

NICOLE ORESME AND *MODI RERUM**

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Among the precious treasures poured out by prof. De Rijk's *Logica Modernorum* we can find also texts referring to a theory that has been wholly developed in the XIVth century: the *modi rerum*, whose close relationship with the *complexe significabile* was noticed by Gabriel Nuchelmans¹ and which have probably some resemblances with what *Ars Meliduna* holds about the meaning of the *enuntiabile*². Oresme's commentary on the *Physics*³ is a very in-

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1 GABRIEL NUCHELMANS, *Theories of the Propositions. Ancient and medieval conceptions of the bearers of truth and falsity*, Amsterdam-London, North-Holland Publishing Company 1973 (North-Holland Linguistic Series, 8), chaps. 15 and 16, and pp. 274-276 in particular for *modi rerum*.

2 LAMBERTUS M. DE RIJK, *Logica Modernorum. A contribution to the history of early terminist logic, II, 2: The Origin and early Development of the Theory of Supposition*, Assen, Van Gorcum 1967, p. 357; cf. NUCHELMANS, *Theories of the Propositions*, cit., p. 209, where the position defended by the *Ars Meliduna* is labelled as 'reist'.

3 In collaboration with Henry Hugonnard-Roche, Jean Celeyrette, Edmond Mazet and Stefan Kirschner I am preparing the edition of this commentary. S. Kirschner has published the questions on books III-IV and some of book V (6th-9th) (STEFAN KIRSCHNER, *Nicolaus Oresmes Kommentar zur Physik des Aristoteles. Kommentar mit Edition der*

teresting witness of the *modi rerum*-theory, which have not yet received the attention it deserves⁴. Oresme makes recourse to the *modi rerum* in very important occasions, such as in discussing the nature of accidents, of *privatio*, of motion, of place; we cannot, nevertheless, unfortunately find in his commentary an explicit and thorough presentation of this theory. The analysis of the contexts in which it is used, however, not only consents to appreciate its philosophical relevance, but also provides some indications of Oresme's possible sources. Through *modi* or *dispositiones rerum* Oresme is able to avoid a commitment either to a realist or to a terminist ontology, to use traditional labels.

In this paper I shall consider Oresme's polemical use of *modi rerum* (1.),

Quaestiones zu Buch 3 und 4 der aristotelischen Physik sowie von vier Quaestionen zu Buch 5, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag 1997 (Sudhoffs Archiv. Beihefte, H. 39). This commentary has been preserved only by one manuscript (Sevilla, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, ms. 7-6-30), discovered by Guy Beaujouan, see GUY BEAUJOUAN, *Manuscrits scientifiques médiévaux de la Bibliothèque Colombine de Seville*, in: *Actes du Dixième Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences (Ithaca 26 VIII-2 IX 1962)*, Paris, Hermann 1964, p. 633; see also STEFANO CAROTI, *La position de Nicole Oresme sur la nature du mouvement* («*Questiones super Physicam*», III, 1-8). *Problèmes gnoséologiques, ontologiques et sémantiques*, in «*Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*» LXI, 1994, pp. 303-385: p. 304, n. 1. On the importance of the *Physics* commentaries of this period see EDITH D. SYLLA, *Aristotelian Commentaries and Scientific Change: The Parisian Nominalists on the Cause of the Natural Motion of Inanimate Bodies*, in «*Vivarium*» XXXI, 1993, pp. 37-83; EAD., *Transmission of the new physics of the fourteenth century from England to the continent*, in STEFANO CAROTI and PIERRE SOUFFRIN (eds.), *La nouvelle physique du XIVe siècle*, Firenze, Olschki 1997 (Biblioteca di Nuncius. Studi e testi, XXIV), pp. 65-110, see also STEFANO CAROTI, *Nuovi linguaggi e filosofia della natura: i limiti delle potenze attive in alcuni commenti parigini ad Aristotele*, in STEFANO CAROTI (ed.) and JOHN E. MURDOCH (intr.), *Studies in Medieval Natural Philosophy*, Firenze, Olschki 1989 (Biblioteca di Nuncius. Studi e testi, I), pp. 177-226. See now: NICOLE ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam (Books I-VII)*, ed. by S. Caroti, J. Celeyrette, S. Kirschner, E. Mazet, Leiden-Boston, Brill 2013 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 112).

4 I have dealt with this topic in Oresme's discussion on motion, see CAROTI, *La position de Nicole Oresme sur la nature du mouvement*, cit., pp. 335-342; STEFANO CAROTI, *Oresme on Motion (Questiones super Physicam III, 2-7)*, in «*Vivarium*», XXXI (1993), pp. 27-33. See also JEAN CELEYRETTE and EDMOND MAZET, *La hiérarchie des degrés d'être chez Nicole Oresme*, in «*Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*» VIII, 1998, pp. 45-65, KIRSCHNER, *Nicolaus Oresmes Kommentar zur Physik*, cit., pp. 38-41.

trying to set it in the larger context of both his ontology (3.) and his epistemology (4.). Oresme's challenge to either a realist or terminist ontology by means of *modi rerum* conceals probably an attack to William Ockham; Oresme refers explicitly to Ockham concerning exclusive propositions, but I think that on many other occasions the polemical target of Oresme's criticism can be reasonably identified in William Ockham⁵ or in some unnamed followers of the Venerabilis Inceptor (5.). Some hints are reserved also to the possible sources of Oresme's *modi rerum* (2).

1. The polemical use of *modi rerum* resorts clearly from the three different meanings of 'accidens' in the 5th *questio* of the first book («Utrum ens sit univocum ad substantiam et ad accidens»)⁶. *Accidens* can be viewed as: a) a *vera forma inherens substantie*; b) a term denoting a particular state of the substance⁷; c) a *modus* or *dispositio rei* (Oresme does not use these words in this context), which can be expressed through the infinitive "aliquid tale esse" (for quality) or "tantum esse" (for quantity)⁸. We do not find here any hint neither to *modi rerum* or to *complexe significabile*, which is, however, presented in its

5 See *infra*, n. 39 for a not better specified *glossa occamica*.

6 ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 31-39.

7 Or even a substance in the case of accidents of the category of quality; Oresme deals with this problem elsewhere, see below.

8 «Secundo, notandum quod accidens potest ymaginari tripliciter: uno modo quod sit vera forma inherens substantie, sicut forma substantialis, licet non intrinsece, ita quod sit vera essentia demonstrata divisibilis et extensa ad extensionem subiecti et proprie significabilis nomine substantivo, sicut ymaginantur de albedine. Secundo modo, quod accidens nullo modo preter animam sit alia res ab ipsa substantia subiecta, sed solum sit ipsa substantia taliter se habens, secundum quod de ea dicuntur diversa predicata, et sic accidens non esset aliud a substantia nisi predicatum, et isto modo dicunt aliqui de quolibet accidente excepta qualitate. Tertia via alia est, et posset ymaginari quod accidens non esset proprie forma extensa vel inherens secundum primam viam, nec solum substantia vel predicatum vel terminus iuxta secundam viam, sed esset aliquid tale esse aut tantum esse. Verbi gratia quod albedo non esset aliud quam album esse, quod proprie significaretur per nomen concretum et isto infinitivo 'esse' et per nomen adiectivum», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., p. 34.

linguistic form. This passage is all the same very important, because what in other parts of the commentary is labelled as *modus* or *dispositio rei* is introduced here as a third solution which permits to bypass either a realist or a terminist view of accidents. The generic reference to the *aliqui*, who maintain that the accidents, with the sole exception of those in the category of quality, are only terms, is clearly to a position identical with Ockham's.

In the 15th *questio* of the first book, concerning the denotation of the term *privatio* («Utrum privatio sit ens»⁹) Oresme proposes again a threefold distinction, but we do not meet here with an opposition between realist and terminist solutions, at least not in a clear cut way as in the above quoted passage on accidents. The first position relies upon the difference between *significatio* and *connotatio* and does not plead for the existence of a special thing denoted by the term '*privatio*'. *Privatio*, in fact, stands for (*supponit pro*) matter, and connotes that it has not a suited form¹⁰. According to the terminist view *privatio* is nothing but a *propositio*, which must be true when a natural change occurs¹¹.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 112- 118.

10 «Primus modus est quod privatio est aliquid, quia est materia privata, ita quod hec nomina 'materia', 'subiectum' et 'privatio' supponunt pro eodem, sed tamen 'privatio' connotat aliquid, scilicet subiectum carere forma que nata est esse in ipso. Et ideo universaliter ista nomina <sunt> sinonima: 'privatum' et 'privatio', 'cecum' et 'cecitas', et sic de aliis [...]. Ista potest probari, quia hec videtur intentio Aristotelis, quia dicit quod materia et privatio sunt unum in numero et differunt ratione. Et exponitur, id est diffinitione exprime<n>te quid nominis, quia, licet hec nomina idem significant, tamen non unum connotant. Secundo, frustra fit multitudo ubi sufficit paucitas. Et per hoc probatur primo *huius* quod principia non sunt plura tribus, quia sufficiunt; modo omnia possunt salvari ponendo tantum duo principia, sicut patet ex solutione argumentorum, que omnia solvuntur per tales expositiones et connotationes nominum», *ibid.*, p. 113.

11 «Secundus modus est quod privatio non est materia, immo proprie non est privatio, sed, si dicatur esse principium, hoc est pro tanto quod hoc nomine intelligitur quedam propositio copulativa, quam oportet esse veram; et est ista: 'subiectum est et quedam forma non est in subiecto quam natum est habere'. Et ideo non est aliud dicere privationem esse principium, nisi quod ad transmutationem naturalem requiritur quod hec copulativa sit vera, ac si hoc nomen causa brevitatis poneretur loco istarum propositionum», *ibid.*

The arguments against the two first solutions, collected in two conclusions, prepare the explicit formulation of the third one, which, according to Oresme, «magis concordat dictis Aristotelis et etiam sensui naturali et etiam dictis antiquorum»¹²; for this solution *privatio* is not matter but «materiam privatam esse aliquo»¹³. Even though this solution does not apparently differs from the first, they can not be confused: in the first solution the denotation is matter, while in this one it is a *conditio privativa* of matter itself. I think that we are facing here a different situation from that we met in the discussion about accidents: to stress the difference between his and the first solution, Oresme is ready to admit that *privatio* can be viewed as an accident, contrary to what he maintains in the 13th question of the first book, and in neat contrast with his effort to reduce all the categories but substance to *modi rerum*, as we shall see below. In this context Oresme is evidently arguing against two different aspects or levels of what for him is a terminist point of view, which he at any rate distinguishes carefully, so much so that they are presented as distinct solutions.

The virulence of the arguments against the first position induces to assume that it is Oresme's true polemical target: according to him, in fact, to maintain the sinonimity between *cecus* and *cecitas* is not only contrary to logic, but also destroys the differences between Plato and Aristoteles¹⁴. The

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116. «Tertia conclusio est quod privatio est subiectam materiam privatam esse aliquo vel aliquid simile. Et ita dico de qualibet privatione, sicut tenebra, malitia, deformitas et quecumque similia. Et hec est intentio Augustini in *Encheiridion*. Et tale quid potest dici 'ens privatum' vel 'accidens privativum' aut 'condicio privativa'».

¹⁴ Oresme quotes the commentary of Averroes, where Plato is accused for having confused matter and privation: «Et sit prima conclusio contra primum modum. Et est ista quod materia non est privatio, sed subiectum. Probo sic, quia sequeretur quod ista essent synonyma: 'privatum', 'privatio', 'cecum', 'cecitas'. Consequentiam ipsi probant, sed consequens est contra Aristotelem in *Postpredicamentis*..sed .cecus dicitur homo, cecitas vero homo nullo modo dicitur. Et ideo, sicut homo non est cecitas, ita nec materia

identification between *privatio* and *materia*, moreover, is very dangerous also on the moral level, because it seems to foster a very different idea of evil than Augustine's, and it does not permit to discriminate between *natura*, which as a God's creature is good, and *malitia* which is a privation¹⁵. The second position has not, however, less dangerous implications, because if privation is nothing, corrupted things can be continuously regenerated¹⁶.

In the fourth argument against this solution Oresme asks if the meaning of the proposition which denotes *privatio* is something or nothing at all¹⁷; in his reply he states that it can not obviously be nothing, because propositions and terms have a meaning which is granted by extra linguistic entities¹⁸. The

privatio est. Secundo, sic: si ita esset, sequitur quod non esset differentia inter positionem Aristotelis et positionem Platonis de principiis rerum naturalium. Consequens est expresse contra Aristotelem, qui nititur improbare Platonem. Probo consequentiam per Commentatorem commento 79 et etiam 78 ante, qui dicit expresse quod Plato deficit in hoc quod posuit quod materia est privatio, et non ponebat differentiam», *ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

15 «Quarto, arguo generaliter de quacumque privatione, sicut de turpitudine, de malitia, cecitate etc., et suppono quod cecitas non est aliud quam hominem esse cecum, aut malitia quam hominem esse malum, nisi in casu ubi est unus habitus. Tunc arguitur sic: illa distinguuntur et non sunt idem, quorum unum est bonum, antiquum, cognitum et dilectum, et aliud per oppositum est malum et novum, ignotum et oditum. Modo sic est quod natura hominis homicide est bona, antiqua, cognita et dilecta, et tamen homicidium vel esse homicidam vel cecum vel aliquid tale in casu potest esse et debet esse <oditum> et malum, ignotum et talia», *ibid.*, p. 114. Oresme is quoting the *Sententia LXV* of Prosperus' of Aquitania *Sententie ex Augustino*, see PROSPERI AQUITANI, *Opera (Expositio Salmorum, Liber Sententiarum)*, Turnhout, Brepols 1972 (CCSL, LXVIII A), p. 273.

16 «Secundo, ratione Commentatoris [...] nisi esset aliquid, sequitur quod corruptum iterum posset generari, quod habetur pro impossibili. Consequentia patet, quia post eius corruptionem omnia essent sicut erant ante, puta materia et agens, quia, si privatio nihil fuisset, nihil esset minus quam ante», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., p. 115.

17 «Quarto, secundum illum modum dicendi, hoc nomen 'privatio' est loco unius propositionis copulative; tunc quero utrum sic esse sicut ipsa significat sit aliquid, et <si sic> habeo propositum. Si nihil, tunc dimittatur pro nihilo, sicut prius», *ibid.*, p. 115.

18 «Et arguo sicut Augustinus: impossibile est cecitatem esse nisi sit oculus, et impossibile est iniustitiam esse nisi sit homo iniustus; igitur tale debet dici aliquid. Consequentia patet, quia, si nihil esset sicut chimera, tunc nihil requiritur ad hoc quod propositiones vel voces illud significant», *ibid.*, p.115.

reference to the meaning of the proposition is very important, because it can provide a possible source of the *modi rerum*.

We have so far considered passages where the *modi rerum* are introduced in a threefold distinction concerning respectively the meanings of *accidens* and of *privatio*¹⁹; in the questions of the third book of the *Physics*, where the denotation of the term '*motus*' is discussed, we face a more complex situation, where five different solutions are presented²⁰. Having already dealt with this topic elsewhere, in this paper I limit myself to stress the difference between Oresme's own solution and the *mobile*-theory.

Together with the realist -- which is considered the worst -- and the terminist view (according to which motion is nothing), we can find here a third solution, the *mobile*-theory (which is also Ockham's), praised by Oresme for not introducing new things in order to explain motion. The difference between this solution and the *modi rerum* one, supported by Oresme, is clearly identified in a different opinion as far as the meaning of the expression *aliter se habere* is concerned: «quia ymaginatur quod taliter se habere non sit nisi res sic se habens»²¹. This statement seems to point out that the differ-

19 For other threefold distinctions see CAROTI, *La position de Nicole Oresme sur la nature du mouvement*, cit., pp. 313, 337, 340.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-27.

21 «Prima que dicit quod motus nihil est: capiendo 'aliquid' pro eo quod vere est aliquid, concedendum est, sicut dicit Aristoteles quod accidens non est ens, sed est entis [...]. Secunda, que dicit quod motus est multa, licet parum valeat, tamen veritas est quod ad hoc quod motus sit, oportet multa esse, quia indivisibile non movetur. Tertia, que dicit quod est mobile, quia ymaginatur quod taliter se habere non sit nisi res sic se habens, secundum hoc habet apparentiam, quia etiam ista condicio vel fluxus non est tale superadditum, sicut multi ymaginantur, nec est res separabilis quacumque virtute [...]. Quarta, ponens quod est acquisitum, etiam est vera, quia <motus> uno modo capitur pro acquisito, sed falsa est in eo quod negat aliam acceptionem. Alia, que ponit quod est fluxus ad modum unius forme distincte, sicut esset albedo vel anima vel aliquod tale, est omnium pessima; tamen si intelligatur quod non sit talis forma vel talis res, sed modus vel condicio ipsius mobilis, tunc est verissima et probabilior et facilior inter omnes, et concordat dictis Aristotelis et philosophorum», *ibid.*, pp. 340-341 .

ence between the two solutions relies on a more clear cut distinction between a state of affairs, a condition of the *mobile* (the *modi rerum*), and the *mobile* itself.

This difference can be linguistically rendered through the distinction between *res sic se habens* or *res aliter se habens* and *rem taliter* (or *sic*) *se habere* or *rem aliter se habere*, a distinction that sometime is used by Oresme to illustrate the divergence between his *modi rerum* and the terminist point of view. An allusion to the ontological status of what is rendered through expressions including adverbs like *aliter* and *qualiter*²² consents a more precise appraisal of this distinction: the '*taliter*', '*qualiter*' or '*aliquo modo esse*' do not exclude a denotation of what is expressed through the linguistic forms in which they are used, contrary to what defended in the discussion on motion by the *mobile*-theory, where only the *mobile* is the denotation of the term *motus*. The diminished ontology of such properties or states of affairs do not prevent from acknowledging the difference, as clearly intended by Oresme in opposing the *modus rei* to the *res aliter se habens*. Both positions are, at any rate, very resolute in opposing a realist point of view, with Oresme assuming a more reductionist atti-

22 In the 19th question of the first book («Utrum cuiuslibet transmutationis principia sint contraria», *ibid.*, pp. 143-151): «Ultimum dubium est quia videtur quod privatio non sit contraria forme, quia dicit Aristoteles quod privatio est per se non ens, igitur generatio dicitur transmutatio de non esse simpliciter. Et si privatio esset, ipsa esset causa appetitus sue corruptionis, quod est contra Aristotelem, quia omne ens diligit se permanere. Respondeo quod 'esse simpliciter' potest esse equivocum: uno modo dicitur esse simpliciter, id est principaliter et non secundum quid; et illo modo privatio est non <esse> simpliciter et per se non ens. Alio modo simpliciter, id est universaliter, sic quod non ens simpliciter, id est nullo modo ens; et sic privatio non est non ens simpliciter, sed est ens aliquo modo, ita quod ly 'aliquo modo' dicitur esse determinatio diminuens, sicut possemus dicere 'taliter', 'qualiter'. Ideo dicit Aristoteles quarto *Metaphysice* quod privationes <et> negationes quodammodo esse dicimus; similiter cum dicimus quod generatio est de non esse simpliciter, potest dici quod forma nullo modo erat ante; vel quod est de privatione, que non est ens simpliciter, sed secundum quid et quodammodo», *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

tude concerning accidents, thanks chiefly to the *modi rerum*. The basic antirealist attitude of both positions could make the appraisal of such a philosophical divergence a knotty question, but I think that we have enough evidence either of the polemical use of *modi rerum* or of the polemical target itself.

2. A very similar distinction is to be found in a passage from John Buridan's commentary on the *Analitica priora*, where he records the different meanings proposed for the proposition «hominem bibere vinum». What I have labelled as *modi rerum* theory corresponds to the second position, for which the meaning of the proposition is identified with a *complexe significabile*²³. An authoritative witness about the close relationship between *complexe significabile* and *modus rei* comes from Albert of Saxony's commentary on the *Physics*, in a passage of the 3rd question of the third book («Utrum figura sit res distincta a re figurata»)²⁴, where he points out that in his time it was customary to refer to *modus rei* as to *complexe significabile*.

Complexe significabile, however, can not be considered the only possible source for the *modi rerum*. In the 6th question on the fourth book («Utrum lo-

23 «Aliqui dicunt quod hoc non est nisi una propositio ita quod haec oratio 'hominem bibere vinum' supponit pro illa propositione 'homo bibit vinum'. Alii dicunt: 'hominem bibere vinum' est quoddam significabile complexum correspondens ex parte rei huic corruptibili propositioni 'homo bibit vinum'. Et alii dicunt quod 'hominem bibere vinum' non est aliud quam homo taliter se habens ad vinum. Alii autem dicunt quod est quoddam accidens inhaerens homini ut taliter se habeat ad vinum», MARIA E. REINA, *Il problema del linguaggio in Buridano. II. Significazione e verità*, «Rivista critica di storia della filosofia» XV, 1960, pp. 141-166: pp. 160-161, n. 18. See also NUCHELMANS, *Theories of the Propositions*, cit., p. 248. This corrects what I have wrongly assumed in my article, CAROTI, *Oresme on Motion*, cit., p. 338.

24 «Esse figuratum et figuratum non sunt res distinctae, saltem sicut substantia et substantia, vel sicut accidens et accidens, vel sicut accidens et substantia, quamvis forte bene posset sustineri quod distinguerentur sicut res et modus rei, quem quidem modum rei nunc temporis vocamus significabile complexum», BENOIT PATAR, *Expositio et Quaestiones in Aristotelis «Physicam» ad Albertum de Saxonia attributae*, Louvain-La-Neuve, Louvain, Paris, Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Editions Peters 1999 (Philosophes Médiévaux, XL), p. 317.

cus sit spatium interceptum inter latera continentis, quod esset vacuum si non esset ibi locatum»)²⁵, before replying to a list of *dubia*, the first of which concerns the ontology of place, Oresme reminds the different meanings of the term '*ens*'. In this context he mentions only two of them: the former which can be expressed through absolute or connotative terms, *complexe* or *incomplexe significabilia* or with other categorematic terms, the latter through syncategorematic terms, like the adverbs '*ubi*' or '*ibi*'²⁶. Following this distinction, one seems entitled to agree with the theory according to which '*locus*' is nothing, because it can be considered neither a substance nor an accident, for being expressed *propriissime* through an adverb such as '*hic*' or '*ibi*'. Oresme, however, conforms himself to the received opinion for which place is something, defining this something as an *aliqua conditio*²⁷.

25 ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 456-464.

26 «Pro solutione primorum argumentorum notandum <est> quod '*ens*' dicitur multipliciter, ut patet primo *huius*, et ad propositum dupliciter: uno modo pro eo quod potest nominaliter significari sive absolute sive connotative, sive *complexe* sive *incomplexe*, sicut '*homo*', '*album*', '*albedo*' etc. et per pronomen demonstrativum significari dicendo '*hoc*' vel '*illud*' vel per reciprocum vel per relativum identitatis aut diversitatis, dicendo '*ipsum*', '*aliud*', '*idem*', '*diversum*' etc. Et tale dicitur substantia, sicut materia aut forma aut compositum; vel etiam accidens, sicut forma accidentaliter vel conditio rei vel taliter se habere vel quocumque <modo> (I shall come back later on this identification between *accidens* and *conditio*, which is another term for *modus rei*). Sed alio modo dicitur '*aliquid*' valde large, quod non est significabile per nomen nec demonstrabile <per> pronomen [...], nec *complexe* nec *incomplexe*, sed solum syncategorematice per adverbia, sicut demonstrando '*hic*' vel '*ibi*'», *ibid.*, p. 461; see also ZÉNON KALUZA, *L'oeuvre théologique de Richard Brinkley O.F.M.*, «Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age» LVI, 1989, pp. 202, ff., 240-243, 272, n. 77.

27 «Secundo, sciendum quod pro veritatibus habendis licitum est fingere ista esse entia [...]. Et ideo talia possunt appellari nominaliter, dicendo '*locus*', '*vacuum*' etc.; et minus <im>proprie in obliquo, dicendo '*in loco*'; et propriissime adverbialiter, dicendo '*hic*' vel '*ibi*'. Ex hoc sequitur <tertio> quod aliquantulum bene dictum est quod locus nihil est, quia nulla res est locus, nec substantia nec accidens, sed quia videtur universaliter negari, ideo non bene sonat, quia non est sicut chimera aut hircocervus. Immo potest syncategorematice significari et assignari, et etiam esse in loco vel esse alicubi est aliqua conditio, et ad hoc movetur res naturaliter, ut sit hic vel ibi. Ideo melius est dicere quod est spatium», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 461-462. Oresme seems more hesitant in replying to the *dubium* in which it is asked whether place is a substance or an ac-

In this context we can find only some more or less clear allusions to the connection between syncategorematic terms and *modus rei* (Oresme uses here *condicio*); we must be grateful again to Albert of Saxony, who in his commentary on the *Ars vetus*, confirms openly this connection (and even that between *modus rei* and *complexe significabile*)²⁸.

Another possible source of Oresme's *modi rerum* theory can be traced in the discussions about relations; it is Oresme himself to prompt this hypothesis, when in the 11th *questio* of the first book («Utrum in qualibet specie sit dare maximum naturale») ²⁹ he proposes a fourfold distinction among natural beings, where *relationes* and *accidentia insensibilia*, the most imperfect beings, are

cident, even though he uses again the term *condicio*: «Tunc ad primam, cum queritur: 'vel substantia etc.', dico quod non est substantia nec accidens, nec est aliquid proprie, sed est illud quod denotatur <per> 'hic' vel 'ibi'; tamen melius posset dici accidens quam substantia, et forte est illud quod intelligitur per predicamentum 'ubi'. Et cum dicitur: 'omne accidens est in subiecto', dico quod ista condicio que est 'esse in loco' bene est in subiecto, et est accidens, vel per predicationem vel per inherentiam, quia accidit rei quod sit in tali loco vel hic vel ibi; tamen illud quod denotatur <per> 'hic' vel 'ibi' non est in aliquo, sed aliquid est in illo. Et ita forte diceretur de tempore, quia hoc non est accidens inherens», *ibid.*, p. 462. In the 17th question of the fourth book («Utrum tempus sit ab anima», *ibid.*, pp. 535-541. Oresme has a similar attitude concerning time: «Ad primum, potest concedi quod est accidens non inherens, sicut una forma, sed illud quod significatur per predicamentum 'quando' et sua inferiora, que sunt adverbium temporis. Ideo dicitur quod heri est aliquando et hodie est aliquando; et non sequitur, ergo est aliqua res. Et propter hoc Aristoteles non nominavit talia predicata per nomina nec vocavit ea 'res' nec 'ens' etc. Bene tamen conceditur quod accidit rei esse in tali tempore, et ideo esse tunc est accidens rei», *ibid.*, p. 540.

28 «Syncathegoremata non significant aliquam rem quae sit substantia vel accidens, sed bene significant modum rei, quod ab aliis vocatur significabile complexe. Patet hoc, nam praedicatum verificari de quolibet contento sub subiecto vel removeri a quolibet contento sub subiecto non est aliqua res que sit substantia vel accidens sed bene est modus rei et dispositio, puta subiecti vel praedicati; et sic syncathegoremata bene significant aliquid, prout aliquid non solum significat existentiam rei, sed etiam modum rei», ANGEL MUÑOZ GARCIA, *Alberti de Saxonia Quaestiones in Artem Veterem. Edición crítica*, Maracaibo, Universidad del Zulia 1988, p. 500, see also pp. 71 and 82-83. See also NUCHELMANS, *Theories of the Propositions*, cit., pp. 240-2; HENRICUS A.G. BRAAKHUIS, *De 13de Eeuwse Tractaten over Syncathegorematische Termen*, Nijmegen, Krips Repro Meppel 1981, pp. 488-489, n. 83.

29 ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 78-86.

labelled as *modi rerum*³⁰.

3. The introduction of *modi rerum* is very often accompanied by the reference to the different meanings of the term '*ens*'. To better appreciate the role of the *modi rerum* as far as Oresme's ontology is concerned, the most significant of these references is the fourfold scheme which follows the above mentioned three conclusions on *privatio*. The first and the most proper denotation of '*ens*', is the particular existing being, followed by the different parts of the same being (Oresme refers to them as to *essentia*), in which *albedo*, that is an accident in the category of quality, is included only to pay lip service to the common opinion (*secundum comunem viam*). The last two meanings are the weaker, and both are presented either as *complexe significabilia* or *condiciones*: the former refers to what can be expressed in an affirmative proposition like '*Sor currere*'; the latter to what can be expressed through a copulative proposition, one part of which is affirmative the other negative, like in

30 «Dicendum quod res naturales sunt in quadruplici differentia quantum ad propositum [...]. Quedam enim sunt multo imperfecta, sicut relationes seu accidentia insensibilia; et ideo aliqui dicunt quod non sunt nisi modi rerum, et alii quod non sunt nisi res ita se habentes (the distinction between *taliter esse* and *ens taliter se habens* is used here again), et ita denominantur, sicut proportio et equalitas etc., que non sunt sensibilia nisi per accidens. Alia sunt minus imperfecta et communiter dicuntur forme accidentales seu qualitates sensibiles, cuiusmodi sunt caliditas, frigiditas et consequentia formas substantiales. Sed alie sunt res <magis> perfecte sicut elementa et mixta que dicuntur imperfecta, et quedam mixta inanimata. Et alia sunt perfectiora, sicut sunt res animate etc. ut homo, bos etc.», *ibid.*, p. 79. In the 16th question on the first book («Utrum privatio sit principium distinctum a materia», *ibid.*, pp. 119-126) Oresme seems to distinguish between accidents and relations: «Multi sunt gradus entis, et aliquod illorum membrorum potest subdividi. Sunt enim quedam condiciones rerum affirmative significabiles et duplices <sunt>, quia quedam sunt absolute et per se acquisibiles per motum, sicut est albedo vel esse album, et sic de aliis; alie sunt relative, sicut similitudo, equalitas, que sunt acquisibiles per motum non per se, sed consecutive <et> per accidens, sicut patet quinto *huius*. Et illarum quedam sunt respectu presentis, sicut paternitas; alie respectu futuri, sicut potentia. Et ideo quedam est potentia coniuncta actui, qua materia potest stare cum forma; et alia est separata, qua potest recipere formam, de qua dicit Commentator quod corrumpitur in adventu forme», *ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

'Sor posse moveri et non moveri'. Oresme mentions finally a pure negative condition, expressed through a negative proposition³¹.

Only the existing particular being can be regarded as an *ens* in the fullest sense, while the pure negative condition is *simpliciter non ens*, and only with some qualification an *ens*³²; all the rest can be regarded for certain aspects as being and for others as not-being, the components of the particular existing beings included³³. In commenting this fourfold distinction of the meaning of '*ens*' Oresme is less hesitant concerning the ontological status of accidents: instead of including them in the second distinction (that of the parts of the existing particular beings) he degrades them to the third one³⁴.

31 «Pro isto est una distinctio quod 'ens' dicitur multipliciter et equivoce, sicut patet primo *huius*, et ideo impossibile est investigare veritatem qui ymaginatur 'ens' dici uno modo. Ad propositum potest esse divisio talis: quod uno modo accipitur 'ens' pro aliquo per se existente, <ut> individuum demonstratum, et sic totum de genere substantie est ens, sicut Sor; et hoc quia habet operationem proprie. Secundo modo, accipitur 'ens' pro essentia aliqua, sicut pro parte substantie vel forma <accidentali>; et sic dicuntur esse materia, forma <substantialis>, manus et albedo secundum comunem viam. Et iste modus potest subdividi. Tertio, accipitur pro significabili complexe, sicut pro conditione affirmativa, sicut est Sortem currere. Quarto, pro conditione quasi hypotetica significabili affirmative et negative; verbi gratia Sor posse moveri et non moveri est quedam condicio que dicitur quies; et omnis privatio continetur sub isto modo. Ulterius posset largius extendi ad condicionem mere negativam <sicut Sor> non currere' vel intelligentiam non movere», *ibid.*, p. 116.

32 *Infra*, n. 33.

33 «Tunc notandum est quod illud quod dicitur <ens> primo modo dicitur simpliciter ens et nullo modo non ens, sicut Sor. Et illud pro ultimo modo e converso dicitur non ens simpliciter et nullo modo ens, sed omnia intermedia dicuntur quodammodo esse, quodammodo non esse. Et ne videatur fictum, probo per Aristotelem. Primo de materia, sicut de parte expresse patet primo *huius*, quod materia dicitur non ens per accidens. Item, septimo *Metaphysice* quod materia non est <substantia> nec forma, sed totum compositum. Item, <in> *De sensu* dicitur quod partes non sunt in toto nisi in potentia, et ita dicuntur quodammodo non esse. Item, primo *Politice* probatur quod pars in toto dicitur non esse, quia unumquodque quod est habet propriam operationem distinctam a toto; unde oculus non videt proprie, sed homo videt per oculum», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 116-117.

34 «De tertio, scilicet de conditione affirmativa, sicut sunt accidentia, patet expresse primo *huius*, ubi dicitur quod accidens est ens secundum quid, et substantia simpliciter; et septimo *Metaphysice*, ubi dicitur quod accidens non est ens nisi quia entis», *ibid.*, p. 117.

3.1 Oresme's decision of reducing accidents in rank is not an isolated instance in his commentary on the *Physics*: in the 5th *questio* of the first book, from which the threefold distinction of the meaning of the term '*accidens*' has been already quoted³⁵, he proposes, with some hesitation³⁶ a drastic reduction of the ten Aristotelian categories to the only one of substance³⁷. In the second conclusion of the second part of the question, where Oresme presents his solution, he states «*probabiliter et cum correctione*» that according to Aristotle an accident can not be considered a form, referring himself to the threefold distinction of the meaning of *accidens* I have previously quoted³⁸. He corroborates this statement with some arguments where he emphasizes either the difference between substance and accidents, which have no natural likeness, or the untenable consequences of a different solution as far as relations, or terms like *angulus* and *figura* are concerned.

35 *Supra*, n. 8.

36 «Sed quantum ad secundum, scilicet an substantia et accidens sint nata significare equivoce, oporteret scire quid est proprie substantia et accidens. Et sicut dicit Commentator secundo *Metaphysice* commento sexto, "ista questio fuit desiderata ab omnibus antiquis, et est difficilis valde". Item dicit Commentator secundo *Metaphysice* commento secundo: "non solum oportet reddere gratias eis qui conveniunt nobiscum in opinionibus, sed etiam aliis qui disconveniunt, quia tales exercitaverunt intellectum nostrum et fecerunt acquirere virtutem ad apprehendendum veritatem". Hoc dico pro tanto, quia in ista questione difficili volui gratia exercitii discedere ab opinionibus aliorum, non asserens quod opinio sequens sit vera, sed cum correctione aliorum», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., p. 34.

37 This reduction relies upon the analogy of the term '*ens*' when referred either to substance or to accident; here Oresme insists in quoting the seventh book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Averroë's commentary on the same, a source used also in the fourfold distinction mentioned in n. 33, and in other contexts in order to stress the difference between the first and the remaining categories: «Prima (scil.: conclusio) est ista: quod '*ens*' dicitur equivoce de substantia et accidente, capiendo '*equivocum*' secundo modo pro analogo, ita quod proprie et vere dicitur de substantia, secund<ari>o de accidente. Probatur <primo>, quia illud equivoce dicitur de accidente, quod non dicitur de eo secundum propriam rationem, id est descriptionem vel definitionem propriam quid nominis, patet ex quarta propositione; sed *ens* est huius<modi> respectu accidentis, quia, si queratur quid est vere *ens*, respondetur quod est substantia», *ibid.*, p. 35.

38 *Supra*, n. 8.

The first conclusion ends with a critical reference to a not better qualified *glossa occamica*, which is the first explicit allusion to an Ockhamist position in Oresme's commentary on the *Physics*. This reference is very important because, even if the topic mentioned here seems marginal to the discussion, it follows a remark where Oresme maintains that the term '*ens*' «non significat ad placitum sed ex natura rei»³⁹. We can find, as we shall see later, the same remark when Oresme attacks the new rules proposed for the *dictio exclusiva* by Ockham in the 8th question on the first book.

From the examples quoted in this context it seems that Oresme is particularly eager to refuse to accidents in the category of quality a special condition: introducing a possible reply about relations and the terms *angulus* and *figura*, which could be considered «*substantia sic se habens*», he proposes to extend such solution to all the accidents and notably to *albedo*⁴⁰. That qual-

39 «Tertio, sic: si '*ens*' esset univocum, sequitur quod non esset nisi unum predicamentum, quia pari ratione qua animal est genus ad hominem et equum et predicatur de eis in quid, ita ens esset genus substantie et accidentis et predicaretur in quid de eis. Nec valet si dicatur quod predicamenta sunt voluntarie instituta, quia in omni idiomate, tam greco quam latino, assignantur decem predicamenta et tot modi significandi non convenientes in aliquo communi; et ideo signum est quod hoc nomen '*ens*' non significat ad placitum, sed ex natura rei. Et ideo dicebat Porphyrius quod "si quis omnia '*entia*' vocet, equivoce nuncupabit". Nec valet glossa occamica qua diceretur quod '*ens*' dicitur equivoce de multitudine collectiva et de re una, quia manifestum est quod hoc non est ad intentionem Porphirii nec Aristotelis; et pari ratione '*homo*' diceretur equivocum, quia participatione multitudinis, quod non est», *ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

40 «Secunda conclusio est ista, quam dico probabiliter et cum correctione: et est quod de intentione Philosophi videtur quod nullum accidens est forma seu essentia secundum primam viam expositam in notabili sive primum modum. Hoc probatur primo, quia sequitur quod '*ens*' esset univocum contra primam conclusionem, quia sequitur quod forma ita diceretur de substantiali et accidentali propter naturalem similitudinem et convenientiam, quia utraque consimiliter informaret, licet una de prope etc. Etiam forma <accidentalis> esset vere ens, ut vide<bi>tur, si quis cogitet. Secundo, sequitur, ut videtur, quod tale accidens, ut albedo, secundum quod ymaginatur, esset substantia, quia proprie significaretur nomine subiectivo et esset vera essentia. Et si dicatur quod non, quia ad corruptionem eius non corrumpitur individuum subiectum, sicut ad corruptionem forme substantialis, ut anime, hoc non sufficit, quia aliquando corrumpitur aliqua substantia in aliquo individuo, et tamen illud non corrumpitur, sicut pars Sor removetur

ity is no exception is explicitly confirmed by Oresme in the following conclusion⁴¹: contrary to what he maintains either in his discussion about *privatio* or in that about motion, Oresme is here less reluctant toward the *res sic se habens*, and seems to propose an extension of this semantical device also to the category of quality. The *res sic se habens*, however, is not Oresme's own solution, which is to be found in the last conclusion, where he considers accidents *modi* of the substance, even though he does not use here the term '*modi rerum*'. This solution is granted by refusing to accidents the possibility to be expressed properly by a substantive term: they are in fact properly expressed by an infinitive with an adjective which permits to locate them inside the Aristotelian categories: «aliquid tantum esse», «aliquid tale esse», «aliquid ad aliquid esse»⁴².

3.2 The discussion about the denotation of the three Aristotelian principles of change, *materia*, *forma* and *privatio* is very important for at least two reasons: a) we can meet here with an explicit reference to *modi* or *condiciones*

manente Sorte. Item, substantia dicitur <a> per se stare: vel igitur intelligitur 'per se', id est 'solitarie', et ita nec forma nec etiam materia esset substantia; vel 'per se', id est 'vere ens', et tunc sequeretur quod albedo esset vera substantia. Ultimo, si poneretur quod accidens esset talis forma extensa et divisibilis etc., tunc multa sunt quibus impossibile esset assignare subiectum adequatum, sicut relationes, angulus et figura etc. Et si dicis quod talia non sunt nisi substantia sic se habens, tunc per eandem rationem dicerem de albedine et de quolibet accidente», *ibid.*, p. 36.

41 «Tertia conclusio [...] est ista: quod nullum accidens est substantia nec qualitas nec quantitas nec relatio etc [...]. Nec valet dicere quod qualitas distinguitur a substantia, et quantitas non vel relatio, quia omni modo per hoc per quod solvuntur rationes probantes quantitatem distingui, solvuntur de qualitate, ut patet inducendo», *ibid.*, p. 37.

42 «Ultima conclusio est quod omne accidens proprie loquendo est aut tantum esse aut tale esse aut ad aliquid <esse> aut aliquod tale, que non sunt significabilia proprie aliquo communi nec aliquo nomine substantivo. Et hoc dicit Aristoteles quasi in omnibus locis: ista predicata nominantur isto modo; et in libro *Physicorum* et undique. <Probatur primo>, quia ponatur quod Sor currat, tunc illud accidens quod est cursus Sortis, vel est quedam forma et essentia inherens, et hoc est falsum per secundam conclusionem, vel est ipse Sor sic se habens, et hoc est falsum per tertiam [...], vel est idem quod est Sor currere, et habetur propositum», *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

rerum; b) Oresme's criticism against the second solution, which is not very far from Oresme's as far as ontology is concerned (*privatio*, in fact, is not something different from *materia*, as it is assumed in the first one) relies upon a terminist interpretation of this same position.

De tertio principali, qualiter sunt tria in transmutatione, triplex est modus dicendi. Primus est quod sunt tres vere res vel sunt tria vera entia distincta, videlicet materia et forma positiva et alia forma privativa; sed illud est contra Aristotelem, qui dicit in ultimo capitulo quod privatio est per se non ens; et dicit in sexto quod ... materia et privatio faciunt unum numero. Secundus modus est quod sunt tria nomina seu tres termini, quorum unus significat ipsam formam et alia duo subiectum, unum absolute, videlicet materiam, et <aliud> connotando privationem, scilicet carentia<m> forme, scilicet privatum <esse>. Et ideo solum sunt due res, sed sunt tres termini habentes definitiones distinctas exprimentes quid nominis, et per hoc glossantur auctoritates Aristotelis. Et hoc est quod ipse dicit, quod sunt duo numero, sed sunt tria ratione, id est definitione exprimente quid nominis. Contra illud arguitur: quamvis possit sustineri probabiliter, tamen non est ad intentionem Aristotelis; immo videtur quodammodo absurdum, et videtur quedam derisio dicere quod tria nomina sunt tria principia rerum naturalium. Sed si dicatur quod non sunt principia, sed significant principia, tunc ita bene principia significantur uno nomine, scilicet hoc nomine 'principium', aut etiam quinque nominibus scilicet 'materia' et 'potentia', 'privatio', 'forma' et 'actus' et sic de aliis. Et ideo, licet responsio fit per nomina, tamen non est de nominibus nec est questio de nominibus, sed loco rerum utimur nominibus, ut dicitur primo <capitulo> *Elencorum* ... Tertius modus est, et suppono distinctionem quod hec nomina 'res', 'ens', 'unum' sunt equivoca. Patet per Aristotelem primo *huius*, ubi dicit quod antiqui erraverunt quia indistinxerunt ista nomina. Et ideo uno modo accipitur 'ens' pro aliqua re demonstrata vere existente, sicut est homo, animal et albedo secundum communem viam. Secundo modo, accipitur equivoce et large pro modo rei sive condicione, que proprie esset significabilis per orationem vel complexe⁴³.

43 «Verbi gratia etas non est aliquid demonstratum sed est rem tantum durasse et fuisse a longo tempore, et sic de multis aliis rebus. Tunc ad propositum <dicitur> quod multo- tiens talia enuntiantur cum re<rum nomini>bus ; verbi gratia, si queratur quid requiritur ad hoc quod aliqua debeat desponsari regi, responditur quod quattuor, scilicet: sapientia, pulchritudo, nobilitas et etas et sic de aliis. Et iste sunt condiciones rerum. Ex quo patet solutio quod, cum dicitur: sunt tria principia, non est intelligendum quod sunt tria entia, sed solummodo duo et una condicio materie, scilicet materiam esse privatam, que dicitur 'privatio'. Et ideo dicit Aristoteles capitulo quinto quod quadammodo sunt duo et quodammodo sunt tria», *ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

Even though Oresme makes recourse in many contexts to connotation, it is evident from this long quotation that he prefers, and in some way opposes, to connotation his theory of *modi* or *conditiones rerum*. The only explanation that I can propose about this sort of opposition is that connotation seems, at least in this context, too narrowly connected with a terminist ontology (labelled here as «quedam derisio»), while *modi rerum* are able to assure a more reistic approach -- *modus rei* being something real and not linguistic -- without however maintaining that *privatio* is a *res* different from *materia*. If it is not too hazardous to think that Oresme associates, even though not explicitly, this position with Ockham's, his effort to reduce also quality to a *modus rei* could be viewed as a part of a wider philosophical strategy.

4. Some more evidence of either the polemical use of *modi rerum* or of Oresme's target is provided by the discussion on the object of knowledge («quid est illud quod proprie est scitum») ⁴⁴ in the 2nd *quaestio* of the first book of the *Physics* («Utrum omne scibile habens causas sciatur per illas») ⁴⁵. Oresme deals with the proper object of science, which is stated to be a *complexe significabile*, in the second part of the *questio* ⁴⁶. His solution is to be found in the third conclusion, which follows the first two, where it is

44 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 8-14.

46 «Tunc dico de secundo principali, quomodo aliquid potest sciri. Et pono aliquam distinctionem quod aliquid sciri vel cognosci potest esse dupliciter: uno modo proprie, et isto modo scitum <est> complexe significabile, sicut 'triangulum habere tres'. Secundo modo improprie, sed magis famose, et illud dicitur <imperfecte> sciri de quo sciuntur multe proprietates et condiciones [...]. Tunc pono unam conclusionem, quod capiendo 'scire' secundo modo, nulla res perfecte scitur sive cognoscitur. Probatur, quia sumpta aliqua re, ut puta adamante, forte sunt aliqua proprietates eius quas non scimus, et ita est de aliis rebus», *ibid.*, p. 12. See STEFANO CAROTI, *L'oggetto della conoscenza secondo Nicole Oresme* ("Questiones super Physicam", I, 2), in LUIGI BORGIA, FRANCESCO DE LUCA, PAOLO VITI, RAFFAELLA MARIA ZACCARIA (eds.), *Studi in onore di Arnaldo d'Addario*, II, Lecce, Conte 1995, pp. 456-649.

excluded that the object of science is either the uttered or written conclusion (concl. 1) or the mental one (concl. 2). Taking the relationship between the terms 'urina' and 'sanus' as an example, Oresme fixes a sort of hierarchy between the two different solutions in relation to science: if the mental conclusion can be regarded as the object of science equivocally, because it is the natural sign of what is known, uttered and written conclusions seem to have a much weaker connection with the object of science⁴⁷. Oresme is probably pointing out through this comparison the different ways of signifying of uttered and written propositions on one part, and mental ones on the other: the former are conventional signs of things, while the latter are natural ones. The tree last arguments of the second conclusion⁴⁸ prepare

47 «De primo, supponendo quod capitur de scientia proprie dicta, sicut illa per quam scitur triangulum habere tres. Tunc sit prima conclusio quod illud quod est proprie scitum non est conclusio vocalis vel scripta. Et si dicatur hec scita, <hoc> est equivoce magis quam urina dicitur esse sana [...]. Secunda conclusio est quod nec mentalis propositio dicitur scita proprie, sed solum dicitur scita equivoce, quia est naturale signum rei scite, sicut urina dicitur sana equivoce, quia est naturale signum sanitatis», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 9-10. The first conclusion contains four arguments: «Probo sic: quia statim sequeretur quod addisceremus res per encaustum et pergamenum et voces; immo quod homo sciret parietem vel lapidem quando sciret unam conclusionem de geometria, et sic de aliis. Secundo, confirmatur: sequitur quod ille qui sciret triangulum habere tres et nihil sciret de geometria plus, quod sciret multas conclusiones, quia illa in multis locis est scripta, et quandoque plures et quando pauciores; et quod si destitueretur de libro, sciret pauciora quam ante. Tertio, confirmatur: sequitur quod surdus et mutus non posset aliquid scire, scilicet <habere> cognitionem de geometria, quod est falsum [...]. Quarto, confirmatur: quia sequitur quod ille qui obliviscitur signa vocabulorum obliviscitur sententiam suam, quod est falsum; sufficit enim scire sententiam. Ultimo, quia nulla propositio talis dicitur proprie propositio, ideo non est scita nec scitur, ut patet, quia tunc eadem esset vera et falsa, et contradictoria essent simul vera, quia possibile est quod significet uni unum et alteri totum oppositum», *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

48 The others are the following: «Probatum sic, quia, si esset verum, sequitur quod duo vel tres non possent idem scire, quod est impossibile et contra illud quod est communiter concessum. Et consequentia clara est, quia scitum a me esset conclusio mentalis de mente mea vel in anima mea, <et> cum ipsa non possit esse in anima alterius nec ei significare; sequitur quod non potest sciri ab aliquo alio. Secundo, confirmatur: idem non posset esse opinatum et postea scitum, cuius oppositum conceditur. Consequentia tenet, quia non potest esse mutatio nisi in ipsa anima, <et> quia scitum est <in anima> semper eodem modo, ideo oportet primo quod esset vera conclusio que esse<t> opinata, et

Oresme's solution in the third one. He distinguishes neatly between the act of knowing and the object of knowledge; the identification of the mental conclusion, considered a natural sign of external beings, with the object of knowledge compels, according to Oresme, to introduce an additional understanding about the meaning of the mental sign, which is considered superfluous and even an obstacle to science⁴⁹. That of which the mental proposition is a natural sign is viewed as the proper object of knowledge in the third conclusion:

obiectum scientie est illud quod proprie scitur et est taliter <esse> in re sicut quod lactuca sanat febrem⁵⁰.

The reply to the first *dubium* which relies upon the modal terms' function to modify propositions and not things, confirms that Oresme is resolute in dis-

postea <alia que> erit scita. Et si diceretur quod esset eadem, tunc oporteret ponere unam aliam opinionem in anima», *ibid.*, p. 10.

49 «Tertio, conclusio universalis est scientia, ergo ipsa non est scita. Antecedens patet, quia non videtur ratio quare debeat poni in anima alia scientia quam sit ipsa conclusio; probatur consequentia, quia videtur quod habitus distinguitur a obiecto, sicut est de aliis habitibus, et modo scientia est habitus et obiectum dicitur esse scitum. Confirmatur, quia obiectum cognitionis incomplexum est aliud ab ipsa cognitione, ergo etiam ita erit de cognitione complexa. Quarto, sic: si conclusio esset scita, sequitur quod homo sciret eam significare sic, et quod est ita sicut significat, et tunc rusticus non posset addiscere geometriam vel aliam scientiam, quia ipse nescit quod propositiones mentales aliquid significant nec quod sint», *ibid.* The last argument is *per auctoritatem*: «Ultimo, concordant omnes auctoritates, que dicunt quod scire est rem cognoscere et non propositionem mentalem», *ibid.*, p. 11.

50 *Ibid.* «Et probatur, quia illud est scitum de quo proprie respondetur quando queritur 'quid scitur?'; et modo sic est tale, ut apparet per experientiam. Secundo, confirmatur sic: quorumcumque est notitia incomplexa et simplex, eorundem est notitia complexa postea et composita; patet statim per Aristotelem tertio *De anima*. Sed res extra cognoscuntur cognitione simplici, ergo ipsemet sunt scite et cognite cognitione complexa. Tertio, confirmatur: illud proprie est scitum quod habet causas expressas in demonstratione, sicut patet per Aristotelem; sed hoc non est propositio mentalis, sicut illa 'lactuca sanat febrem', ymmo res extra, ut notum est», *ibid.*

tinguishing between propositions as signs and what they are signs of⁵¹.

Oresme's discussion is very concise not to say compressed, and even though his fixing in the *res extra* the proper object of knowledge does not rise problems, it is not clear if what is referred to by the proposition is either a *res* or a state of affairs. From the above quoted passages -- and above all from the opposition between *taliter esse* and *res taliter se habens* -- one is entitled to solve this problem granting the latter hypothesis. As we have seen, this solution does not postulate a new special being (in the case of accidents in the category of quality it is even more reductionist than Ockham's position), and at the same time permits to avoid possible misunderstandings occasioned by the distinction between absolute and connotative terms, which, according to Oresme, could probably foster a terminist point of view. I think, however, that it is very difficult to solve this problem, because Oresme does not seem to be very concerned about semantical problems, habitually tackled in the discussions on the object of scientific knowledge.

We can however maintain that in Oresme's ontology only particular existing beings are granted, as clearly stressed also in this context. One could wonder if Oresme resorts to the formula '*taliter esse sicut significatur per propositionem*', which in other contexts is openly identified with a *complexe significabile*, drawing his inspiration from the discussions about the meaning of the proposition. Even though this is highly probable, the scanty allusions do

51 «Sed contra hoc dubitatur, quia 'scitum', 'opinatum' et sic de aliis faciunt propositiones modales, ergo habent determinare propositionem et non rem extra, sicut dicimus quod res non est contingens vel possibilis, sed propositio est contingens; et ita debet dici quod est scientia [...]. Ad primum, dico quod licet 'scitum', 'opinatum' et sic de aliis dicantur determinare propositiones, <tamen dico> quod proprie est pro significatis propositionum; et ideo dico quod sic esse in re est scitum, ita quod ly 'scitum' determinat quandam compositionem que est in re extra. Et ita dicerem de contingenti et necessario, quia Deum esse erat necessarium antequam mundus esset vel aliqua propositio», *ibid.*

not permit to identify with more precision Oresme's sources, preventing to better appreciate his convictions in the historical context of the Parisian debates in the midst of the fourteenth century.

Oresme's main target, in any case, is evidently a terminist conception of scientific knowledge. In order to avoid such a danger, he is even ready to consider the 'triangulum habere tres' an accident in the category of quality, in the reply to the third *dubium* following the above mentioned conclusions. This *dubium* is very interesting because it contains an allusion to the ontology of the expression 'triangulum habere tres', which is considered purely nothing⁵². The identification of 'triangulum habere tres' with an accident in the category of quality is, moreover, a very astute move; reminding that according to Oresme all accidents are *modi* or *condiciones rerum* which can be expressed through a *complexe significabile*, this identification could be considered as an anticipation of what will be defended in the 5th *questio*, rather than the admission of a category different from that of substance.

5. Even in his effort to reduce all Aristotelian categories to substance and *modi* or *condiciones* of the substance itself, and particularly the accidents in the category of quality, Oresme is very severe against what he holds to be a

52 «Tertio, capio illud 'triangulum habere tres'. Vel illud est idem quod triangulus, et tunc sequitur quod quicumque scit triangulum sciat ipsum habere tres, quod est falsum; sed si sit aliquid aliud, ut videtur, quia non est accidens nec aliquid tale, ergo tale non scitur», *ibid.*. In the first reply to this *dubium* Oresme makes recourse to the *vis confundendi* of the verb '*scire*' to avoid that knowing the term '*triangulus*' one knows also that it has three angles: «Ad tertium, potest dici uno modo quod triangulus est 'triangulum habere tres'; et ideo si Sor sci<r>et triangulum et igno<ra>ret ipsum habere tres, tunc concederetur <quod> 'triangulum habere tres' est scitum a Sorte, nec plus posset haberi per quamcumque formam syllogismi expositorii. Sed illa negaretur quod Sor sciret 'triangulum habere tres' a parte predicati», *ibid.*, p. 12. The second reply: «Aliter posset dici quod 'triangulum habere tres' est accidens trianguli de genere qualitatis. Sic igitur concludendo tenendum est quod est aliqua scientia de rebus et realiter et non de terminis»" *ibid.*

terminist position. On the basis of some allusions to a terminist point of view by the defenders of accidents in the category of quality⁵³ we could infer that in this case, like in the discussion concerning the object of scientific knowledge, Oresme's implicit target is William Ockham or some of his unnamed followers. Although it can not be ruled out, I think that the evidence is rather scanty, considering, moreover, that the attribution of *albedo* to the category of quality is labelled by Oresme as «communis via».

There is however an explicit polemical allusion to Ockham in the 8th question of the first book («Utrum hec sit vera: 'tantum unum est'») ⁵⁴, which might shed light on Oresme's attitude toward Ockham. In this rather technical context, the explicit criticism against Ockham refers to his supposed conviction that «homo imponit nomina ad placitum»⁵⁵. In this general censure

53 *Supra*, n. 39.

54 ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 56-61. On this topic see S. EBBESEN (1995). *Tantum unum est. 13th Century Sophistic Discussions around the Parmenidean Thesis*, «The Modern Schoolman» LXXII, 1995, pp. 175-199.

55 This objection is introduced in the discussion about the *expositio* of exclusive propositions, in which terms like '*unus*' or '*alter*' are added: «Secunda suppositio est quod quedam sunt nomina sive dictiones consignantia indistinctionem seu privationem multitudinis, sicut hoc nomen '*unum*', ut patet quinto *Metaphysice*, et '*unicum*', et quedam signa particularia, sicut '*alter*' et '*alterum*', et alia sunt que non significant taliter, sicut '*ens*' et '*homo*'. Tunc sit prima conclusio quod si dictio exclusiva addatur primis nominibus, debet exponi ut patet in hoc exemplo: '*tantum unus homo albus est*', id est unus homo est albus, et nullus alius ab isto est albus. Ex quo patet statim quod ista est falsa, si plures sint albi. Hoc probatur, sicut talia sunt probanda, scilicet per testimonium commune, quia illa est falsa de virtute sermonis que est falsa secundum communem opinionem hominum; sed ista est huiusmodi, <ergo> etc. Maior apparet ex prima suppositione, et minor est nota per se [...]. Secunda conclusio est quod si <dictio exclusiva> aliis <nominibus> addatur, debet sic exponi: '*tantum homo est albus*', id est homo est albus, et nihil est album nisi homo aut pars sui. Probatur, quia, si exponeretur aliter, sicut dicunt alii, tunc ista esset impossibilis, quia aliquid aliud (*in marg.*: opinio Ockham) ab homine est album, scilicet pars eius; sed ubi predicatum inest toti et non partibus, sufficit dicere: '*nihil est album quod non sit homo*' vel '*nihil est tale quod non sit homo*', sicut in ista: '*tantum homo est risibilis*'. Et ideo convertitur in universalem de terminis transpositis. Ex quo sequitur corollarie contra aliquos quod dictio exclusiva potest addi termino numerali, sicut: '*tantum tres currunt*' et nomini colectivo et toti integrali respectu cuiusdam predicamenti, et quod omnes tales si<n>t possibles, nisi aliquid

more precise charges against Ockham's view on exclusive propositions are summarized; from the examples Oresme quotes we can find a common element: all the exclusive propositions we find in both Oresme's commentary and Ockham's *Summa Logicae* refer to the passages where Ockham deals with an improper acceptance of the *dictio exclusiva*⁵⁶.

impediat, sicut: 'tantum homo est albus', et sic de aliis», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 56-57.

56 As far as 'tantum homo est albus' of the quotation in the preceding footnote, see GUILLELMI DE OCKHAM, *Summa logicae*, ed. by Philotheus Boehner, Gedeon Gál, and Stephen Brown, St. Bonaventure N.Y., The Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University 1974 (*Opera philosophica et theologica*, I), pp. 299, 90 ff. The text of Oresme's explicit criticism against Ockham is the following: «Ex hoc iterum sequitur quod, si ponantur aliquae alie expositiones et etiam alie regule, sicut ponit Ockham (*in marg.*: opinio Ockham), ipse sunt vere, supposito quod homo imponat nomina ad placitum, sicut si poneretur quod 'tantum' excludet solummodo homines, tunc posset facere alias regulas. Item probo quod non exponatur sicut ipse dicit, et hoc semper, quia, posito quod non essent nisi duo homines solum, tunc secundum expositionem suam ista esset vera: 'tantum alter illorum est homo', et tamen uterque illorum est homo, quia exponentes essent vere, scilicet: 'alter illorum est homo et nihil aliud quod non sit alter illorum est homo'; et quod ipsa sit falsa patet per expositionem, quia numquam concederetur ab aliquo. Iterum, contra eum est aliud corollarium: quod <ex> maiori universali affirmativa et minori exclusiva concluditur particulariter in prima figura. Verbi gratia: 'omnis homo est substantia, tantum animal est homo, ergo quoddam animal est substantia'. Potest probari, quia minor convertitur in universalem affirmativam, et tunc est primus modus tertie figure; et potest probari per regulam primo *Priorum*: quidquid sequitur ad consequens, sequitur ad antecedens», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., pp. 57-58. The reference to the particular use of 'tantum' limited only to men is to: «Iuxta tertiam -- impropriam -- acceptio-nem dictionis exclusivae potest accipi tertia regula ista, quod quando dictio exclusiva additur termino universali sive aequivalenti, vel connotanti numerum vel unitatem, illa propositio est distinguenda, eo quod potest esse exclusio proprie vel improprie. Primo modo excluditur omne illud de quo non verificatur subiectum; secundo modo excluditur maior pluralitas quam illa cui denotatur praedicatum competere; et potest vocari exclusio maioris pluralitatis. Et secundum hoc ista propositio est distinguenda 'tantum quatuor homines sunt hic intus', quia supponatur quod quatuor homines sunt hic intus et non plures, tunc si fiat exclusio proprie accipiendo dictionem exclusivam, denotatur quod quatuor homines sunt hic intus, et per consequens quod lapides non sunt hic intus, et quod equi non sunt hic intus, nec asini, nec quod duo homines sunt hic intus, quia duo homines sunt alii a quatuor hominibus. Si autem fiat exclusio maioris pluralitatis, tunc denotatur quod quatuor homines sunt hic intus et non plures quam quatuor. Et tunc sunt istae eius exponentes 'quatuor homines sunt hic intus, et 'non sunt plures homines hic intus quam quatuor; et sic est vera, posito priori casu», OCKHAM, *Summa lo-*

I have quoted integrally in the footnotes the passages from Ockham's *Summa Logicae* which Oresme has in mind, because I think that a thorough confrontation between Ockham's text and Oresme's charges can bring to light what we could define Oresme's preconceived attitude toward Ockham. I mean that in his discussion about exclusive propositions Oresme's decision to attack Ockham rests more on Ockham's distinction between a proper and improper acceptance of *dictio exclusiva* than on particular doctrinal interpretations or technical solutions as far as the exclusive propositions are concerned. I should like to add that Oresme's too concise references in order to substantiate his allegations, shows that his own can be considered *ad hominem* arguments; the criticism according to which 'tantum' could refer only to men in order to save the new rules is really uncomprehensible outside the whole context, but obviously is *à propos* for charging Ockham of maintaining that terms have been conventionally imposed. In few words I think that the reason why Oresme has chosen this topic is grounded on Ockham's distinction between «primaria» and «secundaria institutio»⁵⁷ rather than on doctrinal divergences.

I think that such a hypothesis is prompted by the philosophical context of the discussion, which is opened by a very eloquent *suppositio* in which the *virtus sermonis* is completely subordinate to the *communis usus*:

Prima suppositio est quod sermo non habet veritatem nisi ex usu loquentium, et

gicae, cit. , p. 301, 137-155. As far as the example of the second passage: «Similiter est de ista 'tantum alterum istorum est', demonstrando duo entia; nam sumpta dictione exclusiva proprie, vera est, quia utraque exponens est vera, si non sunt plura quam illa duo, scilicet Deus et angelus. Si sumatur improprie, falsa est, quia tunc denotatur quod alterum istorum est et non utrumque», *ibid.*, p. 302, 164-168.

⁵⁷ OCKHAM, *Summa logicae*, cit., pp. 297, 35; 298, 66. This obviously is not the only place where Ockham draws this distinction.

ideo illud dicitur verum de virtute sermonis quod est verum secundum communem cursum, usum et acceptionem hominum, et etiam secundum materiam subiectam⁵⁸.

This *suppositio*, expressed in terms that echo a passage of the well known Parisian Statute of 1340⁵⁹, can help perhaps to give a more precise historical framework of Oresme's attack against Ockham or Ockham's followers. I shall not insist on this very important point, however, because to my knowledge the quoted passage is the only one that could be easily related to the Parisian Statute. I am here interested rather to investigate the possibility of establishing a relationship between this open criticism of Ockham's position on a specific logical topic and the polemical use of the *modi rerum* in the above quoted or mentioned passages, in order to substantiate the impression that this same polemical use is part of a wider philosophical strategy.

The only element I can single out from the discussion on the exclusive propositions is rather generic, and is the remark that Ockham's new rules could be granted only by maintaining that «nomina sunt ad placitum instituta». This remark has of course a precise role in the 8th question, if we consider the first *suppositio*, in which the *virtus sermonis* depends strictly on *communis usus*. I think nonetheless that the introduction of *modi rerum* to face a position interpreted by Oresme as supporting a terminist point of view can be considered as a part of the wider strategy of defending the primacy of things on signs, as clearly ressorts also from the discussion on the object of knowledge. The *modi rerum* seem able to contrast efficaciously a terminist

58 ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., p. 56.

59 JOHANNES M. M. H. THIJSSSEN, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris 1200-1400*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press 1998 (The Middle Age Series), pp. 57-72; LUCA BIANCHI, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'Université de Paris (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres 1999 (L'âne d'or), pp. 129-162.

point of view, which could be regarded as encouraging a conventionalistic view of language.

Even not considering the weak relationship between Oresme's introduction of *modi rerum* and the explicit criticism against Ockham in the 8th question of the first book of the *Physics*⁶⁰, I think nonetheless that some hints in the above quoted texts⁶¹ give some evidence either to such a polemical use or to the hypothesis that Ockham or Ockham's followers are the main target of this polemical use. If my hypothesis is not completely untenable, I think that it can be a modest, but not useless, contribution to a more documented appraisal of the philosophical debates at the University of Paris in the midst of the XIVth century.

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60 We must not forget that the allusion to *glossa occamica* in the 5th question of the first book is preceded by Oresme's refusal of the conventional origin of the term '*ens*'; see *supra*, n. 39.

61 To which the following could be added: «Quinta difficultas est quomodo accidens est mobile, et est adhuc pulchrior. Ad hoc respondeo quod accidens non est corpus, sicut aliqui ymaginantur de albedine, et concedunt quod duo corpora sunt simul. Et ex hoc sequitur quod non occupat locum nec habet partes, sicut dictum est; et ideo non dicitur proprie nec moveri nec quiescere nec per se, sed per accidens. Secundo, dico quod illud moveri per accidens est secundum quid, sicut dicit Aristoteles secundo *huius* quod indivisibile non movetur nisi secundum quid. Et ideo solum dicitur moveri quia inest mobili, vel est in mobili», ORESME, *Questiones super Physicam*, cit., p. 43.