus, the boundary of grammar is correctness of expression. Thus it excludes expressions and constructions that fall outside the ordered conventions of a specific language, such as incomplete sentences, lack of subject-verb agreement, or using tenses incorrectly. This is rather easy to understand. A slightly more complex example that John gives depends upon the distinction between nouns of *primary application* and those of *secondary application*. Nouns of primary application are the first kinds of nouns developed in human language – nouns which name real things which we experience ('tree', 'dog', 'person', and so on). Nouns of secondary application are the kinds of nouns that develop later which refer to the names of things by further names, such as 'name' or 'enunciation' or 'word'. We would not have nouns of secondary application if we did not first have nouns of primary application. Since adjectives modify nouns, there can be adjectives of primary application and adjectives of secondary application. Adjectives of primary application modify real things, such as when we say the 'red ball', the 'brown cow', or the 'tall tree'. Adjectives of secondary application qualify nouns of secondary application, such as the 'patronymic name' or the 'hypothetical enunciation' (examples John gives). Since the grammatical art is concerned with correct expression, and correct expression must be intelligible,

then it is grammatically inappropriate to apply adjectives of secondary application to nouns of primary application. John explains:

[Those] who attach adjectives of secondary application to substantives of primary application either say nothing at all or talk the merest rubbish. For if a horse be called patronymic or shoes hypothetical, the combination is improper, for the business of understanding is impeded by the principal signification of the words, though not by any incoherence on the part of the accidents. For as regards gender, number and case, the adjective coheres adequately with the substantive, but the combination of the principal meanings is ... arrant nonsense even.⁹³

To join terms thus is outside the boundaries of grammar because it is absurd. It does not present anything clearly to the intellect, and thus there can be no real comprehension from statements like that.⁹⁴ John does admit that “words which are, so to say, natural are regularly transferred to make good the lack of rational words, whereas the contrary transference of rational words to natural words is by no means so frequently exemplified in practice.”⁹⁵ What he means is that we might take concrete adjectives and apply them to abstract concepts, such as a ‘strong speech’ or a ‘weak idea’ and so on. If these kinds of analogous naming are allowed through usage and convention, then they are not grammatical absurdities. John recognizes that, since grammar is largely conventional, there is consequently a great amount of complexity and nuance within grammar.

Considering the limits and boundaries of grammar, John explains, “It is agreed that speakers may commit two sins, one if they lie, the other if they transgress a set mode of

⁹³ *Metalogicon*, I.15.

⁹⁴ I used this example because John includes it as a grammatical error. John explains in I.15, “Grammar holds as absurd an inappropriate combination of words, but does not aspire to pass judgment on the investigation of truth.” I think he would consider ‘categorical tunic’ or ‘hypothetical shoes’ or ‘patronymic horse’ to be incongruous expressions that are meaningless because they violate established rules of grammatical usage. However, I could also see that being changeable with time and custom, given that grammar is developed through human convention. To say ‘hypothetical shoe’ would likely not jar most English speakers today.

⁹⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.16.

speech...”.⁹⁶ Grammar *as such* is not truly concerned with lying (one kind of fault of speech), but rather with “violating the established usages of language”, as McGarry translates that same line. A statement that expresses a falsehood is not problematic grammatically. As John puts it, “For the law of grammar does not prohibit lying, only the association of words from which a person skilled in the language derives no understanding.”⁹⁷ Since the proper object of grammar is correct expression, then incorrect expressions fall outside of the boundaries of grammar, but false ones do not. John explains:

Here, though grammar may exercise much restraint, it discovers unsuitability of expression and confutes it ... Accordingly, since understanding is, as it were, the ear of the soul, just as it is also its hand, it takes in absolutely nothing on receiving an utterance the absurdity of which precludes understanding ... For not all falsities are absurd, for all that the investigator of truth reproves and rejects them ... Grammar holds as absurd an inappropriate combination of words, but does not aspire to pass judgment on the investigation of truth.⁹⁸

It is not the proper mode of grammar to concern itself with the truth or falsehood of propositions, but rather to guarantee that our expressions are intelligible to one another according to established conventions of usage.

John is not relativistic here, as if the truth of statements does not matter. Rather, he sees that all of the liberal arts hang together in the pursuit of human knowledge, even though each is distinct in its own subject-matter and application. *Grammar* is the art of correct expression, but *logic* alone judges the truth of propositions. John gives several example propositions: *Man is rational. Man is able to laugh. Man is white. Man is able to bray.* According to John,

None of these combinations repels the grammarian, because in each of them he finds his requirements met. There is nothing in these things which he corrects or alters, but he cheerfully accepts all of them. The fourth combination [*Man is able to bray*] is censured

⁹⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.15.

⁹⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.15.

⁹⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.15.

and confuted by the logician, because what is entrusted to him is the evaluation of truth and falsehood.⁹⁹

So the grammarian *as a grammarian* is not concerned with the truth or falsity of the propositions, but only with the correctness of their expression. The logician, however, *as a logician*, should quickly declare that the first three sentences are (or can be) true, but the last is false. It is the province of the art of logic to pass judgment of truth or falsity upon propositions.

After surveying the limitations and boundaries of grammar, John provides a helpful caveat. Despite its origins in nature, grammar is largely conventional, and thus its rules can certainly differ across cultures and languages, and even within a single language over time or context. He writes:

Furthermore, it is with usage that the supreme authority in the evaluation of speech reposes, and no expression which usage condemns will gain in strength if usage does not rehabilitate it ... so too the usage of those who speak correctly is the most potent interpreter of rules of speech. From which I think it follows that what is nowhere written and read, and nowhere heard coming from those who speak correctly, indeed everything of that kind, has either long been condemned by grammarians, or at least has not yet been approved by them.¹⁰⁰

Because it is developed by human reason in time and culture, grammar has great room for flexibility and is changeable (within certain natural limits) across time, culture, and context. Custom is often an arbiter of grammatical norms.

As a scholar and teacher, John also considers what should be taught and studied within the art of grammar. The most basic skill of grammar is *orthography*, or “correct writing”, which “consists in placing each letter in its proper place, not allowing it to usurp the function of another or abandon its own function.”¹⁰¹ We would call this *spelling*. Beyond orthography, John

⁹⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.15.

¹⁰⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.16.

¹⁰¹ *Metalogicon*, I.18.

identifies three “components” which the grammarian should master: “art, fault and figure.”¹⁰²

The grammatical “art” would entail proper syntax and construction. These grammatical “faults” include *barbarisms* (corruptions of individual words) and *solecisms* (corruptions of construction in syntax). As already seen, there can be some nuanced areas where it may be unclear to identify what counts as a grammatical error always and everywhere. It seems like there may be overlap between grammatical “faults” and “figures [of speech]”. John writes of this nuanced ‘in-between’: “For in between faults, that is barbarism and solecism, and art, which is the excellence and standard of speech, come [figures] and schemata...”.¹⁰³ Figures and schemata involve stretching, bending, or breaking the rules of grammar for the sake of expression, and most skilled writers and readers frequently encounter this. John, quoting from Augustine’s *De Ordine*, argues that moderation is the best approach: “Therefore order, which controls things, will not allow them to be present everywhere nor absent everywhere, for by their introduction speech which would otherwise be dull and mean is lifted up and given lustre.”¹⁰⁴ John also falls back upon the overarching principle and skill which the student of grammar must master – namely, the ability to distinguish literal, figurative, and simply incorrect modes of speech: “[A] man who does not distinguish between proper and figurative utterance and likewise faulty utterance will rarely attain to a sure, and never to an easy, understanding of matters recorded in writing.”¹⁰⁵ A good grammar education will involve teaching figures of speech, how to use them best, and how to

¹⁰² *Metalogicon*, I.18.

¹⁰³ *Metalogicon*, I.18. Hall’s translation actually reads “metaplasma and schemata”, but I substituted “figures” (as McGarry has it) in brackets, since that was clearer to the reader. The *metaplasma* is an irregularity in poetic verse or, more broadly, “a sort of transformation, deformation, or irregularity” of speech (footnote on p. 53 of McGarry’s translation).

¹⁰⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.18. Hall indicates on p. 164 of his translation that this quotation is from Augustine’s *De Ordine*, 2.4.

¹⁰⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.18.

interpret context.¹⁰⁶ John adds, too, that grammar should include proper punctuation and pronunciation.¹⁰⁷

The student who has studied and mastered these subjects is proficient in the art of grammar. If he does not master these skills, he “will not easily be able to derive support from art, or to shun faults, or to imitate the beauties of the *auctores* [authoritative authors]. If anyone ignorant of these [three aforementioned] components writes or speaks correctly, that is not to be ascribed to skill on his part, for the part of that excellence is played by mere chance.”¹⁰⁸ John has already argued that art creates a rational method for repeatable excellence, which is why art can be a perfection of nature. John here shows that the student who does not study and practice grammar effectively will lack the consistency and excellence that the grammatical art imparts. Students that can write or speak correctly without having studied grammar may do so by chance, but they do not have the advantage of habit and consistency that the art makes possible, nor do they have understanding of the grammatical constructions which only mastering the art of grammar imparts. The Cornificians, however, do not value the art of grammar and what it makes possible in the soul of a learner.

John’s strongest defense of grammar is that it – like all the liberal arts – is *propaedeutic*, meaning it engenders and gives rise to the development of other arts. John writes, “It is clear from this that grammar is not concerned with one thing only, but that it previously forms the

¹⁰⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.19.

¹⁰⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.20.

It is worth noting, as Daniel McGarry points out, that “grammar had for John and his contemporaries an extended scope. A virtual curriculum in itself, it comprised, in addition to grammar proper, literature in general, the classics, composition, literary forms, poetry, prose, history, some rhetoric, ‘speech’, writing, spelling, punctuation, definitions, etymologies, and even memory-training” (McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 670). See also Laure Hermand-Schebat: “This study of grammar does not embrace only the reading of the ancient grammarians, but also that of the poets, the orators, and the historians, in the form of examples and grammatical exercises” (Hermand-Schebat, “John of Salisbury and Classical Antiquity”, 186).

¹⁰⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.18.

mind to all things which can be taught by words, so that it can absorb them. Everyone should therefore contemplate the extent to which all other disciplines are indebted to it.”¹⁰⁹ John also argues from the weight of authorities, citing Cicero, Julius Caesar, Quintilian, and Martianus Capella, who all support grammar as the foundation of education. By imparting to students the habit of correct expression in speech and writing, grammar makes possible the development of all kinds of other knowledge and disciplines. Without this art, the student is left to rely upon chance to read, write, and communicate effectively. Even the student with a natural bent toward speech and writing will be lacking if he does not undertake a formal study and practice of grammar.

John directly challenges the Cornificians who had truncated or removed grammar from their ‘shortcut’ curriculum. He writes:

If therefore Grammar affords so much utility, being the key to all that is written, and the mother and the judge of all utterance, who will keep her far from the threshold of philosophy except the man who regards the understanding of things spoken or written down as superfluous for the purposes of philosophy? Certainly, those persons who cast Grammar aside or disparage her make the blind and deaf better suited to the study of philosophy than those on whom gracious nature has conferred, and for whom she maintains, the vigour of sense unexhausted.¹¹⁰

The Cornificians had neglected grammar with the ambitious aim of proceeding to philosophy and imparting the “whole of philosophy in less than three or even two years.”¹¹¹ Yet John argues that they are not fit for philosophizing, given that they arrogantly reject grammar, which he calls the “threshold of philosophy.” Once again, John shows that the Cornificians, while claiming to be teachers, are not even truly educated themselves:

From that time on [since popular opinion did damage to the truth], less time and care have been expended in the study of grammar. The result has been that those who profess all the arts, both liberal and practical, do not even know the first of them, without which it

¹⁰⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.21.

¹¹⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.21.

¹¹¹ *Metalogicon*, I.24.

is pointless for one to move on to the rest. It may well be that other disciplines also contribute to proficiency in letters, but this one has the unique privilege of being said to make a man lettered ... From this it is demonstrable that the man who disparages grammar is not only not a *litterator* [teacher of letters] but does not even deserve to be called *litteratus* [lettered].¹¹²

The arts of eloquence are propaedeutic, enabling one to undertake further and higher studies in many disciplines. The liberal arts are the foundation of education, and grammar is truly the beginning of the liberal arts. Thus, the Cornifician rejection of grammar is an attempt to subvert the entire foundation of a liberal education.

In his defense of grammar, John gives the closing word to Quintilian from his *De Institutione Oratoris* ('On the Education of an Orator'), which John quotes:

No one should disdain the rudiments of grammar as being of small consequence. Not indeed that it requires much effort to distinguish consonants from vowels and then to separate the consonants themselves into semi-vowels and mutes, but those who approach the inner recesses of this sanctuary, as one may call it, will have revealed to them much subtle lore, which can not only sharpen the minds of children but also exercise the most elevated erudition and knowledge. Less tolerance is therefore owed to those who carp at this art as being insubstantial and unproductive. Unless this art has securely laid the foundations for the future orator, all that is built upon them will come crashing down. This then is the first of the liberal arts...¹¹³

Grammar may be a humble art, since it is the necessary starting place for all students, yet its humility does not render it useless or shallow, as Quintilian here argues.

One final question prompted by John's treatment of grammar is the question of virtue (already acknowledged in the preceding section). Does grammar contribute at all to the formation in virtue which liberal education ought to pursue? Stated in blunt terms, does grammar make men moral? John does treat this question briefly in his arguments for grammar. However, as already mentioned above, we will return to this question in the final section and

¹¹² *Metalogicon*, I.24.

¹¹³ *Metalogicon*, I.25.

look comprehensively at what John says throughout the *Metalogicon* on the connection between eloquence and virtue.

The Defense of Logic

In the course of the preceding book I have I think adequately demonstrated that grammar is not without its utility, and that without grammar not only is perfect eloquence an impossibility, but there is no way open to those striving towards other branches of knowledge ... However, we have not yet done with logic, since Cornificius, mangled though he be and to be mangled yet further, like a blind man groping his way along a solid wall, shamelessly assaults logic and even more shamelessly levels accusations against it.¹¹⁴

Thus John summarizes his defense of grammar and turns to the defense of logic in his prologue to Book II of the *Metalogicon*. Books II through IV of the *Metalogicon* take up the defense and description of the logical art in much more depth and detail than John gave to the art of grammar. Perhaps John's account of logic will make clear why he spends so much time considering it and why it is given more attention even than grammar or rhetoric.

First, John must define logic. He has already explained that the broader sense of 'logic' is "the superintendence of all forms of utterance", in which meaning it refers to the trivium as a whole.¹¹⁵ However, here he intends to discuss the narrower sense of logic – logic as an individual art of the trivium: "Closely to define the signification of the name, therefore, logic is the system of argument (*ratio disserendi*) whereby the contemplation of wisdom in all its aspects is placed on a firm foundation."¹¹⁶ McGarry translates *ratio disserendi* as "the science of argumentative reasoning", which is slightly smoother as a functional definition. John calls logic

¹¹⁴ *Metalogicon*, prologue to Book II.

¹¹⁵ *Metalogicon*, I.10. John extracts this from the Greek *logos*, which means both 'word' and 'reason'.

¹¹⁶ *Metalogicon*, II.1.

the “science of argumentative reasoning”, but we could expand his definition to the ‘art and science of argumentative reasoning’ since all of the liberal arts are both arts and sciences.

Having provided this definition, John gives an account of the origin of logic as an art and science. He recounts that the first philosophical pursuits in ancient Greece were *natural* (concerned with looking into the nature of the cosmos) and *moral* (concerned with pursuing the good life). Natural philosophy is physics, and moral philosophy is ethics. However, as John recounts,

[It] was necessary to look for and make known a science which could draw distinctions between words and concepts and scatter the clouds of fallacy. This, according to Boethius in his second commentary on Porphyry, is the beginning of systematic logic. For there was need of a science which could distinguish truth from falsehood and demonstrate what reasoning kept to the true path in disputation and what to a probable, what was reliable reasoning and what properly suspect; otherwise the efforts of the reasoner would not have been able to find the truth.¹¹⁷

Logic was developed as *rational* philosophy which seeks to use reason to understand *itself*, so to speak, and to order its own activities. This rational science is the basis for determining valid argumentation and proof and for discerning truth and falsehood.

John credits Plato with the birth of logic: “[T]he perfecting of philosophy stands to the credit of Plato, who, to physics and ethics which Pythagoras and Socrates respectively had expounded fully, added logic, by which the causes of things and of behaviour could be discussed and the power of reasoning demonstrated.”¹¹⁸ Yet John clarifies that Aristotle is the true founder, organizer, and teacher of logic as a scientific art:

Plato did not, however, reduce logic to an exact technique, but experience and practice played the dominant role, being here as in other matters anterior to a set of precepts. It was Aristotle who finally discovered and handed down the rules of this art. He is the prince of the Peripatetics, praised by the practitioners of this art as its principal originator,

¹¹⁷ *Metalogicon*, II.2.

¹¹⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.2.

and, while he shares other fields of study in common with their originators, he claims this one as his own of right, excluding the rest from its possession.¹¹⁹

Aristotle wrote on almost every branch of knowledge, yet his logical works (collectively titled the '*Organon*') are still considered the foundation of the science.¹²⁰ John describes how Aristotle and his followers (the Peripatetics) developed the art and science of logic:

The Peripatetics then, observing that action may pass into habit and habit into technique, brought what had been vague and arbitrary under the control of fixed rules ... This therefore was the starting-point and this the process by which was perfected the science of debate, which discloses the modes of disputation and the types of proof, prepares the way for those advancing in knowledge, and makes known what in an utterance is true or false or necessary or impossible ...¹²¹

John's analysis here is very insightful. Aristotle and his followers were not the first to use logic; as John will argue, any rational pursuit of knowledge in any discipline or field must depend upon logic. All people innately depend upon logic, since the capacity for logic is *natural* – it is within our nature as humans. However, prior to the development of logic by Aristotle, the rules of logic had previously been “vague and arbitrary.” Once again, we see this pattern that John established at the outset of the work: art (through human reason) perfects and builds upon nature. To reason is inherently human through our nature, but to reason effectively, consistently, and in an orderly manner requires some kind of organization and training of human reasoning. It requires the application of *reason* to reason's own activity. This is a unique property of human reason – our capacity for self-reflection, for introspection, for ordering our own thoughts and speech. Just as natural philosophy seeks to organize and order what can be known about the cosmos, and just as moral philosophy seeks to organize and order what can be known and prescribed about the good

¹¹⁹ *Metalogicon*, II.2.

¹²⁰ It is worth noting that with the development of *symbolic logic* in the eighteenth century and since then, symbolic logic (rather than *Aristotelian verbal logic*) has dominated the study and teaching of logic in the university and field of scholarship. This trend is discussed in more depth in my conclusion of this thesis.

¹²¹ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

life, so rational philosophy (i.e., logic) seeks to organize and order the activity of human reasoning itself.¹²²

And right on the heels of this, John continues with more insight:

[Logic is] later in time than other branches of philosophy but first in order of importance. This science is to be studied first by those embarking on philosophy because it is the interpreter of words and thoughts without which no article of philosophy correctly advances into the light.¹²³

The chronological order in which the sciences developed does *not* correspond to their significance or even necessarily to their logical order of priority. Often what is known *first to us* as human knowers may not be what is truly first in order of logical priority; in other words, the order of knowledge and order of being are not identical, and in many cases are inversely related to one another. John points out that logic truly precedes all the other sciences because it is the foundation that makes them possible. Logic “is a mistress of invention and judgment, and has, or rather makes, a craftsman skilled in drawing divisions, definitions, and arguments” – all of which are employed in every other discipline and pursuit of knowledge.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, it is not surprising that logic (which refines, organizes, and tests human knowledge) was not the first

¹²² It is helpful here to compare Thomas Aquinas’ account in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*: “Now reason is not only able to direct the acts of the lower powers but is also director of its own act: for what is peculiar to the intellective part of man is its ability to reflect upon itself. For the intellect knows itself. In like manner reason is able to reason about its own act. Therefore just as the art of building or carpentering, through which man is enabled to perform manual acts in an easy and orderly manner, arose from the fact that reason reasoned about manual acts, so in like manner an art is needed to direct the act of reasoning, so that by it a man when performing the act of reasoning might proceed in an orderly and easy manner and without error. And this art is logic, i.e., the science of reason. And it concerns reason not only because it is according to reason, for that is common to all arts, but also because it is concerned with the very act of reasoning as with its proper matter. Therefore it seems to be the art of the arts, because it directs us in the act of reasoning, from which all arts proceed.” Thomas Aquinas, foreword to the *Posteriora Analytica*, translated by Fabian R. Larcher, O.P., <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/PostAnalytica.htm#02> (accessed October 21, 2023).

¹²³ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

¹²⁴ *Metalogicon*, II.5.

discipline developed, and it was not truly developed as its own science until Aristotle wrote the *Organon*.

After defining logic and providing a brief account of its origin as a discipline, John lays out the fundamental divisions included within logic: demonstration, probable proof, and sophistry. He explains each of these: “Demonstrative reasoning derives its vigour from strict principles and proceeds to the consequences of these principles, rejoicing in necessity and not much concerned with the view of individuals but only with the inevitability of a view; it thus is appropriate to the philosophic majesty of exact teaching which is confirmed by its own authority, without the assent of the audience.”¹²⁵ As John explains, *demonstration* deals with necessary reasoning that yields certainty through deduction. Since the conclusion of a deductive syllogism contains nothing that was not already present within the premises, the conclusion is certain. Thus, John describes demonstration as proceeding from principles (or beginnings) of various sciences and progressing through deduction to necessary conclusions. It is called *demonstration* from the Latin verb *demonstrare*, which is ‘to show, to point out, to reveal’. In demonstration, the reasons and causes for something are clearly proven and ‘pointed out’ to the learner. The art and science of geometry (and, more broadly, mathematics in general) is perhaps the exemplary practice of demonstrative reasoning, as John himself alleges.¹²⁶

However, demonstration is only one part of the science of logic. John moves to *dialectical reasoning*, which we might call *probable proof*:

Dialectical reasoning on the other hand is concerned with matters agreed by all or by the majority or by the wise, and of these matters either all or most or the best known and most probable or their consequences; comprised in dialectical reasoning are dialectic and rhetoric, for the dialectician and the orator, endeavouring to persuade, the one his

¹²⁵ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

¹²⁶ *Metalogicon*, II.13 and IV. 6.

opponent, the other the judge, do not think it matters much whether their arguments are true or false, so long as they have the semblance of truth.¹²⁷

Whereas demonstration deals in necessity and thus yields certainty, probable logic deals with reasoning that can, at best, yield *probability*. In geometry, the propositions and constructions must be proven necessarily, and the proposition or the construction is not accepted unless its proof be necessary and valid. However, in cases of dialectical argumentation or rhetorical persuasion before a courtroom or a political setting, the arguments cannot truly be certain, given the inherent complexity and variability of the subject-matter. Nor do the arguments need to be necessarily certain in such a mode of reasoning to accomplish their desired end, which is persuasion. Persuasion can be, and most often is, accomplished through probability, rather than through indubitable certainty (which is often impossible in many subject-matters).

It is worth noting that John includes both *dialectic* and *rhetoric* as species within this genus of ‘probable proof’. The distinction is in their purposes and settings, which John hints at in passing. The dialectician seeks to persuade an adversary, while the rhetorician seeks to persuade a judge. Dialectic is accordingly concerned with yielding the most plausible arguments and proofs as can be put forward for the philosophical questions debated, whereas rhetoric is concerned with persuasion in political, legal, and judicial settings. John’s categorization of dialectic and rhetoric together here as species of probable proof (which is itself a species of logic) might be confusing for several reasons. First, the term ‘dialectic’ is often used interchangeably with logic, particularly in Plato. John is here using Aristotle’s use of ‘dialectic’, which is restricted to the narrower meaning of probable reasoning (precluding necessary demonstration), and we will see how significant a part of the logical art John considers dialectic

¹²⁷ *Metalogicon*, II.3. See also II.12 and IV.8.

to comprise. Secondly, rhetoric is here classed as a species of logic, whereas rhetoric is traditionally considered distinct as the third art of the trivium. By classing rhetoric a species of logic, I do not believe John intends to subsume the rhetorical art within the art of logic, but rather to show its proper origin as a discipline and to place it in relation to the other parts of logic. Nevertheless, this question will be revisited more thoroughly in the subsequent section treating of rhetoric in the *Metalogicon*.

The third division of logic which John sets out is *sophistry*. He briefly addresses this: “Sophistic reasoning, however, which is wisdom in appearance, not in reality, affects the image of probability or necessity, not caring what is this or that, provided that the interlocutor is swathed in a cloud of unreal images and, as it were, shadows of deceit.”¹²⁸ John sets out sophistry here as something the true logician must study and understand, even though it is not true reasoning. He will return to the topic of sophistry later on in his defense of logic.

Amid these divisions of what is included within the logical art, John holds up *dialectic* as the primary path within logic:

Assuredly it is dialectic above the rest to which all men aspire but few in my judgment attain; and dialectic neither strives to achieve the authority of teachers nor is overwhelmed in the sea of civil affairs nor leads men astray by fallacy, but weighs the truth in a ready and tempered balance of probability.¹²⁹

Dialectic is the middle path between demonstration and sophistry. Demonstration is necessary in its proper context, but it holds up a very unattainable standard for most disciplines and bodies of knowledge. Sophistry, on the other hand, has no concern for the truth, but only for persuading someone of the sophist’s position. Dialectic, unlike sophistry, does make inquiry into the truth, yet unlike demonstration, it does so in “a ready and tempered balance of probability.” Since

¹²⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

¹²⁹ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

most topics of inquiry do not admit of the certainty and universality of demonstration, dialectic is our best and most frequent method to pursue the truth within many bodies of knowledge and within the limits of our knowledge. John cites Augustine and Aristotle in summarizing the nature and aim of dialectic:

In the view of Augustine, dialectic is the science of correct debate... I say this with all due respect to the demonstrator and the sophist, neither of whom advances successfully towards the end aimed at by the dialectician, since the former does not possess probability and the latter turns his back on truth ... To engage in dialectic is to prove or disprove by the test of reason some one of those matters which are debated or involve contradiction or are propounded in different ways. Whoever by techniques makes one of these matters probable reaches the goal of dialectic. This is the name given to it by its originator Aristotle...¹³⁰

Dialectic is the art that makes it possible to provide probable proof in questions and topics that are doubtful, deniable, or could be construed from different perspectives.

By showing the difference between these three which are included within logic, John also highlights one of the powers of logic: namely, that logic is able to distinguish various modes of knowledge. Demonstration yields certain knowledge, which is often called *scientific knowledge*. Dialectic can affect persuasion, but it can only yield probability, which is often called *opinion*. John writes that “opinion is for the most part in error, while judgment is always associated with the truth; that is if we use the words correctly, although in practice they are interchangeable ... The philosopher, who employs demonstration, has truth for his business, while the dialectician, being content with probability, is busy with opinions...”.¹³¹ Here John’s reference to ‘judgment’ (*sententiam*) is likely referring to the certainty that is had through demonstration, while opinion (*opinionem*) refers to the strong probability that can be established through dialectic. In the last

¹³⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.4. McGarry on p. 80 of his translation lists this reference from Augustine as from pseudo-Augustine, *De Dialectica*, 1.

¹³¹ *Metalogicon*, II.5.

book of the *Metalogicon*, John will revisit this topic with the added reflection that “[Faith] stands midway between opinion and knowledge, since it strongly asserts a things as certain, but does not through knowledge attain to certitude concerning it.”¹³² It is more certain than opinion, yet not demonstrated like science (or judgment). The primary point here is that logic allows us to distinguish different modes of knowledge according to different objects of knowledge. This is essential if we are to pursue the truth in each of the topics and disciplines open to us, not all of which are known in the same way or with the same certainty.

John also offers brief commentary on the relationship between grammar and logic, which he explored in passing in his defense of grammar. “Grammar is about and in words ... but dialectic about and in concepts. Grammar primarily examines the words used to express thoughts, dialectic the thoughts expressed in words...”.¹³³ In his account of grammar, John had argued that grammar *as such* is not concerned with the truth or falsehood of sentences, but merely with the correctness of their expression. Grammar does not ask ‘Is the sentence true?’, but rather ‘Is the sentence intelligible?’ Logic, however, inquires into the truth of statements. The art of logic alone establishes whether something is true or false, or at least whether the truth

¹³² *Metalogicon*, IV.13.

It is helpful to here compare Thomas Aquinas’ account of *opinion* (*opinio*), *faith* (*fides*), *understanding* (*intellectus*), and *science* (*scientia*) in *Summa theologiae*, Secunda secundae, q. 1, aa. 4 – 5. Thomas’ account (though it is about a hundred years after John of Salisbury) is comprehensive and very similar to John’s. For Thomas, what is seen by the senses is known through **sensation**, and what is seen immediately by the intellect is **understanding**. **Opinion** is of things *not seen* (neither through immediate sensation nor through demonstration) and thus taken upon more or less probable reasoning. To be clear, opinion can be of sensible things (such as particular cows, trees, persons, events, etc.), but it is not knowledge seen with certainty by the senses or by the intellect; it is known mediately (such as through probable evidences or through witnesses) and admits of error and uncertainty. **Science** is of things seen through demonstration from evident first principles (which are known through understanding). And **faith** is the golden mean: alongside opinion, things known by faith are not seen demonstratively (or with the senses); and yet alongside science, things known by faith are certain, though the certainty of faith depends upon God’s authority (rather than on logical demonstration).

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, translated by Alfred J. Freddoso, O.P.,
<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm> (accessed September 8, 2023).

¹³³ *Metalogicon*, II.4.

or falsehood of a proposition is probable and likely. Whereas grammar is concerned that the words express *a* meaning clearly, logic is concerned that the meaning expressed is *a true meaning*.

Having considered what is included within logic and how logic relates to grammar, John offers his account of what the art of logic can accomplish – what it can make possible in the learner:

Logic, therefore, among all the other parts of philosophy, is distinguished by a double privilege, being invested with the honour due to the leading member, and carrying out the function of an effective instrument throughout the whole range of philosophy. For the natural scientist and the moralist make no advance in their assertions except by means of probative arguments borrowed from the logician. Not one of them defines or divides correctly unless the logician grants them the use of his technique ... One may indeed have the gift of clear thinking as a quality of soul, but unless one has the power to present a proposition according to reason, in the business of philosophy one comes to a halt before many an obstacle. Reason here is method, that is, a compendious system which formulates propositions and develops skill in handling them.¹³⁴

John calls logic an “effective instrument” which is employed in all other disciplines. Logic provides the *method* of the sciences – the method by which we can organize our knowledge of any topic through definitions, divisions, and reasoning. John is here answering the charges of the Cornificians that the liberal arts (and particularly eloquence) are innate talents that people possess or don’t possess through the God-given faculties of their nature. Even the naturally keenest mind “comes to halt before many an obstacle” without the rational method that logic alone supplies.

Here again we see the recurring pattern that John has already presented in his introductory chapters of the *Metalogicon* – the pattern of reason perfecting nature through the development of arts. Logic, too, is an art that based in our natural capacity (our God-given

¹³⁴ *Metalogicon*, II.5.

sensation and reason), yet this art is developed beyond natural ingenuity through the application of reason and method to our own faculty of reasoning thought.¹³⁵ Whereas all the other arts involve the application of human reason to a different topic of knowledge or skill, logic involves the application of reason *to itself*. And while what makes the other arts *to be arts* is that they employ a rational method to develop natural capacities, the art of logic is the unique art that itself provides the rational method by which all the other arts work. In the art of logic, we apply human reason to itself to yield a rational method; in all the other arts, we apply the rational method (supplied by logic) to a particular topic and particular natural capacities to in turn yield a certain skill or product. As John says,

From the above, therefore, it is clear that something great is promised by logic, which provides a store of invention and judgment, supplies the faculty of dividing, defining and proving, and is so important a part of philosophy that it runs through all its limbs like some breath of life. For all philosophy which is not geared to logic is lifeless.¹³⁶

John's *analogia* here is particularly poignant: just as the soul is the animating principle of the body, quickening the body and motivating it to its proper functions, so logic is the 'animating principle' of all 'science' (or 'philosophy' – John uses the terms interchangeably), bringing the other disciplines 'to life' and motivating them to their proper functions and ends.

¹³⁵ To be even more precise, the origins of logic are in *sensation* even prior to *reason*, since sensation is the first mode of knowing activated in us as animals. Reason (which is a power of the intellect) needs 'stuff to work with', so to speak, and this 'stuff' is provided by sensation – at least initially. John writes, "And so corporeal sensation, which is the primary force or primary exercise of the soul, lays the first foundations of all the arts, and shapes that pre-existent cognition which not only opens up but makes a way for first principles" (IV.8). John also writes, "From this it is clear that, because imagination is the product of sensation, and opinion the product of both sensation and imagination, while from opinion derives prudence which grows strong and becomes knowledge, knowledge takes its origin in sensation. For, as has been stated, many sensations or even one sensation produce a single memory, many memories an experience, many experiences a rule, and many rules an art; while an art produces a branch of study" (IV.12). Thus, reason as providing the method for all the sciences is ultimately depending upon sensation, which is one of the most fundamental natural capacities in us.

¹³⁶ *Metalogicon*, II.6. McGarry's translation here is helpful to compare: "It is such an important part of philosophy that it serves the other parts in much the same way as the soul does the body. On the other hand, all philosophy that lacks the vital organizing principle of logic is lifeless and helpless."

The art of logic makes possible all the other sciences since they necessarily depend upon logic. Furthermore, it also makes possible the pursuit of all other sciences through training and forming the mind of the learner. The rational method which logic produces is a *practical habit* which must be formed in the mind of each student in a liberal education. Without this habit, the student is unable to progress in his own pursuit of knowledge in other disciplines, or is at least severely hindered in his progress. John writes,

And yet the last thing that the skilled craftsman should follow is chance, not the dictates of reason ... For anyone to make progress, however, he must possess not only enthusiasm for the exercise but also an underlying vein of praiseworthy intelligence. A good intelligence is one which readily assents to what is true and rejects what is false. This intelligence comes initially from nature, through the prompting of innate reason, and then with greater vigour derives strength from its striving after what is good and from its being regularly used. Such regular use reinforces exercise and engenders the faculty of testing and evaluating truth, and it does this with greater ease and expedition if it be confirmed by the compendious aid of the art and its precepts.¹³⁷

The student's natural capacity of reason must be honed, refined, and trained through studying the art of logic in its principles and rules. By mastering the art of logic, the student acquires this rational method within himself which enables him to turn his natural ingenuity to greater profit in whatever other disciplines or pursuits he undertakes.

After having praised and commended logic this highly, John provides a caveat that he will reiterate throughout Books II through IV of the *Metalogicon*. His warning is that many pursue logic, but not as a liberal art:

[I want] to make clear that logic is not possessed by those persons who bellow at cross-roads and teach in the highways, spending on this subject, which is all that they profess, not a mere ten or twenty years, but the whole of their lives ... it is logic alone which is on their lips and in their hands, leaving no room for any other form of study.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Metalogicon*, III.10.

¹³⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

He does not name the objects of his criticism, but it seems likely that at least some of these opponents are the Cornificians against whom he is writing the *Metalogicon*. They have placed an overweening importance upon logic while simultaneously failing to truly master or understand logic. Their ignorance is shown in multiple ways. “They fashion new errors, and either do not know how to follow, or disdain to follow, the view of the ancients. They list the opinions of everybody, and in their poverty of judgment record and recall what has been spoken or written down by even the most worthless persons. They advance every proposition because they do not know how to prefer the better ones.”¹³⁹ These opponents do not learn from the ancient authorities (particularly Aristotle), and they think that logic is the compiling of all opinions on all subjects for excessive disputing. They do not possess the true skill which logic imparts – the ability to *discern* what is true from what is false, what is significant from what is insignificant, what is plausible from what is implausible, what is weighty from what is trivial, and so on. These Cornificians debate and talk loquaciously about any and every point, but without a real sense of what has magnitude and what does not. They have not heeded Aristotle’s warning here: “[But] they, without taking heed of [Aristotle], or rather in defiance of him, at all times and in all places debate equally about all things; it may be because they are equally knowledgeable about all things.”¹⁴⁰

John’s most serious rebuke of these Cornificians is that they are harming education by their distortion of logic and misplaced emphasis upon it. In doing this, these peddlers of pseudo-logic are creating a double need in their students: “For the labour is twice as great, the first task being to get rid of the faulty n options derived from the previous teacher, and the second firmly

¹³⁹ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

¹⁴⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.8.

to inculcate what is true and right. Moreover, a man who already lays claim to the name of craftsman cannot easily find the humility to climb down to a lower level, although, unless he does so, he cannot make progress.”¹⁴¹ By neglecting the Aristotelian tradition of logic and prioritizing logic as the preeminent study, the Cornificians have deceived themselves and their students.

Since John criticizes the Cornificians for abandoning the tradition of Aristotelian logic, he spends a large portion of Books III and IV giving a summary description of the books of Aristotle’s *Organon*, which comprise Aristotle’s teaching on the art of logic.¹⁴² John acknowledges Porphyry’s *Isagoge* as an appropriate introduction to Aristotle’s works, provided that it is taught clearly as introductory matter and not used for excessive disputing about metaphysics.¹⁴³ The *Isagoge* explains and teaches the different modes of *predication*, as well as the notion of *universals*, both of which Aristotle assumes in his *Organon*; thus, Porphyry wrote

¹⁴¹ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

¹⁴² Books III.1 – IV.7, as well as IV.21 – 23 comprise a detailed summary of the books of Aristotle’s *Organon*. Clement Webb, Sister M. Anthony Brown, and David Bloch assert that John was the first (or one of the first) medieval authors to demonstrate knowledge of all the whole *Organon* (beyond just the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*), and that he was seeking to reintroduce the whole *Organon* into medieval education. Webb writes: “The true hope for the progress of logical science seemed to John – and here he was no doubt right – to lie in the further study of Aristotle. Accordingly he is the first western writer of the Middle Ages who shows knowledge of the whole *Organon*, a new translation of which he probably had some part in causing, to be made. Abelard had only the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* in the translation of Boethius: of the other works only the names were known to him. John of Salisbury gives us a complete abstract of the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Topics*, *Analytics*, and *Sophistici Elenchi* in turn” (Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 102).

And Brown writes: “John is considered to be the first medieval scholar to evidence knowledge of the books comprising the *Organon*. Many scholars of his day knew the first two books, *On the Categories* and *On Interpretation* from the translations of Boethius, but in addition to these John had studied the *Topics* and the *Prior Analytics* under the tutelage of Thierry of Chartres. Thus, John is considered as the means by which the *Organon* was introduced into England, and Otto of Freising is believed to have performed the same task for Germany. John must also have been acquainted with the *Posterior Analytics* because he divulges that he knows the Aristotelian division of logic into demonstration, probable and sophistical reasoning...” (Brown, “John of Salisbury”, 292).

Bloch agrees that, beyond Aristotle’s *logica vetus* (*Categories* and *De Interpretatione*), John was seeking to reintroduce Aristotle’s *logica nova* (*Prior and Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistici Elenchi*) into education and the teaching of logic. However, he argues that John may not have studied the *Posterior Analytics* (Bloch, “John of Salisbury on Knowledge and Science”, 289 – 293).

¹⁴³ *Metalogicon*, III.1.

the *Isagoge* as an introduction to Aristotle's logical works, and John respects its place provided it be taught properly as introductory.¹⁴⁴

The first of Aristotle's works is the *Categories*. According to John, "Aristotle's book entitled *Categories* is an elementary one, and in a way captures the infancy of those advancing towards logic. For it deals with uncombined words in respect of their signifying things, a subject which for the dialectician comes before all others."¹⁴⁵ In the *Categories*, "one sees clearly what in things is universal and what particular, what substance and what accident, and what in matter of utterance is expressed equivocally or univocally or derivatively."¹⁴⁶ It also introduces the famed ten 'categories' (or 'predicaments') of being: substance, quantity, quality, relation, time, place, posture, possession (also called condition), action, and passion. The *Categories* also teaches the various senses in which we define the fundamental conceptual terms 'opposite', 'contrary', 'prior', 'simultaneous', 'motion', and 'to have'. The significance of the *Categories* is to give us the proper relationship between words and things, and thus it is inherently more metaphysical in character (dealing with the modes of existence and with how our words correspond to modes of existence). Despite its more metaphysical character, John of Salisbury proposes that it is a necessary foundation for the logical art and it should be taught thus – as an elementary primer, rather than as a source of material for metaphysical debates.

The second work of the *Organon* is Aristotle's *On Interpretation*. By John's analogy, if the *Categories* is "elementary [i.e., alphabetical]", then *On Interpretation* is "syllabic".¹⁴⁷ The

¹⁴⁴ Clement Webb summarizes John's perspective on Porphyry's *Isagoge*: "He is especially severe on those whose logical studies begin and end with the *Isagoge* of Porphyry, forgetting the merely introductory character of that book which its very title proclaims" (Webb, "John of Salisbury", 97).

¹⁴⁵ *Metalogicon*, III.2.

¹⁴⁶ *Metalogicon*, III.3.

¹⁴⁷ *Metalogicon*, III.4. McGarry translates as *elementarius* as "alphabetical", while Hall translates it "elementary".

Categories explains the simple concepts of things, while *On Interpretation* moves to combining or dividing things by predication, yielding propositions that must be true or false. The work deals with contrary statements; contradictory statements; and universal, particular, and singular propositions. Interestingly, John argues that, while the content of *On Interpretation* is vital to learn, Aristotle's own text is not strictly necessary. Rather, he suggests that students will be better served by learning this same content from the scholastic doctors of his own generation, who can teach it in a less complex and dense manner than Aristotle does in *On Interpretation*.¹⁴⁸ John explains,

It is clear, therefore, that usage is more potent than Aristotle in the matter of reducing the meanings of words or even annulling them altogether; but the truth of things, not being established by man, is not overthrown by the will of man. And so, if possible, the wording of the arts should be retained along with the thought; but if not, provided that the thought remains, the wording may go; for to know the arts is not to turn over the wording of the writers but to know the power and the thoughts contained in the arts.¹⁴⁹

John's counsel here represents a wise balance. The content of traditional Aristotelian logic must be preserved, since it truthfully presents the nature of reality and of our own reasoning. These are unchangeably woven into the created order and are not established by changeable human conventions or customs. Nevertheless, the exact text of Aristotle is not necessary to master the art of logic, provided one can still comprehend the doctrine taught therein.

John considers that, regarding the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, "if they may not quite properly be said to be about the art [of logical reasoning], they are quite truthfully said to be directed to the art; it does not, however, make much difference whether one speaks of them in this way rather than that."¹⁵⁰ These two elementary works are the necessary foundation for

¹⁴⁸ *Metalogicon*, III.4.

¹⁴⁹ *Metalogicon*, III.4.

¹⁵⁰ *Metalogicon*, III.5.

logical reasoning, providing the “preliminaries”; however, the real body of the logical art “consists in three things, that is to say, a knowledge of the *Topica*, of the *Analytica*, and of the *Elenchi*; for when these are perfectly known, and habituation to them has been strengthened by use and by exercise, a store of invention and of judgement will aid both the demonstrator and the dialectician and the sophist in every branch of study.”¹⁵¹ The actual skill of constructing definitions, divisions, syllogisms, and refutations is taught in these latter works of the *Organon*.

John has high praise for the *Topics*, which he considers “verbal” – to complete his *analogia* of *Categories* as “elementary [i.e., alphabetical]” and *On Interpretation* as “syllabic”.¹⁵² Summarizing the *Topics*, John writes that, in the *Topics*, Aristotle “has, in a manner of speaking, sown the seed of all the ideas which antiquity extended through many volumes. His every word, both in the matter of rules and in the examples, is of benefit not only to dialectic but to practically every form of study.”¹⁵³ The first book of the *Topics* teaches syllogisms, the nature and sources of demonstration, the fundamental principles of the arts, the nature of dialectical syllogisms and probable reasoning, and the errors of fallacious reasoning. The remaining seven books teach on the relative values of things that may be compared, genera (plural of *genus*), properties, definitions, problems related to identity and diversity, and the practical rules of dialectical reasoning.¹⁵⁴ Speaking of the eighth book of the *Topics*, which presents the rules of dialectical reasoning, John writes, “[The *Topics*] teaches to use its weapons, with words interlocked rather than hands, and instils [students] with so much craft as to make it clear that the

¹⁵¹ *Metalogicon*, III.5. Interestingly, John lists the *Topics* before the *Analytica*, while most versions of the *Organon* reverse that order with the *Analytica* coming before the *Topics*. See footnote 45 in Bloch, “John of Salisbury on Science and Knowledge”, 301.

¹⁵² *Metalogicon*, III.6. The Latin is *dictionalis*, which Hall translates “concerned with words”, while McGarry translates it “verbal”. I chose McGarry’s translation here because it matched “elementary [i.e., alphabetical]” and “syllabic” in form.

¹⁵³ *Metalogicon*, III.5.

¹⁵⁴ *Metalogicon*, III.5 – 9.

precepts concerning the whole of eloquence are drawn and flow principally from this source, as from the fountain whence first they took their origin.”¹⁵⁵

John next considers the *Analytics*, which is “exceedingly useful”, so much so that “anyone who professes logic but does not possess this knowledge is a fool ... For this *resolutio* [analysis of something into its component parts] lends the utmost possible support to the intellect in the matter of understanding.”¹⁵⁶ As with *On Interpretation*, John asserts that the content of the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* is necessary for the logician, but that the original text of Aristotle need not be, given its complexity and density.¹⁵⁷ The *Prior Analytics* explains dialectical, demonstrative, universal, particular, and indefinite propositions; subjects and predicates; imperfect and perfect syllogisms; conversion of propositions; figure and reduction to first figure; hypothetical (modal) syllogisms; inferences; deduction and induction; and enthymemes.¹⁵⁸ The *Posterior Analytics* teaches demonstration.¹⁵⁹

The last part of the *Organon* is the *Sophistical Refutations*. John defines sophistry: “Sophistry, it has been said, emulates both dialectic and demonstration, though its appearance is deceptive, since it strives more to achieve the semblance than the true quality of wisdom.”¹⁶⁰ While John (and Aristotle before him) do not consider sophistry to be true reasoning, they do consider it a part of the logical art to learn the techniques of sophistry so as to recognize it, avoid it, and refute it. John expounds upon the need to understand sophistry:

[For] youth, although unable fully to win true wisdom in all things, nevertheless affects a reputation for wisdom, and is eager to have its glory judged worthy of the acclaim of others. It is precisely that which sophistry guarantees; for it is the semblance of wisdom,

¹⁵⁵ *Metalogicon*, III.10.

¹⁵⁶ *Metalogicon*, IV.2.

¹⁵⁷ *Metalogicon*, IV.2.

¹⁵⁸ *Metalogicon*, IV.4 – 5.

¹⁵⁹ *Metalogicon*, IV.6.

¹⁶⁰ *Metalogicon*, IV.22.

not the reality; and the sophist in consequence is replete with seeming wisdom, not real wisdom. Sophistry counterfeits all disciplines, and, manifesting itself in their guise, spreads its traps for all men, bringing down the incautious. There will be no sense in anyone boasting of being a philosopher if he does not possess a knowledge of sophistry, for he will be unable to guard against a lie or to catch another in a lie. And this ability in each and every discipline is confined to the one who has knowledge of sophistry.¹⁶¹

Those interested in valid reasoning must learn fallacious reasoning so they can avoid its snares.

In this critique of sophistry, John seems to be not so subtly rebuking the Cornificians, whom he esteems to be sophists. They claim the appearance of wisdom, but they do not have its substance, particularly inasmuch as they lack the true art of logic which would enable them to discern sophistical reasoning from genuine reasoning. The Cornificians may be the tricksters, or they may themselves be those tricked by sophistry, or some combination of both; nevertheless, their problems stem from the same origin of failing to study and master genuine reasoning.¹⁶²

Having surveyed the works of Aristotle's *Organon*, John shifts: "I cannot adequately say how much I wonder what kind of mentality those persons possess, if indeed they possess any, who carp at these works of Aristotle, which it had been my intention simply to commend, not to expound."¹⁶³ The Cornificians had rejected the classical tradition, including the *Organon* of Aristotle. Thus, in John's fight for the trivium, he is fighting for Aristotle. He argues that Aristotle's logical works are the necessary foundation for the art of logic. John's position is nuanced, though. While he considers the Aristotelian logic to be the method of the sciences and the vital foundation for subsequent studies, he does not necessarily conclude that logic must only be taught through Aristotle's works. In several cases, he suggests that the books of the *Organon* are very difficult to understand or that the same important content could be taught (and had been

¹⁶¹ *Metalogicon*, IV.22.

¹⁶² For example, John says of Cornificius: "What he now passes on to his pupils is what he himself received from his teachers, and he instructs them as he himself was instructed" (*Metalogicon*, I.3).

¹⁶³ *Metalogicon*, IV.24.

successfully taught) by scholars and authors who were John's own contemporaries. For example, he writes,

For the truth in things abides incorrupt, and that which is true in itself never vanishes away when attested by a new *auctor*. Will anyone who is not without taste or gratitude ... reject [a true proposition] because it was put forward by Gilbert and Abelard and our friend Adam? I for one am not among those who hate the good things of their times and begrudge the commendation of their contemporaries as to posterity.¹⁶⁴

By his own admission, John is not ashamed to cite "our modern scholars" (meaning his contemporaries) if their works and writings contribute to the transmission of the logical art of Aristotle.¹⁶⁵ While he pays worthy tribute and acknowledgment to Aristotle, he recognizes that the principles of Aristotelian logic need not be imparted solely through the original Aristotelian text. John also suggests that the study of hypothetical reasoning is not fully explored by Aristotle and has been helpfully expanded by subsequent authors.¹⁶⁶ He even suggests that certain works (i.e., *Sophistical Refutations*) of Aristotle's *Organon* are more helpful than other works in it (i.e., *Analytics*).¹⁶⁷

In sum, John rejects the foolishness of the Cornificians (who themselves reject Aristotle), but he also avoids the superficial, doctrinaire response of requiring the Aristotelian text alone. In this approach, he shows the wisdom of the truly liberally educated scholar, the one who can learn from the wisdom of the tradition and yet can transmit it in ways and methods appropriately

¹⁶⁴ *Metalogicon*, prologue to Book III.

¹⁶⁵ *Metalogicon*, prologue to the *Metalogicon*. The complete quotation is illuminating: "Nor have I disdained to set forth the views of our modern scholars, whom in very many particulars I have no hesitation in preferring to the ancients. I hope indeed that the glory of those now alive will be honoured by posterity, since the noble intelligence, exact investigations, diligent study, wonderful memory, fruitful thought, command of expression and abundance of words which many of them display is a wonder to me" (Prologue to the *Metalogicon*).

¹⁶⁶ *Metalogicon*, IV.4, 21.

Clement Webb writes: "[John] has ungrudging admiration for all the really distinguished teachers of his day ... His enthusiasm for the ancients does not betray him into any pedantic and unreasonable neglect of his contemporaries ... He notes improvements and additions in logic due to modern writers, as, for instance, Abelard's in the doctrine of modals and hypotheticals" (Webb, "John of Salisbury", 99 – 100).

¹⁶⁷ *Metalogicon*, IV.24.

suited to his own time and place. John provides his own summary commendation of Aristotle toward the end of the *Metalogicon*:

I do not, however, assert that Aristotle's thoughts or words are invariably excellent, regarding all that he wrote as sacrosanct. In many particulars indeed reason and the authority of the faith prevail to convict him of error ... There are also many mistakes of his which can be found both in pagan and in Christian literature; but that he had an equal in logic is not recorded. He must consequently be taken not as a teacher of ethics but of debating, to the end that the young may be moved forward to weightier philosophical studies.¹⁶⁸

John's comments about Aristotle as an ethical teacher here are likely due to the fact that he lacked access to Aristotle's more robust philosophical works (the *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Metaphysics*), which could have better informed his perspective. Nevertheless, despite any caveats he provides, John holds up Aristotle as the preeminent and principal teacher of logic, indispensable to a genuine study of the arts of eloquence.¹⁶⁹

To appropriately conclude John's defense of logic, we need to see the arguments and critiques he provides against the Cornifician detractors and perverters of logic. In the first place, throughout his lengthy account of logic, he offers a critique which aims to situate logic in its proper place within liberal education. At least some of the Cornificians had erred through

¹⁶⁸ *Metalogicon*, IV.27.

It is interesting here to compare Cardinal John Henry Newman's similar praise in his *Idea of a University*: "While the world lasts, will Aristotle's doctrine on these matters last, for he is the oracle of nature and of truth. While we are men, we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyze the thoughts, feelings, views, and opinions of human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle; and we are his disciples whether we will or no, though we may not know it" (*Idea of a University*, Discourse V: "Knowledge Its Own End", 5).

John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, edited by Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

¹⁶⁹ Daniel McGarry confirms John's high praise for and extensive reliance upon Aristotle: "Aristotle, hailed as '*the Philosopher par excellence*' as well as 'the supreme master of logic', is used extensively, not only for logic proper, but also for epistemology, psychology, cosmology, and pedagogical method. He is, in fact, John's principal source. The 'Prince of the Peripatetics' is mentioned by name no less than one hundred and twenty times. Over half of the entire *Metalogicon* is occupied with a specific and detailed discussion of the *Organon*, which, while the only work of Aristotle at hand to our author, was available in its entirety" (McGarry, "Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*", 662).

elevating logic to their sole profession (“which is all that they profess”) and giving themselves to excessively loquacious, sophistical disputation over insignificant topics.¹⁷⁰ John’s simple warning is that logic must not be separated from the other disciplines, and that it must not be made an end in itself: “[Just] as dialectic promotes other disciplines, so, if it remains on its own, it lies bloodless and barren and, if it does not conceive from some other source, it does not make pregnant the soul to bear the fruit of philosophy.”¹⁷¹ By either scorning logic or giving it overweening and isolated importance, the Cornificians had fragmented the unity of the different branches of learning, which is at the heart of liberal education. John writes, “For all scholarly disciplines are interconnected, and each one of them derives its final perfection from others. There is scarcely one, if indeed there is one, which can reach the summit without the support of another.”¹⁷² Rather than being made the chief study in itself, logic must be mastered so that it can be kept in conjunction with the other disciplines as their instrument and servant: “Each of the branches [of learning] thus asks its own questions, and, for all that they are fortified by their own principles, logic furnishes them all together with its own methods, that is, its compendious process of reasoning.”¹⁷³ Similarly, John adds later in the work,

But for all that this art [of logic] is useful in so many respects, a student ignorant of other matters is not so much aided in philosophy by a grounding in logic as hindered by the wordiness and temerity derived from it. For logic on its own is practically useless, only then rising to eminence when it is illumined by the qualities of additional arts.¹⁷⁴

Logic is vital to provide a foundation and instrument for everything else, not to itself serve as the ultimate and primary topic of study and education.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.7.

¹⁷¹ *Metalogicon*, II.10.

¹⁷² *Metalogicon*, IV.1.

¹⁷³ *Metalogicon*, II.13.

¹⁷⁴ *Metalogicon*, IV.28.

¹⁷⁵ Clement Webb also comments: “What John insists upon is not that logic – ‘dialectic’ as he generally calls it – is useless, but that it is so when isolated from other sciences, to which it should be a means and an aide. He is

To give all the emphasis to logic for its own sake is to disorder the proper relationship of studies. It must be remembered that the trivium (and logic specifically) should be a pathway to more serious studies in all the other disciplines. John writes,

From this it is evident that dialectic, the readiest and the promptest of the handmaids of eloquence, is of value to each man in accordance with the measure of his knowledge. It is of most value to the man who has knowledge of very many things, and of least value to the man who knows little ... so dialectic, if deprived of the vigour of other disciplines, is somehow maimed and largely useless, but if invigorated by the strength of those other disciplines is able to demolish all falsehood, and, to credit it with the bare minimum, is capable of debating all issues with probability.¹⁷⁶

The Cornificians had both denigrated logic by supposing it useless and also elevated logic beyond its proper place by making disputation into an end in itself. John provides the corrective: logic pursues truth, and so it is both essential for everyone to learn but also not an end in itself, since truth is the end that logic pursues. And logic equips the student to pursue knowledge of the truth in all the various sciences, for which it is the preparation and the instrument.

As John has alleged throughout, even in claiming to be logicians, the Cornificians do not possess the true habit of mind produced by the logical art. Constant disputation and debating useless questions do not constitute the true practice of logic: “Those persons therefore who constantly dispute about mere trifles are not engaged in problems of dialectic, and they are as far removed from the subject-matter of the logical craftsman as they are from his function.”¹⁷⁷ John soundly warns against this kind of corruption of logic:

One should not, however, dispute in all places and at all times and about any matter. For there are many things which do not admit of disputation, and there are things which

careful to explain that his contempt for mere logic is not a contempt for logic itself ... [The true scholar] must be a *dialectician*, but must remember that the universal range of dialectic does not make it superior, but auxiliary, to the other sciences. From them it derives its subject-matter, in the form of *quaestiones* or problems: and then in its turn it directs us in the discussion of these, and supplies a collective method applicable in all departments of knowledge where we seek probability, though every science has its own proper constitutive method as well” (Webb, “John of Salisbury”, 98 – 99).

¹⁷⁶ *Metalogicon*, II.9.

¹⁷⁷ *Metalogicon*, II.15.

surpass the reasoning of men and are consecrated to faith alone. There are also things which seem unworthy of the questioner and the respondent alike, and which prove that those who fight over such things have either taken leave of their senses or never had any ... To devote attention to these things does not so much prepare the advance towards philosophy as the retreat away from it, being indicative not of a mind making progress but of a mind falling away.¹⁷⁸

A key benefit the proper study of logic imparts is *discernment* – the ability to distinguish between what ought to be disputed and what ought not, as well as the ability to distinguish between proper modes of logical reasoning appropriate for different subject matters (such as the difference between demonstration and dialectic). If conducted in the proper spirit and properly situated within the whole, logic becomes the “advance towards philosophy”, whereas it becomes a “retreat away from it” when it is corrupted.

Yet John also has a response to the Cornifician contempt for logic as a supposedly useless study. Logic is the perfection of *reason*, which is distinctive to man *as man*. Reason is the distinctive gift man possesses as made in God’s image, which sets him apart from the beasts:

For brute beasts too in a way possess the power of discrimination by which they distinguish foods, evade snares, leap across precipices, and recognise their kith and kin; they do not however exercise reason, but are endowed with vigorous natural appetites and, while able to form images of many things, are by no means able to determine the causes of things ... only man obtained the power to discriminate effectively and soundly; for, while breathing life into him, God willed that he be participant in the divine reason. Man’s spirit, since it is given by God and will return to God, alone thinks on things divine, and is superior to the rest of animate kind in hardly any respect except this.¹⁷⁹

Thus, to scorn the study of logic which perfects man’s reason is to scorn reason itself and to hold in contempt man’s special status as made in the image of God. We are made by God to contemplate the truth because through our reason we participate in God’s divine perfection. He is the source of truth, and we are made to imitate Him by knowing and loving the truth: “For in the essence of God is primal truth, that is, certainty or stability or clarity, and from this is

¹⁷⁸ *Metalogicon*, III.10.

¹⁷⁹ *Metalogicon*, IV.16.

somehow derived whatever in things is faithfully said to be true ... But man, however great he may be, merely aspires to certainty, because of the love of truth is cognate with and innate in reason...”.¹⁸⁰ When we love and pursue the truth, we are fulfilling the nature and proper function of our God-given reasoning. John explains, “To discover truth itself as it really is belongs to the perfection of God or of His angels; and to that truth each man advances with a familiarity proportional to the eagerness with which he seeks what is true, the passion with which he cherishes it, the honesty with which he explores it, and the sweetness which delights him in the contemplation of it.”¹⁸¹ The art of logic is the means by which we contemplate the truth that flows from God, and perfecting the art of logic is ultimately preparing ourselves for heavenly beatitude where we will see things *as they are* and have clear knowledge.

For John of Salisbury, we should value the liberal art of logic inasmuch as it perfects our reason, which is a natural gift, yet which must be refined to pursue God’s truth.

Reason, then, is a sort of mind’s eye, or, on a wider definition, a sort of instrument by which the mind puts all its senses to work; the peculiar function of reason is to investigate and to grasp the truth. The contrary of this quality is weakness and impotence in investigating and comprehending the truth. Error however is contrary to that activity of investigating the truth which above we designated reason. In God this quality is simply perfect, in the angels as perfect as their nature allows, but in man it is either altogether or generally imperfect...¹⁸²

Consequently, those who reject logic are opening themselves to error and failing to make any improvement upon the imperfection of their human reason. Our reason raises us above the animals, yet it must be perfected and guided to attain to divine truth, which is why John defends the art of logic.

¹⁸⁰ *Metalogicon*, IV.36.

¹⁸¹ *Metalogicon*, III.10.

¹⁸² *Metalogicon*, IV.38.

After spending the majority of Books II through IV of the *Metalogicon* in a lengthy account and defense of logic, John has little patience left for the Cornificians. He provides this summary rebuke:

And so, since the power of logic is so great, whoever attacks it as being foolish is himself an utter fool ... with perfect justification our friend Cornificius, who calumniates logic, will be despised as the clown of the philosophers. Leaving aside Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero who, according to our forebears, began philosophy and brought it to perfection, the Father Augustine, whom it is rash to oppose, lauds logic so highly that it could only be disparaged by persons devoid of senses and full of impudence.¹⁸³

Logic has remarkable power, for it is the rational science which alone furnishes the method for all the other sciences to proceed. It is also the perfection of man's gift of reason, in which he imitates God and comes to know God's truth. And, if that was not enough, John here adds the authority of both the greatest pagan philosophers as well as the church doctor Augustine to his argument. Quoting Augustine's *De Ordine* ('On Order'), John further writes:

'When, therefore, could reason move on to the construction of other things if it did not first, by distinguishing, indicating and separating, construct what one might call its own tools and instruments, thereby producing the skill of skills called dialectic, which teaches how to teach and how to learn? In dialectic reason shows herself, and reveals her identity, her aims and her capacities: she alone knows knowledge, and not only wishes but also is able to make men knowledgeable.' What is Cornificius' response to all this? Why, it is the response of every deficient mind, accustomed slothfully to snore when virtue calls: what he cannot achieve, he defames.¹⁸⁴

John (quoting Augustine) praises logic as the "skill of skills" (*disciplinam disciplinarum*). He once again gets at the heart of the Cornifician dissent: the Cornificians exercise themselves in deception either by claiming to be what they are not (namely, logicians and educated masters) or by criticizing that which they will not patiently study to attain.

¹⁸³ *Metalogicon*, IV.25.

¹⁸⁴ *Metalogicon*, IV.25. Hall (on p. 316 of his translation) and McGarry (on p. 242 of his translation) indicate that this quotation comes from Augustine's *De Ordine*, II.13.

John acknowledges that there is a distinction between what is tolerated in youth and what is refined in maturity. In other words, there is an ‘age of reason’ which students must attain and through which they mature. Until they attain this age, and even as they progress through their developing years, they may be lazy, idle, puffed up, overly loquacious, impudent, sophistic, or contentious in that process.¹⁸⁵ Yet when their reason has been refined and matured, we expect mature reasoning and thought from them, and teachers should hold them to a different standard: “To persist in these things is to refuse to be a philosopher and to join the ranks of the fools.”¹⁸⁶ John’s ultimate denunciation of the Cornificians is that, in rejecting and corrupting the art of logic, they have proven themselves to be over-grown adolescents who refuse to attain maturity. They are spouting childish immaturities while claiming to be educators and scholars.

The Defense of Rhetoric?

Having examined John of Salisbury’s defense of the arts of *grammar* and *logic*, it is fitting to turn to the art of *rhetoric*. Rhetoric is the third art of the trivium, which John has called the arts of eloquence. However, it is somewhat surprising that there is no formal treatment of rhetoric in the *Metalogicon*. Unlike grammar and logic, John does not set aside any chapters to define rhetoric and to argue on its behalf. While I do not want to unwisely speculate, I do want to assess what John does say about rhetoric in the *Metalogicon* and consider how he evaluates it.

In Book I.24, John lists rhetoric within the order of studies he describes, following grammar and logic. He writes that rhetoric “rivals the gleam of silver wherever persuasion of the lustre of eloquence is needed.”¹⁸⁷ In Book II, John includes rhetoric as a subset of probable

¹⁸⁵ *Metalogicon*, IV.28.

¹⁸⁶ *Metalogicon*, IV.29.

¹⁸⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.24.

proof, which is itself one of the three species of logic he identifies in II.3 (these were articulated in the preceding section – demonstration, probable proof, sophistry).¹⁸⁸ John indicates that dialectic and rhetoric share in common their status of probable proof, since neither one is purely demonstrative reasoning admitting of certainty; both deal with what is plausible and more or less likely to be true. He writes that “only necessary topics are claimed by demonstration, the rest being left to the dialectician and orator, who are satisfied with the construction of a syllogism closely approximating to the truth.”¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, within probable proof, John distinguishes dialectic and rhetoric by distinguishing that dialectic aims at persuading “his opponent”, while rhetoric aims at persuading “the judge”.¹⁹⁰ Along these same lines, rhetoric is concerned with *hypotheses* (formulation of questions involved in particular circumstances), while dialectic is concerned with *theses* (questions “freed from the constraints of the aforementioned circumstances”).¹⁹¹ John goes on to explain:

The instrument, however, which either form of dialectic employs in the service of its aim is speech. For that form of dialectic [i.e., *rhetoric*] which sways a judge who is not one of the combatants employs continuous speech and, more frequently than the other, induction, because it is addressed to a number of people and regularly seeks to win over the whole populace. This other form [i.e., *dialectic proper*], however, employs intermittent speech and, more often than the first, syllogisms, because it hangs on the judgment of an adversary, and is directed to just one person.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Metalogicon*, II.3; Richard McKeon, “Rhetoric in the Middle Ages”, *Speculum* 17, no. 1 (1942): 18 – 19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2856603>; McGarry, “Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*”, 671; Joseph Sharp, “Definitions and Depictions of Rhetorical Practice in Medieval English Fürstenspiegel” (PhD Dissertation, University of Louisville, 2022), 51, <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5115&context=etd> (accessed October 7, 2023). Thomas Aquinas also follows the same Aristotelian distinction and ordering that John of Salisbury does, considering rhetoric a species of probable proof. See Thomas Aquinas, foreword to the *Posteriora Analytica*, as well as McKeon, “Rhetoric in the Middle Ages”, 23.

¹⁸⁹ *Metalogicon*, IV.8.

¹⁹⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.3.

¹⁹¹ *Metalogicon*, II.12.

¹⁹² *Metalogicon*, II.12.

The difference between rhetoric and dialectic is that dialectic is for philosophical debate, while rhetoric is for popular persuasion (often in political or legal settings). One might say that dialectic aims at settling a question, whereas rhetoric aims at persuading an audience. Despite their difference, John sees rhetoric and dialectic as closely connected. Rhetoric (as an art of the trivium, defined as the art of persuasion) employs dialectic (as a species of the art of logic), since dialectic aims at probable opinion rather than certain, indubitable knowledge.

Lest it seem as if John discounts rhetoric as a separate art – as if it were subsumed within logic – John does indeed consider rhetoric to be a distinct art from logic. In his discussion of the eighth book of Aristotle’s *Topics*, he mentions that it was “from this source that the authors of rhetorical textbooks derived not only assistance in their rhetorical writing but the first impulse to such writing; subsequently, however, it was expanded by the development of its own distinctive ordinances.”¹⁹³ John had likely not read Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* due to its not being translated into Latin until the thirteenth century, but he saw the roots of the art of rhetoric present in the *Topics*.¹⁹⁴ When describing Aristotle’s *Analytics*, he mentions in passing that this work is “well-nigh useless for the building up of diction, what we may call a stock of vocabulary. Diction is an adequate verbal facility in any language.”¹⁹⁵ He recognizes that Aristotle’s *Organon* teaches one how to reason effectively and properly, but that is not the same thing as teaching one how to express oneself gracefully and persuasively. There is need of a distinct art of rhetoric to perfect logic into eloquence.

¹⁹³ *Metalogicon*, III.10.

¹⁹⁴ McKeon, “Rhetoric in the Middle Ages”, 2.

¹⁹⁵ *Metalogicon*, IV.3. McGarry renders it, “[This] book is practically worthless for providing rhetorical expression. The latter may be explained as a ‘clothing with words’, and consists in the ability to express oneself easily and adequately in a given language.”

Furthermore, this explanation of rhetoric as a “clothing with words” (at in least in McGarry’s translation) and the “adequate verbal facility” hearkens to John’s definition of eloquence in Book I: “For eloquence is the faculty of giving apt expression to thoughts which the mind desires to be set forth ... The eloquent man is not anyone and everyone who speaks, or who somehow or other expresses what he wishes to express, but only the one who aptly sets forth the judgment of his mind.”¹⁹⁶ John seems to treat rhetoric and eloquence (its product) interchangeably, which also fits with his comment that “rhetoric rivals the gleam of silver where persuasion of the lustre of eloquence is needed.”¹⁹⁷

Yet this raises an important consideration: John collectively calls the trivial arts the arts of *eloquence*, while eloquence is the product of rhetoric, and John himself uses those terms (eloquence and rhetoric) interchangeably. John captures an insightful paradox in his account of the trivium. He calls the trivium the ‘arts of eloquence’, while eloquence is the product of the art of rhetoric. Yet he also refers to the whole trivium as ‘logic’, and his title (*Metalogicon*, meaning ‘on or about logical studies’) supports this.¹⁹⁸ Is the trivium ‘logic’ or is it ‘rhetoric’ (producing eloquence)?

While this may seem like an apparent contradiction, John recognizes that the distinct art of logic is the central and foundational art of the trivium, since it is the application of the logical method to any subject-matter which yields an art in the first place (this was articulated and defended in the preceding section). Even in the trivium, logic underlies grammar and rhetoric. Perhaps John recognizes that eloquence is specifically the product of rhetoric, and yet only if

¹⁹⁶ *Metalogicon*, I.7.

¹⁹⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.24. See also Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 68 and Brian Gilchrist, “The *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury: Medieval Rhetoric as Educational Praxis” (PhD Dissertation, Duquesne University, 2013), 113, <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1596&context=etd> (accessed October 7, 2023).

¹⁹⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.13.

one's rhetoric is truly built upon a foundation of sound grammatical and logical instruction. Without the development of those propaedeutic arts, rhetoric cannot be taught or employed successfully, even as rhetoric itself is propaedeutic for other arts and sciences. Throughout the *Metalogicon*, John critiques sophistry, and he argues that the Cornificians are sophists. The insight here is that without grammar and logic, rhetoric dissolves into mere sophistry. If a true foundation in grammar and logic is present, then rhetoric can pursue its course effectively, while if those are lacking, it will necessarily become sophistry. With a strong foundation in grammar and logic, one can become an effective rhetorician, but to attempt it the other way around – one cannot pursue rhetoric alone and expect to become an effective grammarian or logician. There is an inherent order within the trivium that progresses from grammar to logic to rhetoric. Eloquence is the product of rhetoric, but only as rhetoric is built upon grammar and logic.

Yet, to call the trivium the 'arts of eloquence' is to recognize – as John argues against some of his critics – that logic is not ultimately an end in itself, but an instrument for the pursuit of knowledge in every discipline and ultimately the knowledge of God. In this ordering, logic then is fulfilled in eloquence, which implies skillful and winsome rhetoric within a community, rather than merely correct analysis in the intellect. To employ the Aristotelian terms, it could be said that logic is the *formal* cause of the trivium, but eloquence through rhetoric is the *final* cause of the trivium. So, in one sense, the whole trivium is 'logic', and in another sense it is all ordered to 'eloquence' (rhetoric).

And even though it is logic which makes the arts to be arts, logic is dependent upon the other arts, particularly the other language arts, in a way for its own expression and efficacy. Joseph Sharp writes, "To operate effectively, however, during the process of deliberation, reason must employ language to interpret truth and the instrument of speech to express it. Without

speech, abstracted universal knowledge cannot be leveraged toward practical action.”¹⁹⁹ In the opening chapter of Book I, John already recognizes this relationship between logic and rhetoric and describes it thus: “[Just] as eloquence not illumined by reason is not merely ill-considered but also blind, so too wisdom which does not profit by the use of speech is not only powerless but somehow crippled.”²⁰⁰ Even though rhetoric depends upon logic for its soundness, logical reasoning depends upon grammar and rhetoric to express itself and to accomplish anything skillfully and eloquently.

Even in John’s account of the arts of eloquence in Book I, he mentions the communal benefits of eloquence, which necessarily imply logic being fulfilled in rhetoric. Logic is individual, but rhetoric is communal. John writes:

For although inarticulate wisdom may from time to time be of some avail in supporting shared knowledge, it is only rarely and to a small extent that it contributes to the needs of human society ... if the practice of utterance did not bring forth into the light the fruit of that conception and in its turn make known to men the results of the judicious activity of the mind, reason would remain utterly barren or at best its yield would be small. This is that delightful and fruitful union of reason and speech which gave birth to so many glorious cities, brought together and made allies of so many kingdoms, and united and bound so many peoples in the bonds of charity....²⁰¹

For John, a key part of the trivium’s value is its role as the foundation of human community, which is something that entails rhetoric used properly upon the basis of logic.²⁰² Furthermore, some of John’s criticisms against Cornificius are that he is harming the “common benefit” and “tears apart the bonds of human society and leaves no place for charity or for the reciprocal carrying out of obligations.”²⁰³ John’s concern for the human community shows that he

¹⁹⁹ Sharp, “Definitions and Depictions”, 54.

²⁰⁰ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

²⁰¹ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

²⁰² See also Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 69 – 70 and Sharp, “Definitions and Depictions”, 46 – 47.

²⁰³ *Metalogicon*, I.1.

considers rhetoric to be the fitting and necessary culmination of the trivium, capable of bringing human communities together or tearing them apart.

I do not claim to decisively settle why John of Salisbury does not treat rhetoric more thoroughly in the *Metalogicon*. I have tried to present what John does say about rhetoric in this work, as well as show how the trivial arts are bound together for the flourishing of each other and of the whole of liberal education. The answer to the Cornifician sophistry is to build a better rhetoric upon a better foundation of grammar and logic.

Eloquence and Virtue

Having surveyed John's defense of the arts of eloquence, it behooves us to return to the question proposed at the outset but postponed until now: what connection do these language arts have to the development of virtue and moral formation? This question has appeared in several forms along the way, but we have postponed it to this point in our analysis. In other words, is there a moral reason to study and teach the trivium? What is the relationship between eloquence and virtue, and what does the pursuit of eloquence through the trivium have to do with our moral formation through education?

One objection from the Cornificians to the arts of eloquence was their observation that "principles imparting eloquence do not confer wisdom, or even the love of wisdom, and very often are of no use in attaining to it. For it is not words but objects that are sought by philosophy, or rather by the end of philosophy, which is wisdom."²⁰⁴ Thankfully, John has anticipated this accusation and has presented an alternative perspective throughout the *Metalogicon*, as we will see. For John, the Cornifician disjunction between eloquence and virtue

²⁰⁴ *Metalogicon*, I.6.

(or wisdom) is a faulty one. The two are distinct, yet they are not divorced, as John argues throughout the work.

In his prologue to the *Metalogicon*, John sets this point forth clearly: “I have deliberately included a number of comments on moral issues, since my view is that everything which is read or written is valueless except in so far as it affords some support to the way we live. Any profession of philosophy whatsoever is valueless and deceitful if it does not manifest itself in the cultivation of virtue and the conduct of our lives.”²⁰⁵ From the beginning of his work, John anticipates the objection that he is only interested in cultivating eloquence. He asserts that he is not merely interested in eloquence alone, but in the “cultivation of virtue.” And this cultivation of virtue must be the entire aim of education and philosophy.²⁰⁶ Thus, John does not see his advancement of eloquence as a pursuit unrelated to the cultivation of virtue in education. In the introductory chapters of Book I (so still before the defense of the trivium), he writes: “Among those things to be desired the first place belongs to virtue and wisdom (different words but perhaps not different substances, in the view of Victorinus) but the second is claimed by eloquence...”.²⁰⁷ John acknowledges that wisdom and virtue are foremost, but he puts eloquence as a close second; throughout the rest of the *Metalogicon*, he endeavors to demonstrate why.

John argues that, while the arts of eloquence are not equivalent with moral virtue, they nevertheless prepare the way for it and serve as an aid to it. In his defense of grammar, John

²⁰⁵ *Metalogicon*, Prologue.

²⁰⁶ Cary Nederman provides this helpful summary of John’s perspective: “Making men virtuous is not a distinct enterprise from making them intelligent or knowledgeable; it is of no value to be well educated if one is unable to apply this learning in the service of moral rectitude” (Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 72). He also adds, “[John] proposes that education, properly attained, promotes the useful goods of wisdom and virtue, qualities of the human soul that ultimately generate the highest degree of happiness. We should desire to be learned, John believes, because we will thereby fulfill our natural (and divinely ordained) purpose as human beings. And when we flourish in this way, we cannot fail to become happy in the way God intended” (Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 75).

²⁰⁷ *Metalogicon*, I.7.

explains that Cornificius had cited Seneca as an authority supposedly on the Cornifician side, so to speak, in critiquing the liberal arts. John seeks to disabuse Cornificius of this error:

[Seneca] is aware that the liberal disciplines do not make a man good. For my part I agree with him, and hold this same view of other matters also. For knowledge puffeth up, but charity alone maketh a man good. He gives less prominence to the arts, but without divorcing them from philosophical study; for not only philosophers are good men. The grammarian, he declares, is concerned [with language, narratives, and poetry]. This is no insignificant contribution, but of the greatest value in shaping virtue, which makes a man good ... The view handed down from antiquity is that the liberal disciplines are so useful that whosoever knows them fully can understand every book and every thing that has been written down, even if he has no teacher.²⁰⁸

John argues that Cornificius is wrongly appropriating Seneca to critique grammar (and the other liberal studies). Grammar may not make men moral, strictly speaking; yet it engenders much in the student that will prepare him for virtue and aid him in the growth of that virtue. Reading is one of the primary means by which children and students are instructed (formally or informally) in virtue. How could grammar – the art that allows students to read and write intelligibly – be thus severed from the pursuit of virtue? And grammar allows us to learn from a great variety of teachers and guides in the study of virtue (“understand every book and every thing that has been written down”): how could grammar then fail to serve the pursuit of virtue?

Still speaking of grammar, yet broadening his application to scientific knowledge as a whole, John further expounds:

The practice and cultivation of virtue, however, is naturally preceded by knowledge, for virtue does not run uncertainly or beat the air in the fight which it carries on with vice, but it sees whither it aims and against what it draws its bow ... Knowledge is the product of reading, learning, and reflection. It is consequently agreed that grammar, which is the foundation and root of these activities, in an indefinable way sows its seed as it were in the furrows of nature, if grace precedes; and if grace is present also as nature’s fellow-worker, the seed grows into a sturdy crop of solid virtue, multiplying her increase so as to produce fruits of good works, from which stem the name and actuality of good men. But

²⁰⁸ *Metalogicon*, I.22. McGarry indicates on p. 63 of his translation that this quotation from Seneca is from *Epistle* 88.1 – 2.

only grace, which carries into effect good intentions and good works, makes a man good
...²⁰⁹

John here presents, in an abbreviated form, an entire philosophy of education, as well as a foray into theology. For students that attain the age of reason and maturity, reasoned knowledge must precede the “practice and cultivation of virtue”, for one cannot pursue virtue through ignorance, guesswork, or intellectual laziness.²¹⁰ To truly grow in virtue, one must come to accurately know oneself and reality (including the others around us). Therefore, John argues that grammar (as the seed of the liberal arts) is the seed of virtue, which must grow up into an entire education and entire lifestyle of virtue. This quotation also shows John’s theological perspective on the necessity of grace, to which we will shortly return. John summarizes, “That man therefore who aspires to philosophy must set his hand to reading, learning and reflection, together with the exercise of good works...”.²¹¹ A liberal education should cultivate reading and learning (the arts of eloquence) alongside the practice of good works (virtue), for these two are intricately connected.

In his defense of logic, John also provides an account of the relationship between logic and virtue. At the very beginning of Book II (the beginning of his defense of logic), he writes:

²⁰⁹ *Metalogicon*, I.23.

²¹⁰ John’s statement that reasoned knowledge must *precede* the practice and cultivation of virtue could lend itself to much debate. My intent is not to debate it, since I am seeking to expound John’s work, not critique it. Obviously, John would likely agree with Plato, the Scriptures, and others who teach that young children need to be formed in virtuous habits *before* their reason (which is not yet developed) can assent, just as they should be taught basic truths in an elementary form *before* they are old enough to truly understand them. They should be morally and doctrinally formed *before* they can consciously understand why, for they will grow into this understanding. Nevertheless, John’s point here (echoed in Plato’s *Republic* and the Scriptures) is that the entirety of a virtuous, liberal education cannot be mere external ‘printing’ or ‘stamping’ without the cultivation of scientific knowledge. As students attain the age of reason, they must be led to understand the truth and to assent to it willingly if they are truly to progress in virtue and knowledge of God. Our students (and we ourselves) must still be formed by good habits our entire lives, yet we must also seek to impart understanding through the cultivation of reason, lest we stultify our students or keep them perpetually adolescent. The truly virtuous person chooses the good with understanding and knowledge of the truth, not merely because he is told to or because he guesses it might be good.

²¹¹ *Metalogicon*, I.24.

[Logic] is the system of argument whereby the contemplation of wisdom in all its aspects is placed on a firm foundation. For since wisdom is the first of all desirable objects, and its fruit consists in the love of what is good and the cultivation of virtue, the mind must necessarily concern itself with the search for wisdom, and fully investigate individual things so as to be able to pass a clear and unbiased judgement about each single one of them. The mind, therefore, is engrossed in the search for truth, which, according to Cicero in the *De officiis*, is the object of the primary virtue, called prudence ... prudence is entirely bound up in the perception of truth and what one might call an adroitness in evaluating the truth. Moreover, the truth is fenced about by justice and protected by fortitude, while temperance governs the activities of the preceding virtues. From this it is clear that prudence is the root of all the virtues ... Will anyone embrace or cherish that which he knows not? But truth is the object of prudence and the source of the virtues; he who knows truth fully is wise, he who loves her is good, and blessed is the man who possesses her.²¹²

In this beautiful passage, John weaves together the art of logic with the virtue of prudence, which in turn forms and guides all the other cardinal virtues. Prudence ascertains truth in particular situations, which is what all the other virtues need to fulfil their own ends. Since logic teaches us to know and discern the truth, how could it be fundamentally divorced from prudence and the cardinal virtues? As John writes, “No yoke of vices weighs down a man whom truth claims and draws forth from slavery into liberty.”²¹³

The Cornificians, however, had denigrated the art of logic as useless and disconnected from wisdom and virtue. To them, John writes, “But the man who does not embrace demonstration and dialectic is certainly no lover of the truth, and does not even seek to gain knowledge of what is probable. Of a surety, no one obtains virtue without truth, and he who disparages what is probable wins no approbation.”²¹⁴ To reject logic is to reject the truth and to reject virtue, which lives in accord with the truth. Cornificius may present a noble appearance – as if he is rejecting eloquence to pursue something higher, namely wisdom – but John exposes

²¹² *Metalogicon*, II.1.

²¹³ *Metalogicon*, II.1.

²¹⁴ *Metalogicon*, II.5.

this as a falsehood. In rejecting eloquence (including logic), Cornificius shows that he does not truly desire wisdom and the truth.

The best authors of the classical and Christian tradition all agree that the virtuous life is the life lived in accord with reason. John explains:

Since therefore reason is ennobled by a divine origin and exercises its power on matters divine, the precept that it be cultivated above all things has been sanctioned by decree passed by the whole of philosophy. For reason checks disorderly movements and arranges all things according to the standard of goodness, so that there is nothing that fights against the divine ordinance. Whoever obeys reason will advance through and complete his span of life in felicity; but whoever rejects her, as Plato says in the *Timaeus*, crawls maimed ... along the path of life and finally together with his friend folly is summoned down to hell. Reason is concerned with both body and soul, and sets both in order.²¹⁵

Thus, the cultivation of our reason through the arts of eloquence (and particularly logic) is actually part of pursuing virtue. However, one might argue that the primary challenge of living a virtuous life is training reason to rule the passions through practice and habit. This is likely true, yet it does not displace the importance of cultivating reason through logic. The whole of wisdom and virtue is certainly *more* than intellectual virtue, but it is not *less*. John acknowledges that, although logic does fall short of perfection, still “logic is of the greatest utility, affording the systematic basis, the method and the opportunity for discovery and evaluation.”²¹⁶ Logic should never be treated as an isolated habit of the intellect that has no bearing upon our moral formation.

Ultimately, for John, the cultivation of our reason even leads us to higher things – to the divine. “But reason transcends all sensation, and introduces its judgment even into incorporeal and spiritual things. It contemplates all things below, and strains its gaze to the things above.”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ *Metalogicon*, IV.17. McGarry indicates on p. 229 of his translation that this quotation from Plato comes from *Timaeus* 44 C in the translation by Chalcidius.

²¹⁶ *Metalogicon*, IV.30.

²¹⁷ *Metalogicon*, IV.16.

The cultivation of reason is not only efficient for development of knowledge on earth, but it guides us to know God. This does not merely mean that cultivating reason allows us to pursue theology, but also that God Himself is known by our intellect (our rational soul), since He is immaterial and invisible. John writes, “Philology [love of reason] has an earthly and mortal origin, but, when she passes to things divine, a form of immortality makes her a god; for when prudence, which is of the earth and is the love of reason, rises to the secrets of truth incorrupt and things divine, it passes into wisdom and in a way is removed from the condition of mortal things.”²¹⁸ As the distinctive mark of being made in God’s image, reason raises us above mere physical reality to the spiritual reality and opens the way to the knowledge of God and eternal happiness.²¹⁹

Despite his high praise of the arts of eloquence and the way they are intimately connected with wisdom and virtue, John does provide several warnings in the *Metalogicon* related to the pursuit of eloquence and virtue. In the first place, eloquence must be coupled with the pursuit of wisdom and virtue (as is naturally fitting to them both) lest it degenerate on its own. He writes, “That eloquence is of no value without wisdom is a commonplace and a truism. Consequently, it is clear that eloquence derives its value from wisdom. Therefore eloquence is valuable in proportion to the tiny measure of wisdom which each man has acquired; if divorced from wisdom, eloquence is positively harmful.”²²⁰ While eloquence ought to aid virtue, and while one will be severely handicapped to pursue virtue apart from eloquence, it is possible that one can acquire the arts of eloquence and yet not pursue virtue. Pride is the inevitable result, which

²¹⁸ *Metalogicon*, IV.17.

²¹⁹ As Sønnesyn writes, “Human nature, raised above other animate creatures on account of the faculty of reason, reached its perfection in the attainment of the purpose of reason, the beatific vision of Truth” (Sønnesyn, “Ethics of John of Salisbury”, 333).

²²⁰ *Metalogicon*, II.9.

ultimately blinds one to God. Rather, John would have the whole of education undertaken in service to God, to know Him and love Him through all the studies: “For unless a man turn what he knows to the service of God, his knowledge works not with him but rather against him; for much knowledge is of no avail if that one thing be lacking which above all is necessary and which reveals itself in the intelligence of created things.”²²¹ John is referencing Romans 1, where the apostle Paul teaches that God is clearly revealed through creation and thus known to all men, and yet this knowledge is suppressed by human pride and idolatry. All truth flows from God, and so our pursuit of truth should lead us back to God. Otherwise, as John has argued, our best studies and skills will become mere sophistry.

John’s other warning is that mankind requires the gift of God’s grace to truly progress in knowledge and virtue. We possess the capacities of our nature, including its limitations, yet our greatest limitation is not strictly speaking ‘natural’, but due to man’s fall into original sin. John explains: “We human beings, however, weak as we are, and, both by reason of our natural condition and because of our sins, exposed to many errors – no, ensnared and brought down by many errors – have degenerated from the first and the second degrees of purity in our examination of things, that is, in the exercise of reason.”²²² Our reason is hindered not merely by a need to be developed and trained, but more significantly by disordered loves introduced through sin. John explains the obstacles to human understanding:

But because there are many things which impede understanding, namely, invincible ignorance of such things as the mystery of the Holy Trinity which cannot be explained by reason, the frailty of our condition, the shortness of life, the neglect of what is useful, profitless occupations, the conflict of probable opinions, sin which should be shrouded from light, and finally the sheer number, indeed, immensity of things open to investigation, the human heart is so overwhelmed that rarely can it attain to a knowledge of the truth. Of the eight obstacles which I have set forth, however, there is none in my

²²¹ *Metalogicon*, IV.40.

²²² *Metalogicon*, IV.33.

opinion which so much hinders the knowledge of what is expedient as the sin which separates us from God and shuts off the fountain of truth, after which reason nevertheless continues to thirst.²²³

As John explains, our greatest hindrance is our sin, which separates us from God who is the Truth.

Given our condition in sin, we are in need of something beyond merely the gift of nature – we are in need of grace. There is a requisite humility before God which we should have, and we must be open to God’s grace and His revelation if we are truly to grow in knowledge, virtue, and wisdom. John says, “This faculty of desire [for truth, goodness, and sure reason] has been naturally implanted by God in man, although it cannot naturally avail without grace.”²²⁴ Even the ascent from our natural capacities of sensation and reason to knowledge of the world, to development of the arts and sciences, and to contemplation of the whole in philosophy and theology – this entire ascent and all its “stages are controlled not by nature but by grace” and require God’s prevenient and sustaining grace.²²⁵

John warns that our knowledge of God must ultimately depend upon grace. Unaided human reason is not sufficient to mount to the complete knowledge of God: “[If] anyone ... believes firmly that he can find God through the power of the intellect by enquiry and discussion, he will unquestionably be as much in error as it is possible to be. Elsewhere also [Augustine]

²²³ *Metalogicon*, IV.40.

²²⁴ *Metalogicon*, IV.29.

²²⁵ *Metalogicon*, IV.19.

Sigbjørn Sønnesyn is writing primarily about the *Policraticus*, but his observations are relevant here: “Grace, John repeatedly states, is always and everywhere necessary for the full realization of the specifically human aptitudes and potentials. Reason is a prodigious gift, capable of sublime achievements; but even reason, *qua* gift, is dead where grace is absent” (“Ethics of John of Salisbury”, 323). He also writes, “Grace, then, is vital for all intellectual work, in an intimate and pervasive way. It provides the basis – readies the ground – and provides the principle and actuality of growth. Again, John makes clear that philosophy as a human activity depends on the gift of grace from its beginning to its end, saturating it throughout ... This mode of thought and this form of expression is thoroughly Augustinian” (Sønnesyn, “Ethics of John of Salisbury”, 325).

says: Ignorance of God is God's truest wisdom."²²⁶ In His grace, God makes Himself known to us, and we must rely humbly upon God's special revelation to us in the Scriptures. Since God is infinite, mysterious, and incomprehensible, our admitting what we do not know of God is the beginning of our "truest wisdom" concerning God. And what we do know about God is primarily revealed to us through the Scriptures.²²⁷ As John explains, "[By] the clemency of God a law has been given to reveal the knowledge of what is useful and to make clear how much we may know about God or how much it is expedient to seek."²²⁸ The arts of eloquence will aid us in knowing God through this revelation, but those themselves will not provide that special revelation to us nor infuse us with grace through themselves.

At the close of the work, John offers a sketch of one who is truly pursuing philosophy in the right manner:

But the man who turns external things to the benefit of life, recognizing and reverencing the giver of those things and assessing the extent of his own imperfection, who with difficulty is able to comprehend but a few things and avails himself of passing things, with which he himself passes, only on sufferance and for but an hour, who controls, represses or extinguishes concupiscence, who strives by diligent study to refashion the image of God which sin corrupted, who devotes his every effort to carrying out the duties

²²⁶ *Metalogicon*, IV.40. McGarry indicates on p. 271 of his translation that this quotation is from Augustine's *Sermones* cxvii. 3.5.

²²⁷ Commenting on this passage, Christophe Grellard explains, "Certainly, this is not a form of negative theology in any precise sense. John contents himself with citing three occasions where Augustine affirms our ignorance in respect of God. John's aim here is to demonstrate the limits of reason when it comes to knowledge of divine truth, in order to promote the role of faith" (Grellard, "John of Salisbury and Theology" in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, 366).

²²⁸ *Metalogicon*, IV.41.

On the topic of John of Salisbury's reliance upon the Scriptures (and subsequent teachings of the Christian doctors), Daniel McGarry adds this helpful summary: "John's attention to classical philosophers, essayists, and poets does not imply any neglect of the Bible and the Fathers. As we would expect in the work of such a 'Christian humanist', the *Metalogicon* is honeycombed with thoughts and quotations from the Sacred Scriptures. It is exceptional when we do not find a Biblical quotation summoned to help cinch an argument. In the same vein, Augustine's writings provide a prototype for practically every major proposition, the Bishop of Hippo being mentioned and used more frequently than any other Christian author" (McGarry, "Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon*", 663).

imposed by the virtues – he is the one whose practice of philosophy is the most genuine.²²⁹

This passage is an integration of everything John has put forward. The true philosopher – the liberally educated scholar – is the one who acquires the arts of eloquence as the cultivation and perfection of his reason, which is the image of God in him. Yet such a one also pursues the cultivation and practice of virtue and the training and ordering of his loves which flows from the knowledge of the truth. The one who harmonizes eloquence along with wisdom and virtue in worship before God, such a one is the true philosopher.²³⁰

It is perhaps fitting that John of Salisbury ends the *Metalogicon* with a prayer which weaves these themes together. Inviting his readers to pray for him, he offers, “[Let them pray] that, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and driving away the love of vanity, [Christ] may pour into me the light of His knowledge, and make me zealous in my pursuit and love of truth and in my devotion to it.”²³¹ From its opening prologue to its closing prayer, John of Salisbury’s defense of the arts of eloquence is infused with reverent humility, with reliance upon grace, and with love for God. John’s desire for his readers is that by grace they would pursue truth through the cultivation of reason and eloquence, and that this would be brought into service to God who is Himself the Truth.

²²⁹ *Metalogicon*, IV.40. McGarry’s translation of the same passage is also insightful and worth comparing:

“However, he who converts external things to the betterment of his own life, so that he may know and venerate their author; takes into account his own imperfection, which is scarcely able to understand a few things; uses transitory things, along with which he himself will also pass away, merely as a short-term loan; checks, represses, or extinguishes the lusts of his flesh; endeavors diligently to form again [in himself] the image of God, which has been disfigured by vice; and bends every effort to the cultivation and practice of virtue: [such a one] is most truly philosophizing.”

²³⁰ Sønnesyn summarizes: “By developing the specifically human faculties and potentials through the inculcation of the virtues, human beings may ultimately attain the very perfection for which these faculties were created: the beatific vision of God. However, while human beings must direct all their striving towards this ultimate end in order to have the possibility of attaining it, the innate powers of human nature are radically insufficient to reach their appointed end unaided. Only through the free gift of grace can human nature be raised to the beatific vision” (Sønnesyn, “Ethics of John of Salisbury”, 326).

²³¹ *Metalogicon*, IV.42.

Conclusion

In this final section, I want to briefly offer some reflections on the relevance of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* for the current movement of liberal education (usually referred to in our culture as classical education).²³² This survey is not exhaustive by any means but demonstrates my own recognition of some ways in which John's writing addresses our current situation within liberal education.

The first reflection is that John's writing provides a fitting and necessary reminder that the arts of the trivium are first and foremost *arts* – not stages of a child's education. Dorothy Sayers's 1947 address "The Lost Tools of Learning" provided a vital catalyst for the revival of classical education and has given inspiration for the founding of many classical, Christian schools over the past few decades in the United States. However, her appropriation of the terms 'grammar', 'logic', and 'rhetoric' to apply primarily to stages of a student's education corresponding to his mental development and formation was a shift in meaning and emphasis.²³³ It is now very common for families, students, and teachers within classical, Christian schools to speak of 'stages of the trivium' where 'grammar', 'logic', and 'rhetoric' are seen primarily as stages or grades of their school (with 'grammar' corresponding to elementary grades, 'logic' to middle grades, and 'rhetoric' to high school grades). I propose that this shift in understanding

²³² I think it would be beneficial to provide a reminder here about my use of the terms *liberal* and *classical*. To summarize, I use *liberal education* to speak of the kind of education that is unified by a certain philosophy of liberating the soul through education (which is classical in origin), but I use *classical* to refer to historical descriptions, whether those of the ancient world or those in our own era in which the name *classical* is applied to the revival of liberal education. Also, here in my conclusion of this thesis, I use the term *classical* in the way it is commonly used today – such as in speaking of the 'classical school movement' or 'classical, Christian education'.

²³³ Dorothy Sayers writes: "Now it seems to me that the lay-out of the Trivium adapts itself with a singular appropriateness to these three ages: Grammar to the Poll-parrot, Dialectic to the Pert, and Rhetoric to the Poetic Age" (11). "The Lost Tools of Learning", E. T. Heron Publisher, 1948, <https://www.pccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/LostToolsOfLearning-DorothySayers.pdf> (accessed August 24, 2023).

the trivium is not entirely harmful, but it does risk losing an understanding of what John of Salisbury defends in the *Metalogicon*.

The arts of the trivium are first and foremost arts. Their names may be applied analogically to stages of a child's education (following Sayers's model), but this should not transfer our meaning away from the notion of the trivial arts *as arts*. Each art of the trivium, as an art, possesses a body of reasoned, ordered knowledge about a subject-matter that enables us to make or do something. As John defends, grammar is the art of communicating through verbal signs and the sentence most specifically. Logic is the art of reasoning which discerns truth. And rhetoric (though John does not address it in detail) is the art of persuasion. Thus, we cannot fail to acknowledge that each of these arts is a discipline in its own right to be studied and perfected, yielding a corresponding skill that liberates the mind and prepares it to progress in further studies. We risk diluting our understanding of these propaedeutic disciplines if we see them primarily as stages of education. For example, if we understand 'grammar' to mean all of the elementary studies learned in an elementary mode of fact memorization proper to our youngest students, that mistakes the fact that the art of grammar is actually primarily about communicating correctly through verbal signs. Not only that, but thoroughly understanding the art of grammar entails a level of cognitive organization and difficulty that will rarely be mastered truly before the age of reason, which would probably be called the 'logic' or 'rhetoric' stage in most current classical schools. Similarly, the robust philosophical reasoning that Aristotle lays out in his *Organon* cannot truly be taught to 'logic' school grades, if those are middle grade students, because their minds are not sturdy and trained enough yet to handle that kind of difficulty and depth of reasoning. In all three arts – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – the true mastery of the art is not really possible prior to the latter years of primary education (what is normally called the

‘rhetoric’ stage). Transferring the names of the arts to stages of the student’s education can obscure this important fact.

My argument is not against Dorothy Sayers or against current classical, Christian schools. Rather, I simply want to make sure that in taking up the mantle to defend the trivium, we are actually defending the trivium as it was historically taught and understood, not recreating our own understanding of it that shortchanges or dilutes it. John of Salisbury and his forbears truly believed that the subjects taught in the seven liberal arts (and especially in the trivium) were supposed to provide a foundation for the other studies to be pursued subsequently. And, perhaps more controversially, the disciplines of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (and by extension the quadrivium) were deemed more foundational, exceptional, and propaedeutic than other studies that could have been pursued. In treating the trivium as stages of education rather than as these three core arts, we can miss the fact that the three disciplines of grammar, logic, and rhetoric were themselves deemed indispensable content and skills to be mastered. If we want to use ‘grammar’, ‘logic’, and ‘rhetoric’ to apply to grades of school, we can do so but only if we first understand, preserve, and transmit their original meaning, as well as thoroughly teaching those three liberal arts as foundational in our schools.

This leads me to a few remarks on the teaching of formal grammar and logic, which John spends most of his *Metalogicon* addressing. John defends the teaching and study of formal grammar, a subject that has fallen out of favor in our present cultural moment. Formal grammar has come under attack, such as by the 1963 Braddock report that disparaged the teaching of formal grammar as valuable in the classroom. There has also been a movement toward primarily imitative approaches of using grammar and in the teaching of languages (both English and foreign languages). The assumption is that, since students can learn language most naturally

through imitation, they should thus not be required to learn it ‘artificially’ through formal grammatical conventions, which usually involve memorization, parsing, diagramming, and other such formal practices. This hearkens to John’s foundational remarks on nature and art at the outset of his *Metalogicon*. Students may learn indeed learn language easily and naturally by imitation, but this capacity of nature must be perfected, refined, and made durable through the application of reason which seeks to organize and understand. Formal grammar is necessary for the true mastery of a language with excellence and for the transmission of a language. As John argues, it is not enough to have basic proficiency or natural ingenuity with a skill (i.e., language); art allows us to understand and order our knowledge, to perfect its use, to repeat it consistently, and to transmit it to others. Thus, John is a strong advocate for the preservation of formal grammar instruction for which there is no substitute.

Since this conclusion is reflecting on the application of John’s work in the sphere of classical education in our present moment specifically, I will not give my attention to the numerous and destructive ways that public education in the U.S. and around the world has forsaken formal grammar instruction. Rather, the public schools’ abandonment of formal grammar is indicative of a larger cultural, philosophical trend in our era which does show itself in classical, Christian schools, too. Thankfully, many classical, Christian schools were founded on the basis of teaching these foundational skills of knowledge (the trivium), but that does not mean they are impervious to the philosophical trend away from formal grammar, nor does it mean that every teacher in classical schools understands and advocates for formal grammar instruction for the students. If we want to preserve the true heritage of liberal education that has been handed down to us, we need to follow John of Salisbury in upholding formal grammar instruction as necessary and nonnegotiable.

Similarly, John also advocates for formal instruction in traditional Aristotelian logic. Once again, the teaching of traditional logic has suffered an even worse fate than grammar in our present cultural moment, particularly in public education. And just as with grammar, we have hope in the fact that many classical, Christian schools champion teaching the ‘lost tools of learning’ to students – teaching them how to think, read, and evaluate for themselves. My warning would be, though, that we must also make sure that our understanding of the ‘logic’ we teach is in accord with the traditional art of logic as it was taught and handed down to us. Many contemporary classes or curricula (even in classical schools, not just public schools) substitute a nebulous version of ‘critical thinking skills’ in place of traditional Aristotelian logic. The result of this is to suggest that logic is merely a mental exercise in sharpening one’s thinking skills, comparable to many other such exercises – brain teasers, math puzzles, solving Rubix cubes, computer programming, or playing other kinds of logic games. Sometimes ‘critical thinking skills’ seem to be parsed down to merely learning to ask good questions. To be clear, I am not at all discounting learning to ask good questions (which is part of logic), but I am suggesting that such a view is a substantially oversimplified understanding of logic. This understanding would seek to have the use and application of logic in all studies, but without the formal study of logic in its own right.

Aristotelian logic is about the way in which we use words to describe reality, to what extent we can know whether the predications we make are true or false, and to what extent we can have certainty of knowledge. Thus, it is much more philosophical than the idea of casual ‘critical thinking’ exercises would suggest. To teach Aristotelian logic is to teach anthropology (a certain account of human nature) and epistemology (how we can come to knowledge) and even to make forays into metaphysics (with the questions of universals and particulars, for

example). Aristotelian logic is an excellent foundation for the robust study of philosophy, ethics, politics, theology, and more, which is precisely how the ancient and medieval teachers conceived of it. We do a disservice to our students if we pare down the substance of their logic classes to avoid complexity rather than forcing them to wrestle with these questions that are at the basis of any human knowing. There are a growing number of classical logic curricula that are written to parallel Aristotle's *Organon* and the way he lays out the subject-matter, which would seem to be a solid way to progress.

Another important note on the teaching of logic is that teaching Aristotelian logic is *not* the same thing as teaching modern symbolic logic, which has developed into the logic of computer programming. Symbolic logic does have ancient roots with Chrysippus (279 – 206 B.C.), but it was not really developed until modern times by thinkers such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1781 – 1848), George Boole (1815 – 1864), Augustus De Morgan (1806 – 1871), Gottlob Frege (1848 – 1925), Alfred North Whitehead (1861 – 1947), and Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970).²³⁴ It is a development of the branch of hypothetical reasoning, which John of Salisbury acknowledges Aristotle did not treat fully and which he says later thinkers developed.²³⁵ The topic of symbolic logic is vast and worth discussing at length, which I cannot do adequately here. Suffice it to say that, while symbolic logic is a legitimate development of the field of mathematical and hypothetical reasoning and while it does serve many valuable purposes, it is not a liberal art in the mode of Aristotelian logic (which is *verbal*) and it is not propaedeutic in the same way. Aristotelian logic recognizes the inherent connection between

²³⁴ See Martin Cothran, *Traditional Logic I: Introduction to Formal Logic*, 3rd ed (Memoria Press, 2017), 1 – 7; also see Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles*, 3.1 ed., edited by Trent Dougherty (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2010), 15 – 25, 364 – 369; and also see R. E. Houser, *Logic as a Liberal Art: An Introduction to Rhetoric and Reasoning* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), xvii – xx.

²³⁵ *Metalogicon* IV.4, 21.

intellectual understanding and verbal expression, and it sets out the different modes of knowledge and reasoning and their corresponding kinds of certainty or probability. Symbolic logic, on the other hand, is a specific kind of reasoning (a species of logic as a genus) which has very useful applications in certain areas such as mathematics or programming, but it is not a linguistic art addressing our use of language, nor does it have the philosophical complexity of Aristotelian logic. The student who has studied Aristotelian logic may find much that is interesting, worthwhile, and applicable in symbolic logic, but symbolic logic will not serve as an adequate substitute for Aristotelian logic. Much more could be argued on this topic, but I will simply suggest that, to transmit the tradition handed down to us and to best prepare our students, we must teach them Aristotelian logic, not a substituted version of symbolic logic.²³⁶

In teaching Aristotelian logic, we also must make sure that we do not let our understanding or practice of the logical art be corrupted into a version of pseudo-logic that looks more like what John criticizes in the *Metalogicon*: sophistry, constant disputation, hyper-skepticism, arguing useless questions, failing to discern what is significant and what is not, failing to distinguish between solid and weak reasoning, treating all arguments and kinds of reasoning equally – in short, producing over-loquacious disputants who “at all times and in all places debate equally about all things.”²³⁷ This is the result of allowing logic to become sterile, as John warns against, by focusing on it exclusively without bringing it into service of other

²³⁶ There is much that could be argued here, and Kreeft has a good analysis of modern symbolic logic in his *Socratic Logic* (see footnote above). The simplest arguments against modern symbolic logic in favor of Aristotelian logic are that symbolic logic does not recognize universal natures to be real (Aristotelian realism) and that it does not have a real doctrine of *predication* – only identity statements. For example, to ‘say something of something else’ (which is to predicate something of a subject) requires a level of philosophical understanding that the human intellect is capable of, but which is not captured in an identity statement ($a = b$) of symbolic logic. As Porphyry clarifies in his *Isagoge*, to predicate can be to say something’s species, its genus, its specific difference, its property, or its accident. This level of intellectual understanding and metaphysical realism is captured in Aristotelian logic but not in symbolic logic.

²³⁷ *Metalogicon*, II.8.

disciplines and studies. It also can be the result of pursuing logic without the foundational philosophy of Aristotelian logic, which is that truth exists and can be known through human sensation, reasoning, and language. We must teach our students how to pursue truth and model it for them. We must teach logic, but we must be sure that we are teaching what Aristotle and John of Salisbury meant by logic, not allowing it to be corrupted into mere sophistry and disputation for its own sake.

The last remark I want to make on the relevance of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* to our current moment in the revival and transmission of liberal education is on the proper use of the past tradition and the proper spirit of transmission. I have argued for teaching formal grammar and logic as John does because I believe that there is value in what has been handed down as the classical tradition, and we risk losing insight and valuable formation when we depart from the time-tested ways or seek to metaphorically 'reinvent the wheel' of classical education. However, lest I seem to be a reactionary advocating antiquated ways merely because they are old, I would propose that John gives us a healthy framework for seeing how we should both be humble, attentive recipients of the tradition passed down to us, as well as creative artisans who can transmit and develop what we have received in the best way for our own generation and the generations to come.

As I have already argued in the body of this thesis, John believes that Aristotelian logic should be taught, but that it need not be taught exclusively through the exact text of Aristotle's writings. In fact, he suggests that other 'modern' teachers (his contemporaries) might teach the same concepts more effectively than Aristotle's text itself, which can often be dense and confusing. He also suggests that other teachers since Aristotle have developed logic further than

Aristotle did, building upon Aristotle's foundation. In considering this, John provides this amazing reflection:

Nevertheless, our age enjoys the benefit of the age preceding, and often knows more than it, not indeed because our intelligence outstrips theirs, but because we depend on the strength of others and on the abundant learning of our ancestors. Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants so that we are able to see more and further than they, not indeed by reason of the sharpness of our own vision or the height of our bodies, but because we are lifted up on high and raised aloft by the greatness of giants. With these words, I readily concur, because the compilers of the textbooks, even in their *Introductiones*, impart the rudiments of the art and many articles of truth fully as well as the ancients, and, it may be, with greater profit.²³⁸

John's spirit reflected in this beautiful passage demonstrates the proper humility we should have toward the preceding generations and toward the greatest masters such as Aristotle and others.

We seek to learn from them because all of our knowledge and progress is indebted to them and built upon what they began. We are not the first humans to wrestle with any topic of knowledge, and often those who have wrestled with it before us have left very eloquent, inspiring, or insightful accounts of their own struggles, thoughts, and beliefs. Nevertheless, John does say that we frequently know more than our forebears; yet it is because we are "lifted up on high and raised aloft by the greatness of giants", not because we are inherently wiser, more virtuous, or more naturally talented. We have the ability to progress further than the ancients and medievals did precisely because we can work with what they left us and because we have the perspective to see them more objectively than they could see themselves. In this sense, each generation of learners and teachers provides a gift of themselves to the future generations – a gift of written knowledge and of perspective.

For those of us engaged in the current sphere of liberal education, we must draw upon those who have gone before and make sure we are faithfully carrying on the tradition of liberal

²³⁸ *Metalogicon*, III.4.

education. This means that we must understand the liberal arts truly for what they are, which is what John helps us to do with the trivium in his *Metalogicon*. Nevertheless, we are not bound in a worship of the past for its own sake; we can take the knowledge of the greatest teachers of the past and apply it in our own era and situation, just as John of Salisbury did in the twelfth century. We can also recognize the great teachers and writers of our own era, as John did with those of his era. Ironically, here in the *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury gives us a kind of instruction for how to receive, read, and apply his own work. We may see further than John because we are borne aloft on his shoulders, and we can use his *Metalogicon* to rebuke the revived shades of Cornificianism in our own world and to further the cause of liberal education in our own time.

Bibliography

- John of Salisbury. *Metalogicon*. Translated and edited by Daniel D. McGarry. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2015.
- John of Salisbury. *Metalogicon*. Translated and edited by J. B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan. *Corpus Christianorum in translation*, Vol. 12. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013.
- Joannis Saresberiensis. *Metalogicon*. Edited by J. B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan. *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*, XCVIII. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1991.
- ***
- Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle. Vol. I*. Revised Oxford Translation. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Augustine. *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*. Translated by Peter King. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995.
- Brown, Sister M. Anthony. "John of Salisbury." *Franciscan Studies* 19, no. 3/4 (1959): 241 – 297. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41974691> (accessed May 24, 2023).
- Cothran, Martin. *Traditional Logic I: Introduction to Formal Logic*. 3rd ed. Memoria Press, 2017.
- FitzGerald, Brian D. "Medieval Theories of Education: Hugh of St. Victor and John of Salisbury." *Oxford Review of Education* 36, no. 5 (2010): 575 – 588. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25753519> (accessed May 24, 2023).
- Gilchrist, Brian. "The *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury: Medieval Rhetoric as Educational Praxis." PhD Dissertation, Duquesne University, 2013. <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1596&context=etd> (accessed October 7, 2023).
- Grellard, Christophe and Frédérique Lachaud, eds. *A Companion to John of Salisbury*. Boston: Brill, 2014, <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/1877186?accountid=7106> (accessed May 24, 2023).
- Houser, R. E. *Logic as a Liberal Art: An Introduction to Rhetoric and Reasoning*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2020.
- Keats-Rohan, Katharine S. B. "The Textual Tradition of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*." *Revue d'histoire des textes*, no. 16 (1986): 229 – 282. doi : 10.3406/rht.1988.1299.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles*. 3.1 ed. Edited by Trent Dougherty. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2010.
- Lehman, Jeffrey. *Socratic Conversation: Bringing the Dialogues of Plato and the Socratic Tradition into Today's Classroom*. Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021.

- McGarry, Daniel D. "Educational Theory in the *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury." *Speculum* 23, no. 4 (1948): 659 – 675. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2850447>.
- McKeon, Richard. "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages." *Speculum* 17, no. 1 (1942): 1 – 32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2856603>.
- Morris, Geoege S. "Mediæval Anticipations of the Modern English Mind – John of Salisbury, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, William of Occam." In *British Thought and Thinkers: Introductory Studies, Critical, Biographical and Philosophical.*, 30 – 52. Chicago, IL: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1880. doi:10.1037/12831-002.
- Nederman, Cary J. *John of Salisbury*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Vol. 288. Tempe, AZ.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005.
- Newman, John Henry. *The Idea of a University*. Edited by Martin J. Svaglic. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982.
- Pieper, Josef. *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems in Medieval Philosophy*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Pantheon Press, 1960.
- Poole, Reginald L. "The Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres in John of Salisbury's Time." *The English Historical Review* 35, no. 139 (1920): 321 – 342. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/551501> (accessed May 24, 2023).
- Sayers, Dorothy. "The Lost Tools of Learning." E. T. Heron Publisher, 1948. <https://www.pccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/LostToolsOfLearning-DorothySayers.pdf> (accessed August 24, 2023).
- Sharp, Joseph. "Definitions and Depictions of Rhetorical Practice in Medieval English Fürstenspiegel." PhD Dissertation, University of Louisville, 2022. <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5115&context=etd> (accessed October 7, 2023).
- Thomas Aquinas. *Posteriora Analytica*. Translated by Fabian R. Larcher, O.P. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/PostAnalytica.htm#02> (accessed October 21, 2023).
- Thomas Aquinas. *Super Librum Ethicorum Aristotelis*. Translated by C. I. Litzinger, O.P. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/Ethics.htm> (accessed September 8, 2023).
- Thomas Aquinas. *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*. Translated by Vincent Guagliardo, O.P., Charles Hess, O.P., and Richard Taylor. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996. Internet Archive Open Library, https://archive.org/details/commentary-on-the-book-of-causes-aquinas_202106/page/n3/mode/2up (accessed September 8, 2023).
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. <https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm> (accessed September 8, 2023).

- Turgeon, Wendy C. "John of Salisbury: An Argument for Philosophy within Education."
Analytic Teaching 18, no. 2 (1999): 44 – 52.
<https://journal.viterbo.edu/index.php/at/article/view/682/466> (accessed August 18, 2023).
- Webb, Clement C. J. "John of Salisbury." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2, no. 2 (1892):
91 – 107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4543597> (accessed May 24, 2023).