II. Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries
It is of course not true to say that all sixteenth-century scholars looked down upon the accomplishments of the fourteenth century; some approved and tried to extend them. On the other hand, many expressed their disdain about them. Among the latter were two tolerably important Renaissance figures. Coluccio Salutati complained of the demise of the “knowledge of things”; we should not, he went on, “always toil among the extremes and ambiguities of significations and suppositions.” And Agostino Nifo was more forcibly dismissive in calling fourteenth-practitioners of this ilk “babblers” (blatterones) and “stutterers” (balbutiri), and seals his derision with a term Cicero used for pettifogging lawyers, captiunculatores. Another term of contempt Nifo uses is “Sorticulae,” referring to those who formulate sophisms having to do with “Sortes” (which was in these contexts Socrates), some of which we will be sampling below. All of these derisive terms are used again and again, not only in Nifo’s Expositio on the Physics, but also in his commentary on Aristotle’s De generatione and beyond. They provided, as it were, a major part of Nifo’s armentarium against the accursed recentiores.

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2 Agostino Nifo, Expositio super VIII libros De physico auditu (Venice, 1569), pp. 40–41: “Multae aliae rationes hinc inde fiunt, et etiam hinc inde defenduntur positiones quas hic brevitate causa omittus. Qui enim curiosus est, potest illa in libris nostrorum recentiorum legere; sat mihi sit tangere pollentiores. Fiunt etiam a captiunculatoribus captiuncularii infinite casus, qui cum philosophiam non sapient, omittantur etiam...Captiunculatores omnes tenet activas non per maximum inclusive terminari, sed exclusive, quod est minimum quod non...Propter haec sequitur talem rem rei corruptibilis potentiam terminari maximo tempore exclusive, quod Sorticulae vocant minimum ultra quod non...Post haec restat videre quid Anaxagoras ipse sua in ipsius fictione voluit balbutiri...” (The context is, of course, the discussion of minima naturalia in Book I of the Physics.) Such terms are also found in Nifo’s Dialectica