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DREAMERS, PHILOSOPHERS AND PHYSICIANS:

BOETHIUS OF DACIA AND THE CONJECTURAL CHARACTER OF NATURAL SCIENCES

Although I shared with Thomas Ricklin many interests – from vernacular philosophy to Dante’s *Convivio* – I will focus here on a different topic, on which he was working at the beginning of the 1990s, when we first met in Freiburg. Thomas was then deeply interested in medieval literature on dreams, and between 1997 and 1998 he published a brilliant *Réverie historique sur le rêve antique et médiéval*, a groundbreaking article on Albert the Great’s *De somno et vigilia*, and a huge, impressive book on twelfth-century theories of dreams¹.

In these works, Thomas repeatedly mentioned Boethius of Dacia’s treatise *De somniis*, which not only provides an original reading of Aristotle’s conception of divination through sleep but also contains important epistemological remarks. Following Aristotle, Boethius claims that although most dreams bear no relation to future events beyond mere coincidence, nonetheless a few of them are either «causes» or «signs» of forthcoming events and can provide some kind of knowledge about the future. In particular, some dreams are the result of a «passion» that affects the human body, such as cooling and heating. Once awake, the dreamer may identify this «passion» as well as the external agents that produced it, and since «that passion of the body upon which the form of his dream followed can cause some future effect in his body, such as health or sickness, therefore through that passion the dreamer can know future effects, which he knew through his dream». Boethius hastens to emphasize that «such a passion can be impeded from its action, and therefore its effect, of which the dream could be a sign, can fail to take place». Shifting abruptly from bodily «passions» to human actions, he observes that «many of those things which are properly disposed to occur are changed when a weightier counsel intervenes»². Eventually he returns to natural causes, noticing that they are

¹ RICKLIN, Thomas : *Réverie historique sur le rêve antique et médiéval*, in : *Critique* 53 (1997), 591-560 ; ID., *Albert le Grand commentateur : L'exemple du De somno et vigilia III, 1*, in *FZPhTh* 45 (1998), 31-55 ; ID., *Der Traum der Philosophie im 12. Jahrhundert. Traumtheorien zwischen Constantinus Africanus und Aristoteles* (= *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 24). Leiden : Brill 1998.

² *De somniis*, ed. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Nicolaus, in : *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi* (hereafter CPD). G.E.C. Gad, Hauniae 1955-, vol. 6.2, 381-391, here 386-387. I use the English translation by J.F. Wippel, BOETHIUS OF DACIA, *On the Supreme Good, On the Eternity of the World, On Dreams*. Toronto : Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 1987, here 73. For my Italian annotated translation of this treatise see : BOEZIO DI DACIA, *Sull'eternità del mondo, Sui sogni, Sul sommo bene*, a cura di Luca Bianchi (= *La coda di paglia* 41). Milano : La Vita Felice 2017, 169-187.

often impeded «when a stronger and contrary cause intervenes which corrupts them». As a consequence – Boethius argues – when the natural philosopher draws a conclusion from such causes, he does not establish it *simpliciter*, i.e. absolutely speaking, without qualification, but only «insofar as it follows from those causes»:

Therefore when the natural philosopher draws a conclusion in syllogistic fashion by means of such causes, that is, causes which can be impeded, he establishes his conclusion insofar as it follows from those causes, but does not establish it without qualification [*simpliciter*]; for the causes through which he draws his conclusion can be impeded. Thus a physician may reason: “He in whose body there is a raw and indigested superfluous humor will die. Socrates is of this kind”. The physician correctly demonstrates his conclusion insofar as it follows from this cause, but he does not demonstrate it without qualification [*simpliciter*]. A warm medicine or a constellation or some other cause which strengthens the digestive heat will corrupt the cause from which the physician was arguing and thereby falsify his conclusion. And this is why many are deceived in thinking that natural philosophers wish to demonstrate some conclusions in the unqualified sense [*simpliciter*] when they demonstrate them by means of causes with respect to which or under the supposition of which it is not possible for those conclusions not to follow. But since those causes and consequently those conclusions can be otherwise – for the causes can be impeded – therefore the natural philosopher does not intend to demonstrate such conclusions in the unqualified sense [*simpliciter*]³.

Boethius’ emphasis on the limits of natural philosophy, whose conclusions cannot be qualified as absolutely true, has led scholars to interpret this passage in the light of the best-known, and supposedly parallel passage of his *De aeternitate mundi*, where Boethius claims that the conclusions of natural philosophy are not true without qualification (those contrary to the tenets of Christian faith are indeed false when «taken in the absolute sense [*accepta(e) absolute*]) but are nevertheless true «in certain respects [*secundum quid*]»⁴. I argued many years ago that the two passages have in fact quite different purposes. In his treatise on the eternity of the world Boethius calls attention to the fact

³ *De somniis*, 387-388 (= Wippel’s translation, slightly modified : 73-74) : «Sicut in his quae fiunt a proposito, multa eorum, quae bene disposita sunt fieri, superveniente maiore consilio mutata sunt, sic etiam frequenter contingit in his, quae aguntur per naturam, quoniam multa eorum, quae bene disposita sunt fieri quantum est in suis causis naturalibus, superveniente fortiori causa contraria istas corrumpente impedita sunt. Ideo physicus syllogizans conclusionem aliquam per causas tales, videlicet in quarum virtute est recipere impedimentum, certificat illam quantum est in illis causis, sed non certificat illam *simpliciter*, quia causae per quas syllogizat recipere possunt impedimentum. Sicut cum medicus arguit: “in cuius corpore est humor superfluus crudus et indigestus, ille morietur. Socrates est huiusmodi”, iste medicus bene demonstrat, quantum est ex illa causa, non tamen *simpliciter* demonstrat, quia medicina calida vel constellatio vel aliqua alia causa confortans calorem digestivum illam causam, ex qua arguebat medicus, corrumpit et suam conclusionem falsificat. Et ista est causa deceptionis multorum qui credunt physicos velle *simpliciter* demonstrare conclusiones aliquas, cum demonstrant eas per causas *respectu quarum sive ex quarum suppositione* impossibile est illas conclusiones aliter se habere. Cum tamen et causae illae et per consequens conclusiones illae aliter se possunt habere, cum causae illae natae sunt recipere impedimentum, ideo non intendunt physici tales conclusiones *simpliciter* demonstrare. In mathematicis vero una causa non impedit aliam, quia mathematica secundum quod huiusmodi separata sunt a motu. Quod enim linea una perpendiculariter cadens super aliam constituit duos angulos rectos, vel quod lineae aequae distantes non concurrunt, hanc causam nulla alia impedire potest. Ideo demonstrationes mathematicae sunt in primo gradu certitudinis, et demonstrationes naturales sequuntur illas, sicut ex iam dictis manifestum est».

⁴ *De aeternitate mundi*, ed. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Nicolaus, in : CPD, vol. 6.2, 335-366, here 352-353 (= Wippel’s translation, 52). On this passage see my remarks in BIANCHI, Luca : *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l’Université de Paris (XIII^e - XIV^e siècles)* (L’Âne d’or). Paris : Les Belles Lettres 1999, 181-187. ID., *From Pope Urban VIII to Bishop Étienne Tempier: the Strange History of the Doctrine of “Double Truth”*, FZPhTt 64 (2017), 9-26, here 19-21.

that the conclusions of natural philosophy are relatively, and not absolutely true because natural philosophers can take into account *only* natural principles and causes, although, as Christians, they know of supernatural causes which may act outside and even against natural principles. In his *De somniis* he aims instead at highlighting that the conclusions of natural philosophy are relatively, and not absolutely true because natural philosophers cannot take into account *all* natural principles and causes⁵. I would like to argue now that this methodological digression, which at first sight seems to occur rather unexpectedly in Boethius' *De somniis*, may be better understood and appreciated if one reads it against its proper background, which is obviously provided by Aristotle's treatise *De divinatione per somnum*⁶.

In this treatise Aristotle argues that it is not unreasonable to assume that some dreams are the «causes of the actions cognate to each of them», because the choice to follow a certain course of action in the daytime is often prepared and strengthened «in the images before the mind at night» (463a22-463a32)⁷. Later he adds that it is no surprise that «many dreams have no fulfillment», because it is so too with «many bodily symptoms and weather-signs, e.g. those of rain or wind». As a matter of fact, if a new change occurs, more influential than the change that would originate from the event announced by a sign, the event will not take place; similarly, many well-planned human actions fail, owing to the intervention of other, more powerful «principles» (463b22-28)⁸.

Whereas the first Latin interpreters of the *De divinatione per somnum*, such as Adam of Buckfield and Geoffrey of Aspull, simply noticed that human knowledge of future events through dreams is not

⁵ Cfr. BIANCHI, Luca : *L'errore di Aristotele. La polemica contro l'eternità del mondo nel XIII secolo*. Firenze : La Nuova Italia 1984.

⁶ The strict link between Boethius' *De somniis* and Aristotle's treatises on sleep and dreaming is highlighted by FIORAVANTI, Gianfranco : *La "scientia sompnialis" di Boezio di Dacia*, in : Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche 101 (1966-67), 329-369; GREEN PEDERSEN, Nicolaus: *Introduction*, in : CPD, 6.2, LXI-LXII; BIANCHI, Luca : *Introduzione*, in : BOEZIO DI DACIA, *Sull'eternità del mondo, Sui sogni, Sul sommo bene*, 127-168, here 148-152. For a general survey the medieval reception of Aristotle's treatises on sleep and dreaming see GIRALT Sebatà : "*Aristoteles imperfectus. Natural divination, dream and prophecy in the Latin Middle Ages (1210-1310)*", in : Fidora, Alexander (ed.) : *Die mantischen Künste und die Epistemologie Prognostischer Wissenschaften im Mittelalter*, Köln / Wiemar / Wien : Böhlau Verlag 2013, 23-59.

⁷ I use the translation by J.I. Beare and G.R.T. Ross, in : *The Works of Aristotle translated into English under the Editorship of W.D. Ross, Vol. III*. Oxford : Clarendon Press 1931.

⁸ Translatio vetus: «quoniam vero non eveniunt multa sompniorum, nichil inconueniens: neque enim eorum que in corporibus sunt signorum et celestium, velud aquarum et ventorum: si enim alius vehementior isto accidit motus, a quo futuri factum est signum, non fit. Et multa consulta bene que fieri expediebat dissoluta sunt propter alias digniores inchoationes»; Moerbeke's translation: «quoniam *autem* non eveniunt multa sompniorum, inconueniens nichil: neque enim eorum que in corporibus sunt signorum et celestium, velud aquarum et ventorum: si enim alius vehementior isto accidit motus, a quo *futuro non sit signum*. Et multa consulta bene que fieri expediebat dissoluta sunt propter alias digniores inchoationes». The English translation by J.I. Beare and G.R.T. Ross – which might be slightly revised – reads as follows: «For if another movement occurs more influential than that from which, while [the event to which it pointed was] still future, the given token was derived, the event [to which such token pointed] does not take place. So, of the things which ought to be accomplished by human agency, many, though well-planned, are by the operation of other principles more powerful [than man's agency] brought to nough».

certain because natural causes can be impeded⁹, Albert the Great, in his *De homine* (composed around 1242) highlighted that, unlike prophecies inspired by God, dreams do not signify what will happen «absolutely [*simpliciter*]», but what will happen «according to a certain condition» established either by natural or by voluntary causes:

dicendum quod revelationes fiunt duobus modis, scilicet secundum veram intelligentiam voluntatis divinae, et secundum permixtionem phantasmatum. Et primo modo non est somnium, ut supra habitum est, sed prophetia, de qua infra disputabitur. Secundo vero modo est revelatio non significans rem futuram *simpliciter*, sed *secundum condicionem aliquarum causarum naturalium vel voluntariarum*, quae cause cum non sint necessariae, non erit necessarium futurum, quod significatum est. Hoc tamen semper intelligendum est quod somnium sit in proprietatibus phantasmatum, quia sine phantasmatis non est aliquod somnium¹⁰.

From the late 1270s onwards, several commentators of Aristotle's works on sleep and dreams developed the thesis that the knowledge of the future acquired through dreams is not absolutely but only conditionally true. According to Simon of Faversham, the *bonus divinator* is not allowed to affirm that a certain effect will follow *absolute*, but only provided that no stronger cause intervenes to impede it¹¹. John of Jandun emphasizes that the interpreter of dreams should not claim «absolutely [*simpliciter*]» that what has been dreamt of will come true, but simply argue – «moderating the words [*moderando sermones*]» – that it is likely to come true¹². Walter Burley repeats that «the interpreter

⁹ In his *De somniis*, falsely ascribed to Thomas Aquinas and published in the Parma edition of *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia* (ed. Parmensis), vol. 20, 242, Adam of Buckfield simply affirms that «non est necesse propter signum evenire signatum» and highlights that «causae naturales ut frequenter causant effectus suos, et non necessario». In his questions on Aristotle's *De somno et vigilia* Geoffry of Aspoll remarks: «Ad alia quae consequenter obiciuntur dicendum est quod futura contingentia non possunt totaliter cognosci per somnia, talia enim futura possunt indifferenter esse et non esse, sed possunt impediri priori causa superveniente». I quote from the edition provided by EBBESEN, Sten : *Geoffrey of Aspoll Quaestiones super librum De somno et vigilia. An Edition*, in : CIMAGL (= Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Âge Grec et Latin) 83 (2014), 257-341, here 336.

¹⁰ *De homine*, ed. ANZULEWICZ, Henryk / SÖDER, Joachim R., in : *Opera Omnia* (ed. Coloniensis), vol. 27, 386b.

¹¹ «Ad primum argumentum dicendum quod scientia de divinatione generatur in nobis ex ratione certa, quae est divinatio, si nos attendimus ad praedicta. Et cum probatur quod non habent causam certam, dicendum est quod sequitur quod infallibiliter verum est quod talia idola informata a virtute phantastica sunt signa talium effectuum, et tales effectus de necessitate eveniunt nisi fortior motus superveniat, quia illos effectus suo motu fortiori impedit, illa enim quae bene provisae sunt fieri fortiori agente superveniente dissoluta sunt. Iuxta quod intelligendum quod bonus divinator *non* debet dicere *absolute* quod talis effectus eveniet, sed dicet quod eveniet addendo praedictam condicionem quod eveniet nisi fortior motus superveniat. Unde *dicunt Albertus* quod astrologi eo quod nomine absoluto utuntur suam scientiam vilescent in conspectu hominum, dicunt enim talem effectum *simpliciter* evenire, unde quando non evenit, homines scientiam increpant, et scientia non est increpanda, sed ea utentes increpandi sunt». I quote from the edition by EBBESEN, Sten : *Simon of Faversham Quaestiones super librum De somno et vigilia. An Edition*, in : CIMAGL 82 (2013), 90-145, here 144-145. The reference to Albert the Great is not to his *De homine* but, as Ebbesen makes clear in the apparatus, to the chapter of his *De somno et vigilia* which will be examined below.

¹² «Sed est sciendum quod *scientia de futuris, que per somnia acquiritur, non est certa sicut scientia naturalis et mathematica*, quia scientia accipit certitudinem ex impermutabilitate sui scibilis et *impossibilitate suscipiendi impedimentum*, et notitia de aliquo futuro capit certitudinem ex eo quod illud futurum nunquam vel raro impeditur quin eveniat. Nunc autem eventus illorum futurorum quae enunciantur per somnia potest impediri, et ideo non est omnino certa talis notitia, et ille qui interpretatur somnia *non* debet enunciare et iudicare *simpliciter* sic fore, *vel cum modo necessitatis*, sed *moderando sermones* debet dicere quod possibile est, vel probabile, sic evenire quantum potest accipi per somnium: quin tamen possit impediri non debet negare, quia sua scientia omnino irridetur, et merito et quod pluries mentiretur», *De somno et vigilia*, q. 22, in : IOHANNES DE JANDUNO, *Quaestiones super Parvis Naturalibus*. Venetiis : apud

of dreams [*interpretator somniorum*]» cannot have sure knowledge of the future and «must not say absolutely [*simpliciter*] that such an event will happen, but that it will happen if it is not impeded»¹³. Placed within the exegetical tradition of Aristotle's treatises on sleep and dreaming, the remarkable passage of Boethius of Dacia's *De somniis* devoted to scientific methodology is less inappropriate than it might at first appear. Still, since the Danish master is likely to have written his treatise around 1270, he is one of the first Latin Aristotelians who used the Stagirite's rather trivial statement that «many dreams have no fulfillment» as an opportunity to scrutinize the limits of the predictive capability of sciences and their conjectural character¹⁴.

But why does Boethius shift from the uncertainty of inferences drawn from dreams that are supposed to be signs of future events to general remarks on the fallibility of both natural philosophy *and medicine*? In order to answer this question, it is useful to recall that, after discussing Aristotle's views on divination through dreams in his *De homine*, Albert the Great examined them more thoroughly in his later paraphrase of the *De somno et vigilia*, redacted around 1256. If the Stagirite cursorily mentioned that bodily and heavenly «signs», like dreams, do not always come true, Albert devotes an entire chapter of the third book of his paraphrase – so skillfully studied by Thomas Ricklin¹⁵ – to

Hieronimum Scotum 1570, 80a. This passage is examined by GRELLARD, Christophe : *La réception médiévale du De somno et vigilia. Approche anthropologique et épistémologique du rêve, d'Albert le Grand à Jean Buridan*, in : GRELLARD, Christophe / MOREL, Pierre-Marie (eds) : *Les Parva Naturalia d'Aristote. Fortune antique et médiévale*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne 2010, 221-237, here 235-236.

¹³ «... dicendum quod cognitio de significatione somniorum non est certa nisi *sub condicione*, nec potest aliter interpretator somniorum *certudinaliter* dicere effectum somni evenire, sed potest per suam scientiam scire effectum evenire, nisi alius fortius motus superveniat. Unde *non* debet *absolute* dicere, quod talis effectus eveniet, sed debet dicere, quod talis effectus eveniet, nisi impediatur. Et ideo *dicit Albertus*, quod astrologi nostri temporis et interpretores somniorum errant certudinaliter asserentes, quod talis effectus eveniet. Unde faciunt scientiam astrologicam vilescere, cum tamen defectus non sit in ea». I quote from TÖRNQVIST THOMSEN, Christina : *Walter Burley's Expositio on Aristotle's Treatises on Sleep and Dreaming*, in : CIMAGL 83 (2014), 379-515, here 509-510. Also Burley's reference to Albert the Great is to the chapter of his *De somno et vigilia* which will be examined below.

¹⁴ There is no need to say that awareness of the conjectural character of oniromancy was diffused even before the diffusion of Aristotle's works on sleep and dreaming. Significantly enough from the ninth century onwards the term *somniorum conjectores* was used to make reference to the interpreters of the dreams. See BOUDET, Jean-Pierre : *Entre science et nigromance. Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII^e-XV^e siècle)*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne 2006, 98.

¹⁵ See RICKLIN, *Albert le Grand commentateur : L'exemple du De somno et vigilia III, 1*. This pioneering contribution focuses on the first treatise of the third book, and therefore does not examine the passage discussed below, which belongs to the second treatise. On Albert the Great's original reshaping of Aristotle's theory on divination through dreams see PALAZZO, Alessandro : *The scientific significance of fate and celestial influences in some mature works by Albert the Great: De Fato, De somno et vigilia, De intellectu et intellegibili, Mineralia*, in : BECCARISI, Alessandra / IMBACH, Ruedi / PORRO, Pasquale (eds). *Per perscrutationem philosophicam. Neue Perspektiven der Mittelalterlichen Forschung. Loris Sturlese zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*, Meiner, Hamburg 2008, 55-78, here 62-63 ; ID. : "*Philosophi aliter loquuntur de prophetia quam sancti*". *Alberto il Grande e la profezia naturale*, in : BETTETINI, Maria / PAPARELLA, Francesco (eds) : *Immaginario e immaginazione nel Medioevo*. Turnhout : Brepols 2009, 179-201, here 191-196 ; GRELLARD : *La réception médiévale du De somno et vigilia.*, 223-233 ; RODOLFI, Anna : *Sogno e profezia in Alberto Magno*, in : PERFETTI, Stefano (ed.) : *Scientia, Fides, Theologia. Studi di filosofia medievale in onore di Gianfranco Fioravanti* : Pisa, Edizioni ETS 2011, 193-215, here 211-213; GIRALT : "*Aristoteles imperfectus*", 29-31, 37-39; PALAZZO, Alessandro : *Il Socrate di Alberto. Profeta, astrologo, mago*, in BECCARISI, ALESSANDRA / PALAZZO, Alessandro (eds), "*Per studium et doctrinam*".

arguing that medicine and all «divinatory sciences» based on «signs» take into account causes that may be hindered, and therefore their predictions are reliable, even if they may at times turn out to be false. Albert complains that «the astronomer, the augur [*augur*], the magician, the interpreter of dreams and visions» are often unfairly criticized by ignorant men, who forget that the knowledge of future contingents is inevitably uncertain; and he cites Ptolemy as an *auctoritas* claiming that astrology should not be despised because of the errors of some of its practitioners, but should be appreciated as a particular form of knowledge in which nothing can be stated *nisi valde generaliter et cum protestatione cauta*. Like those made by physicians, the predictions of the astrologers are indeed useful precisely because they concern events that may be impeded:

... propter quod etiam Ptolemaeus sapiens dicit nihil esse iudicandum *nisi valde generaliter et cum protestatione cauta*, quod stellae ea quae faciunt, faciunt per aliud et per accidens, ex quibus multa in significatis suis *occurrunt impedimenta: frustra enim poneretur studium ad scientias vaticinantes, si ea quae future praevidentur, impediri non possent*: ad hoc enim praevidemus ut mala impediatur, et bona expediatur ad actum, *sicut faciunt periti medicorum in suis prognosticationibus*¹⁶.

Albert – whose apology of the astrologers was developed by Simon of Faversham and Walter Burley in the passages mentioned above – undoubtedly alludes to chapters 2 and 3 of the *Tetrabiblos*¹⁷, available to Latin readers through several translations, starting with the one from the Arabic authored in 1138 by Plato of Tivoli, which was commonly used by medieval scholars not only before, but also after William of Moerbeke's translation from the Greek (1266-1269) and the new translation from the Arabic by Giles of Parma (1271-1275)¹⁸. In these chapters Ptolemy acknowledges that astrologers occasionally deceive people and make predictions that «sometimes fail», but insists that this is not a good reason to reject their branch of learning, which should be welcome and prized although it is

Fonti e testi di filosofia medievale dal XII al XIV secolo (Flumen Sapientiae 6). Canterano : Aracne 2018, 99-124, here 101-115.

¹⁶ *De somno et vigilia*, III, 2, 5, in : *Opera omnia* (ed. BORGNET, Auguste), vol. 9, 202a-b. GRELLARD, *La réception médiévale du De somno et vigilia* finely examines the epistemological consequences of late medieval theories of dreams, but focuses mainly on John of Jandun and John Buridan, without taking into account this passage by Albert which is – I think – the main source of later debates. In his commentary on the *Physica* Albert already emphasized that dreams are «signs» of events that do not occur by necessity : «... et hoc significat somnium, et tamen non necessario evenit propter impedimenta, quae occurrunt in materia tracta ad oppositum». See *Physica*, II, 2, 21, ed. HOSSFELD, Paul, in : *Opera Omnia* (ed. Coloniensis), vol. 4.1, 129.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Albert repeatedly mentions the *Tetrabiblos* in his works, and in his *De caelo et Mundo* praises its author for inviting men to pursue scientific inquiry on heavens regardless of its limits: «Quoniam, sicut optime dixit Ptolemaeus in Quadripartito, non oportet nos abicere scientiam, quam habere possumus de caelo, propter hoc quod non totum possumus comprehendere, quod quaeri potest de illo». See *De caelo et mundo*, II, 1. 3, 13, ed. HOSSFELD, Paul, Münster : Aschendorff 1971 (in : *Opera Omnia*, ed. Coloniensis, vol. 5.1), 170b.

¹⁸ For details on medieval translations of the *Tetrabiblos* see the homepage of the project *Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus*, directed by Dag Nikolaus Hasse (<http://ptolemaeus.badw.de>). The two most diffused translations from the Arabic, i.e. those by Plato of Tivoli and Giles of Parma, have been published in *Liber quadripartiti Ptholemei ... cum commento Haly*. Venetiis : per Bonetum Locatellum (Octavianus Scotus) 1493. William of Moerbeke's translation has been critically edited by G. Vuillemin-Diem and C. Steel : *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos in the Translation of William of Moerbeke. Claudii Ptolomaei liber iudicialium*. Leuven : Leuven University Press 2015.

«conjectural and not to be absolutely affirmed»¹⁹. Moreover, recalling that «the Egyptians have entirely united medicine with astronomical prediction», Ptolemy invites not to attribute categorical statements to physicians, because when they foretell the probable outcome of a certain disease they are aware that it will not occur if «remedies are provided»; and he also deplores that «since for the most part the resisting faculty is not coupled with the prognostic, because so perfect a disposition is rare, and since the force of nature takes its course without hindrance when the primary natures are concerned, an opinion has been produced that absolutely all future events are inevitable and unescapable [*simpliciter eventuris tamquam de immutabilibus et inevitabilibus*, according to Moerbeke's translation]»²⁰.

Whereas in his *Summa contra gentiles* Thomas Aquinas links quotations from the *De somno et vigilia* and the *Tetrabiblos* while arguing that in the sublunary world the effects of heavenly bodies do not occur by necessity because they may be hindered by other conflicting causes²¹, Boethius of Dacia's colleague James of Douai makes use of *Ptolemaeus in principio Quadripartiti* in his commentary on Aristotle's *De divinatione per somnium*. He, however, skips any reference to physicians and focuses only on astrologers, whose prognostications – he writes – are not certain because, given the mutability of matter, the effects of a «constellation» may be blocked²². Boethius instead does not mention any source in his *De somniis*, totally neglects astrologers and focuses only on natural philosophers and

¹⁹ I quote from the English translation by ROBBINS, Frank Eggleston : *Ptolemy Tetrabiblos*, I.2. London / Cambridge Ma. Heinemann / Harvard University Press 1956, 13-15. Moerbeke's rendering of this passage uses the formula «*verisimilativa et non assertiva*», see *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos in the Translation of William of Moerbeke*, 163. Plato of Tivoli's and Giles of Parma's translations are less precise, but they both highlight that astrology is unable to follow a *via certa*, to «truly [*veraciter*]» become a science: see *Liber quadripartiti Ptholemei ... cum commento Haly*, f. 6^{va}.

²⁰ *Ptolemy Tetrabiblos*, I, 3, 27-31 (= *Liber quadripartiti Ptholemei ... cum commento Haly*, ff. 9^{ra}-10^{rb}; *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos in the Translation of William of Moerbeke*, 167-169). Charles Burnett recently emphasized that this comparison between astrological and medical prognosis «was not made in Classic times» and, introduced by Ptolemy, was largely developed by Arabic thinkers, notably Abu Ma'shar. See. BURNETT, Charles : *Doctors versus Astrologers: Medical and Astrological Prognosis Compared*, in : FIDORA : *Die mantischen Künste und die Epistemologie Prognostischer Wissenschaften*, 101-111. It is however significant that Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* is precisely one of the sources quoted in the exegetical tradition of Aristotle's works on sleep and dreaming, from Albert the Great onwards.

²¹ «*Aristoteles etiam dicit, in II de Somno et Vigilia, quod eorum quae in corporibus sunt signorum etiam caelestium, velut aquarum et ventorum, multa non eveniunt. Si enim alius vehementior isto accidat motus a quo futurum est signum, non fit: sicut et multa consulta bene, quae fieri expediebat, dissoluta sunt propter alias digniores inchoationes. Ptolemaeus etiam, in Quadripartito, dicit: Rursus, nec aestimare debemus quod superiora procedant inevitabiliter, ut ea quae divina dispositione contingunt et quae nullatenus sunt vitanda, necnon quae veraciter et ex necessitate proveniunt*». *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, c. 86, in : *Opera Omnia* (Leonine ed.), vol. 14, 262.

²² «*Unde Ptolemaeus in principio Quadripartiti dicit quod per medicinas et disciplinas et diaetas actiones stellarum impediuntur, nam ista transmutant materiam in qua talis constellatio talem effectum, quantum de se erat, debebat producere; illa autem materia transmutata, amplius in illa materia non producet effectum illum, nam actus activorum sunt in patiente et disposito. Et ideo astrologi volentes prognosticare de futuris cum certitudine non possunt per astra iudicare de illis; verum est enim quod illud quod dicunt evenire per astra, si recte iudicant, est natum evenire, tamen est impediibile propter materiae variationem et mutabilitatem*». I quote from the commentary edited by EBBESEN, Sten : *James of Douai on Dreams*, CIMAGL 84, 2015, 22-92, here 81. Interestingly enough, James' quotations of Ptolemy is not second hand from Albert. Long citations of different passages of the *Tetrabiblos* can be found in Roger Bacon's *Opus Maius*, IV, ed. BRIDGES, John H. Frankfurt a.M : Minerva 1964, vol. 1, 243-245.

physicians. In emphasizing that they both give reliable though not infallible information about the future, he may well depend on the methodological considerations put forward by Ptolemy in the first chapters of his *Tetrabiblos*. This hypothesis seems to me quite plausible, since in his questions on the *Physics* Boethius quotes precisely these chapters in order to support the following three thesis: first, that a physician skilled in astronomy foreknows «the effects that the stars may have on the human body» and may therefore successfully modify them; second, that astronomers' estimations are «more certain [*certiora*]» when they deal with the effects of the celestial bodies which come about by necessity; third, that this happens only with a few effects, because the influence of one «star» may be blocked by another²³. Now, in the passage of his *De somniis* that we are examining, Boethius claims that natural philosophy – including the *scientia somnialis* – is a valuable form of knowledge but is inevitably based on the analysis of a limited number of causes which can be impeded, hence it has no pretensions to demonstrating «in the unqualified sense [*simpliciter*]» what is going to happen. He makes clear that the same should be said of medical diagnosis, which may be at times falsified because the expected effects can be inhibited by unforeseen causes such as «a warm medicine or a constellation»²⁴.

The comparison between predictions through dreams and medical diagnosis, therefore, does not emerge abruptly in a passage which should be interpreted as a first draft of Boethius of Dacia's more 'mature' epistemological remarks developed in the *De aeternitate mundi*. As a matter of fact, this comparison is significant in itself, provided that one understands it against its proper background: the debate on human foreknowledge of future events which took place from the mid-thirteenth century onwards among Latin Aristotelians, who originally developed ideas coming not only from the exegetical tradition of the Stagyrte's treatises on sleep and dreaming, but also from Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*. Moreover, this comparison is in keeping with Boethius of Dacia's conception of the

²³ «... et Ptolemaeus [dicit] quod medicus peritus in astris praecognoscens effectum quem stellae possunt facere in corpore humano, potest corpus humanum convertere in alias dispositiones»; «... ideo dicit Ptolomaeus quod iudicia astronomorum certiora sunt in his quae manifesta necessitate ex orbe reguntur»; «... actiones essentielles stellarum recipiunt impedimenta, hoc contingit, quia una stella quin effectum faceret alia sibi contrariae virtutis impedit, ut Ptolemaeus 3° capitulo Quadripartiti», *Quaestiones in Physicam*, II, q. 25, ed., SAJÓ, Geza, in : CPD, vol. 5.2, 247, 250, 253. Without making reference to Ptolomaeus, Boethius of Dacia examines the problem of predictions of the future also in his *Topica*, II, q. 20, ed. GREEN-PEDERSEN, Nicolaus / PINBORG, Johannes, in : CPD, vol. 6.1, 146-148, where the idea that some causes may be impeded plays a pivotal role. See BIANCHI, *Introduzione*, 166-167.

²⁴ See the passage quoted above, with the helpful comments by Sten Ebbesen : «The material world is contingent, but is not chaotic. We can build up our sciences, starting with experience and abstraction, and for the most part they will give us good guidance. We just must be prepared for the unexpected. It is all right to call scientific theorems true. But we should not forget to understand “supposing such things as they speak about exist”, and – more generally – “supposing no other causes intervene than those described in this science”. It is an unfortunate mistake when laymen “believe that natural scientists want to prove conclusions in an absolute way, when, as a matter of fact, they prove them by means of causes with respect to which or on the supposition of whose occurrence it is impossible for these conclusions to be otherwise”, as Boethius says in *On Dreams*». See EBBESEN, Sten. *Topics in Latin Philosophy from the 12th-14th centuries. Collected Essays of Sten Ebbesen Volume 2*. Farnham : Ashgate 2009, 161.

origin and the significance of dreams. For him, dreams are caused either by external agents (such as stars, which produce heat or cold that affects the sleeper's body) or by internal changes, both physiological (fever) and psychological (emotions such as fear and love), which impact human health. Correctly interpreted, dreams may therefore help skilled physicians to prognosticate future diseases, but their reliability, like that of all prognoses, is not absolute since no 'scientist' can take into account all the variables that may influence a phenomenon.