A neglected source of Boethius's *De syllogismo categorico*

Abstract: This paper shows that Boethius's *De syllogismo categorico* had among its sources Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentaries on the *Topics* and on the *Prior Analytics*. The first of these sources has been neglected by scholars until now. Boethius's usage of these sources shows the originality of his logical treatise.

Keywords: Boethius, syllogistic, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Aristotle, ancient logic

It is well known that Severinus Boethius's logical works were largely reliant on Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentaries on Aristotle.¹⁾ What is perhaps worth being noted is that Boethius followed Alexander in the latter's tendency to conflate doctrines from different logical works of Aristotle: the aim of this operation was to present a consistent logical system, which we could hardly find in Aristotle's own texts.

A new look at the sources of his short treatise *De syllogismo categorico* confirms the claim that Boethius, like Alexander, was looking for consistency in his exposition of Aristotle's logic. In his analysis of the terms of a proposition which is meant to be a parallel of Aristotle's sketchy observations in *Prior Analytics*, A, 1, 24b16-18, Boethius expresses himself as follows:

Diuiditur ergo, ut dictum est, propositio in id, quod subiectum est et in id, quod praedicatur. Dico autem subiectum in propositione 'Omnis homo animal est' 'hominem', id uero, quod praedicatur, dico 'animal'. Et semper quod praedicatur aut abundat et superest subiecto aut aequatur; minus uero praedicatum a subiecto numquam reperietur. Sed id, quod diximus, patefaciamus exemplis.

Praedicatum a subiecto abundat, quotiens genus aliquod de aliquo praedicatur, ut si dicas: 'Omnis homo animal est'; non enim potes conuertere, ut dicas: 'Omne animal homo est', quia 'animal' ab 'homine' plus est et abundat. Aequatur autem praedicatum subiecto, quotiens proprium quoddam cuiuspiam praedicatur, ut 'Omnis homo risibilis est' potes conuertere: 'Omne risibile homo est.' Vt

¹⁾ Cf. de Rijk 1964, 32-36; Thomsen Thörnqvist 2008a, xx-xxii; Thomsen Thörnqvist 2008b, xxii-xxvi; Bonelli 2009, 51-67, especially 55-56; Gili 2011, 40-42.

autem minus sit id, quod praedicatur, ab eo, quod subiectum est, fieri nequit. Dicitur etiam praecedere praedicatum, sequi quod subiectum est; idoneior est enim praedicatio constituere propositionem, quam id, quod subiectum est.²⁾

The *apparatus fontium* of C. Thomsen Thörnqvist's edition fails to provide the exact source of this passage,³⁾ which is certainly a conflation of these two passages from Alexander's commentaries on Aristotle:

1. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπεράσματι μείζων λεγόμενος, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πλέον τοῦ, οὗ κατηγορεῖται· οὐκ ἀεὶ μὲν τοῦτο· ἔστι γάρ ποτε καὶ ἐπ' ἴσης· ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἐπ' ἴσης ποτὲ γίνεσθαι κοινόν ἐστι τῷ τε ὑποκειμένῳ καὶ τῷ κατηγορουμένῳ, ὅτε δὲ μὴ εἰσὶν ἴσοι, ἴδιον τοῦ μὲν κατηγορουμένου τὸ ἐπὶ πλέον λέγεσθαι τοῦ δὲ ὑποκειμένου τὸ ἐπ' ἔλαττον λέγω δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀληθείαι προτάσεσι οὐδέποτε γὰρ ἀνάπαλιν.⁴⁾

2. ἐπειδὴ ἐν παντὶ προβλήματι καὶ πάσῃ προτάσει ἐστὶ τι κατηγορούμενόν τινος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν κατηγορουμένων αἱ τε διαφοραὶ καὶ τὰ εἶδη τῶν προτάσεων καὶ τῶν προβλημάτων (λέγοιτο δ' ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ περὶ τῶν ὑποθετικῶν προτάσεων καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐκείναις τὸ ἐπόμενον, ὃ κατηγορουμένου χώραν ἔχει, τούτων τι ἔστι λαμβάνειν), ὅτι πᾶν τὸ κατηγορούμενόν τινος ἀνάγκη ἢ ἐπ' ἴσης αὐτῷ λέγεσθαι (καὶ ἀντικατηγορεῖται ταῦτα ἀλλήλων) ἢ μὴ ἐπ' ἴσης, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἀντικατηγορούμενον ἢ ὅρος ἢ ἴδιον, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀντικατηγορούμενον ἢ ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ καὶ τῷ ὀρισμῷ τοῦ πράγματός ἐστιν ἢ οὐ. καὶ εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν τῷ ὀρισμῷ, γένος ἢ διαφορὰ ἂν εἴη, εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐν τῷ ὀρισμῷ, συμβεβηκὸς ἂν εἴη· τὸ γὰρ συμβεβηκὸς ἦν ὃ μήτε ὅρος μήτε ἴδιον μήτε γένος ὃν ὑπῆρχε τῷ πράγματι.⁵⁾

The first passage is clearly the main source, but in it we do not find any reference to the genus or to the *proprium*, which appear in Boethius's exposition. From the second passage Boethius could have inferred that every term which figure in a proposition is one of the predicables. In order to expand why a term "aut abundat et superest subiecto aut aequatur", Boethius relied on this latter doctrine,

²⁾ Boeth. *syll. categ.* p. 16.13-17.9.

³⁾ C. Thomsen Thörnqvist provides many useful possible sources for this passage in her remarkable edition, but does not take into account Alexander's commentary on the *Topics* in her *apparatus fontium*, because she rightly underlines that Alexander's commentary on the *Prior Analytics* is the major source of Boethius's treatise (cf. Thomsen Thörnqvist 2008b, lxxv).

⁴⁾ Alex. Aphr. *inAPr.* p. 47.30-48.2.

⁵⁾ Alex. Aphr. *in Top.* p. 63.22-64.2 (cf. Arist. *Top.* A, 8, 103 b1-19).

by making reference to the genus (which 'abundat et superest subiecto') and to the *proprium* (which 'aequatur [subiecto]'), without mentioning the other predicables. In other words, Boethius presented a syllogistic which is reliant on Aristotle's theory of predication, and this theory of predication is expanded mostly in the *Topics*.⁶⁾ Boethius's operation has been made possible by Alexander's interpretation of Aristotle's logic,⁷⁾ which has influenced Boethius's own reception of syllogistic. However, Boethius expounds Alexander's doctrine in a simpler way, which avoids many logical technicalities (such as the reference to the other predicables): these details, on the contrary, may be found in Alexander's commentaries. This notwithstanding, this conflation of Boethius's sources is of a certain interest to modern readers, because it offers us an original doctrine: such an interpretation of Aristotle's syllogistic, which is presented against the background of Aristotle's theory of predication, has become more popular among contemporary scholars only in the last two decades, mostly thanks to the contributions by P. Thom, and by M. Malink. Furthermore, this conflation is a sign of Boethius's deep understanding of Aristotle's logic, and of Alexander's presentation of it.⁸⁾

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⁶⁾ It is not clear whether this was Aristotle's own understanding of syllogistic. Some scholars have recently expounded Aristotle's syllogistic against the background of his theory of predication: see Thom 1996; Malink 2006. On Aristotle's theory of predication see Mignucci 1996.

⁷⁾ On Alexander's syllogistic see Flannery 1995, Gili 2011, Gili 2012.

⁸⁾ I am grateful to the anonymous referee of this journal, who made invaluable comments on a previous draft of this note. Any remaining shortcomings and mistakes are only mine.

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