

What is the point of *obligationes*?

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What is an *obligatio*?

- ▶ A new genre of logic developed in the 13th century.
- ▶ Discussed explicitly and implicitly in many 13th- and 14th-century texts on logic.
- ▶ Consists of an *opponent* and a *respondent*.
 - ▶ Opponent puts forward statements
 - ▶ Respondent can accept, reject, or doubt these statements, according to certain rules.
 - ▶ The respondent is *obliged* to make the responses he does.

What was their purpose?

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Some modern answers to the question:

- ▶ *Obligationes* were mere school-boy exercises, serving only a pedagogical goal [8].
- ▶ *Obligationes* were more than school-boy exercises, they were a first foray into axiomatic systems [2].
- ▶ *Obligationes* were used to explore counterfactual reasoning [14], with counterarguments in [15].
- ▶ *Obligationes* were a tool for evaluating *sophismata* and *insolubilia* [15].
- ▶ Reasoning in an *obligatio* was intended to show the co-tenability or consistency of a set of propositions [12], [7].
- ▶ The theory of *obligationes* provides a theory of belief revision [11].
- ▶ *Obligationes* are thought experiments [16].
- ▶ *Obligationes* are the fore-runner of modern thesis disputations [Spade unpublished].

Why revisit the question?

A different goal.

What do the authors themselves say is the point of *obligationes*?

That is, what did they think they point was?

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Two questions

- ▶ *What* is the purpose of the *obligatio*, according to the author of the treatise?
- ▶ *How* is that purpose carried out given the rules and applications in the treatise, and *how well* is it carried out?

Tractatus Emmeranus

These two short works, edited in [4], are found in an MS dating from the middle of the 13th century, but were written in the first decades of the 13th c.

- ▶ *What*: To see what follows from a statement when you assume it is true.
- ▶ *How*: Through *falsi positio*; *positio* can only occur when a false statement is put forward, never when a true one is. Some rules are directed to opponent rather than respondent.

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We are still required not to concede both of a pair of contradictories, and we must proceed according to *recta consequentia*.

Obligationes Parisienses

Edited in [5], prob. mid-13th C, prob. written in Paris.

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- ▶ *What*: To teach the art of the respondent in restricted disputations.
- ▶ *How*: With *dubitatio*.

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Tractatus Sorbonnensis

Edited in [6], prob. dates from the later part of the 13th C, prob. written in Oxford.

- ▶ *What*: A tool for solving sophisms, in accord with Book 8 of the Topics; also, for seeing necessary consequences.
- ▶ *How*: Through *petitio contrariorum* 'petition of contraries'. *Falsi positio* also mentioned.

De arte obligatoria

Edited in [10], written post 1321, prob. between 1335–1349, in Oxford.

- ▶ *What*: To train the respondent in consistency maintenance.
- ▶ *How*: If the *positum* is not impossible, then no impossibility follows.

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- ▶ *How*: The *casus*.

Anonymous

This anonymous text, translated in [13], is found in conjunction with Peter of Spain's *Tractatus Syncategorematicum*, and probably dates from the 15th C.

- ▶ *What*: To set and escape from traps, specifically that from a possible an impossible does not follow ([Prior Analytics, book 1](#); [Metaphysics, book 9](#)) and that certain propositions by their signification destroy themselves ([Metaphysics, book 4](#)).
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The respondent's acceptance of the obligation is “as it were a sort of eager request for controversy between an opponent and a respondent”.

John of Holland

John of Holland's *Obligationes*, written between 1369 and 1375, edited in [9], was a standard university text on the topic in the late 14th and 15th centuries. There is no discussions whatsoever as to the purpose or point of the theory.

Some conclusions

Figure: Purposes of *obligationes*

	Exercises	Axiomatics	CF reasoning	Sophisms	Consistency	Belief revision	Though Exp.	K&B of cons.	Glory
Ob.Par.	X							X	
NoP	X								X
Tract.Em.								X	
Tract.Sorb.				X				X	
Art.Ob.	X		X		X		(X)		
Anon.	X			X	X				

Suggested by modern authors; Given in the treatises

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