CHARLES V, NICOLE ORESME, AND CHRISTINE DE PIZAN: UNITIES AND USES OF KNOWLEDGE IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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One of John Murdoch's most influential contributions to the study of medieval science has been to expand our understanding of the specific intellectual contexts in which medieval ideas about the natural world were located. Long before the concept of intertextuality became fashionable, Murdoch's detailed empirical study of the concerns, arguments, and methods of scholastic sciences demonstrated their ties to, indeed their integration with, the concerns, arguments, and methods of philosophy and theology. Without a grasp of these intellectual contexts, modern scholars are in danger of misconstruing (or missing altogether) the *medieval* meaning and importance of specific developments in scientific theory or approach:

If it is true, for example, that the new area of importance for fourteenth-century theology was that of justification, grace, and predestination, then the philosophical deliberations over the logic of future contingent propositions surely was a phenomenon of relevance.¹

The intimate relations among such concerns are an example of what Murdoch calls the "unitary character of late medieval learning"; they have their foundation in the curriculum and milieu of universities, which promoted a complicated conversation within and among the arts, theology, medicine, and law. Although texts are the immediate context in which this unity is grounded, Murdoch has suggested that the institutions that frame it and the relations among the persons who enacted it have a bearing on its particular character.²

The work of Nicole Oresme, encompassing (among other things) natural philosophy, epistemology, mathematics, and theology, illustrates Murdoch's account of the fourteenth-century intellectual scene. Seen in dia-

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logue with other developments—from the science of mechanics to the epistemology of probabilism—it takes on greater significance than it would have were Oresme not engaged in a wider scholarly conversation. Yet his systematic criticism of and polemical attacks upon astrology, particularly in the French *Livre de divinacions*, have suggested the existence of another set of contexts—the intellectual life of the laity, the social dynamics of the court, and the political interests of the monarchy. Historians of science have had limited interest in the connections between the production of learned texts about the natural world and these broader contexts, in part because (unlike much of Oresme’s other work) the antiastrological writings have seemed to have existed in intellectual isolation—contesting unspoken views of silent adversaries (the astrologers) and addressing the unyielding position of an equally silent audience (King Charles V of France).

Within the court itself, however, resides evidence of a serious exchange about the nature and role of astral sciences. Furthermore, this conversation reveals cultural and political roles for academic philosophy that extend beyond the simple deployment of horoscopes and elections. Though we have little direct record of their words, Oresme’s adversaries were not silent.

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