1. Introduction

Throughout the history of philosophy there has been a continuous struggle to deal with inferences that involve the terms "necessary" and "possible" and the words derived from them. In his Prior Analytics Aristotle made an attempt to analyse the special difficulties that come up when dealing with modal inferences, and Mediaeval textbooks also often contained discussions on modal syllogisms. However, till this day we are still not in agreement about the validity of arguments containing modal terms.

The central problem that comes to mind when dealing with terms such as "necessary" and "possible" is the following: to what type of entities can these terms be applied, or, what kind of property do the terms in question refer to? Roughly one could suggest that there are two options here: necessity (and possibility or contingency) either has to do with the way in which we talk about things, or it concerns the things themselves and thus is independent of our way of conceiving them. In other words, necessity is either a matter of logic or of ontology.

The discussion on modality played a major role in the Middle Ages. It was an important item in treatises on logic and, moreover, the analysis of modal terms was considered crucial to come to grips with the notion of God's omnipotence. In the fourteenth century, for instance, the authors John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham adhered to the notion of radical contingency in order to ensure that our way of conceiving the events of the world do justice to the idea that God was in no way bound by the actual course of nature.

In an earlier period there was ample attention for the peculiarities of modal terms. For detailed information on this subject we are to turn to the contents of the thirteenth-century treatises on syncategorematic words. Although there is no evidence for a position of radical con-
tingency in the thirteenth century, the discussions on modality in this period are nevertheless of great importance, because one can find a significant difference of opinion in the authors of *syncategoremata*-treatises as to what can properly be called necessary and/or contingent. In other words, one can come across distinct views as regards the application range of the terms in question.

The *syncategoremata*-treatises are an extremely rich source for people interested in the different aspects of modal terms. The authors themselves deal with a host of problems connected with these words. In the treatises one often finds a section on grammatical aspects of modal terms, presented as questions on what the modifiers ‘necessarily’ and ‘contingently’ are modifiers of. Furthermore, the authors take a great interest in the meaning of the words ‘necessarily’ and ‘contingently’, and the relationships between the use of ‘necessarily’ and/or ‘contingently’ in modal propositions on the one hand, and the extra-linguistic states of affairs the words ‘necessary’ and ‘contingent’ refer to on the other. Finally, the sophisma-sentences that are discussed in the treatises often enlighten us on the question as to what type of necessity an author is committed to: is ‘necessity’ based on something real, or is it merely an expression indicating the way in which we, human beings, look at things?

Before going into the philosophical issues connected with modality, let us first see how the *syncategoremata*-authors consider the function of adverbs of modality.

2. On what the modifiers modify

John le Page starts off his section on modal terms by raising a question about what kind of modifiers the ones are that make a sentence into a modal sentence. (The terminology ‘modal’ is based on the distinction made by Aristotle in *Anal. Priora* I, 2, 25a1-2, where he tells us that there are two types of propositions, namely the ones that the Mediaevals have labelled ‘*de inesse*’ (‘of inherence’) and the ones that are named ‘*modales*’.) He specifies this question by raising the problem whether ‘necessario’ and ‘contingenter’ are the only modifiers

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1 Quite a number of excerpts from these texts have been published by H.A.G. Braakhuis, in: *De 13de Eeuwse Tractaten over Syncategorematische Termen* (2 vols.; Vol. I: Inleidende studie; Vol. II: De *Syncategoremata* van Nicolaas van Parijs), Meppel 1979.

2 Parts of the passages quoted here have been taken from Braakhuis, *op. cit.*