THE FORMALIZING OF THE TOPICS IN MEDIAEVAL LOGIC

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The Topics have received little attention in modern logical studies. If they are noticed at all, it is usually for reasons that have little to do with formal logic. In fact, by those who use the distinction it is customary to assign the Topics to material rather than to formal logic.

Yet during the great period of mediaeval formal logic considerable attention was given to the Topics. The *Summulae Logicales* of Peter of Spain devotes one of its twelve treatises to them. Since this was a standard elementary text, this means that no mediaeval logician would be ignorant of their existence. Furthermore, when we look at their history, we find that a serious effort was made to isolate a formal element in the Topics and to formulate it as a logical rule. There is in effect, within the limits of the logical method employed, a formalizing of the Topics.

I propose to analyse this development as follows:

I. The conception of a Topic according to Boethius, who is the *auctoritas* for the mediaeval Topical tradition.

II. Abelard's criticism and revision of the Boethian conception of a Topic.

III. The absorption of the Topics into the Theory of Consequences in 14th century logic.

I. *Boethius on the Topics*

How Boethius looked upon the Topics may be seen from the first detailed analysis of one of them in his *De Differentiis Topicis* (BDT, 1187A-B).* Suppose, he writes, we want to know whether trees are animals. The following syllogism will decide the question:

1. An animal is an animate sensible substance.
2. A tree is not an animate sensible substance.
3. Therefore, a tree is not an animal.

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*Such page citations are to the editions listed in the Table of References at the end of this article.