The history of logic is the history of a technical discipline and no matter what form that history takes whether it be whiggish, Kuhnian, feminist, post-foucauldian, or whatever, it will be inadequate to its subject if it does not properly understand the character of the discipline as it presently exists. Neither the claim that some concept important in contemporary formal or philosophical logic has a history which connects it continuously with a concept employed in the past nor the claim that there is a radical incommensurability between them can be assessed if one does not fully understanding the contemporary accounts of these concepts. ‘Accounts’ rather than ‘account’ since in general there need be no agreement among contemporary philosophers over the concepts in question. One of the major reasons, indeed, for studying the history of philosophy philosophically\(^1\) is to recruit past philosophers into the debate over some topic which interests us – in the case at issue here the nature of propositionality and propositional logic. This is not to claim that our present understanding of these concepts is uniformly superior to some past version of them though in the case of formal and philosophical logic this is certainly for the most part true. The aim of the following paper is to show, however, that some of the progress made in the nineteenth and twentieth century towards understanding the nature of propositionality and propositional inference which were crucial for the development of propositional logic as we know it had already been made in the twelfth century only to be forgotten when the interests of philosophers changed. Methodologically what is important is that we must evaluate the work of twelfth century logicians from the point of view of our twenty-first century understanding and from

\(^1\) For a discussion of philosophical versus historical histories of philosophy see Nor- more 1990.
that point of view we can say that Peter Abaelard’s contributions to the investigations of the foundations of propositional logic parallels that of Frege in the nineteenth century and that his understanding of propositions anticipates our own. We can also say, and in a way this is more important, that Boethius clearly did not understand the nature of propositionality and of propositional logic and that it is the worst kind of historical mistake to pretend that they did.\(^2\)

Aristotle’s project in *De Interpretatione* is to establish the character of one of the two relationships upon which his account of valid inference will be based. The relationship, that is, that holds between propositions which are such that it is not possible for them to be true together. Aristotle’s appeal to *reductio proofs* in the *Prior Analytics* shows that he holds that if his various provisos about the structure of a syllogism are satisfied, a sufficient condition for such an argument to be valid is that the opposite of its conclusion cannot be true when both of its premisses are true. In his *reductio* proofs of various moods of the secondary figures he invokes the other fundamental relationship of his logic, that of evident syllogistic entailment, as exhibited by all the moods of the first figure, to show that the condition in question is met for particular combinations of premisses and conclusion.

*De Interpretatione*, then, is concerned to locate pairs of propositions which are opposed in that they cannot be true together. Aristotle explores this relationship in the first place in Chapters 5–8 of the work and it is those chapters that I wish to consider here. They have been relatively neglected by modern commentators but they seem to me to be the most important in the book. They show us that Aristotle apparently had no notion of propositionality in our modern sense and that Boethius on the evidence of his commentaries certainly did not. In the twelfth century, however, Peter Abaelard working on the material provided in these chapters and in Boethius’ commentaries developed what we can recognise as the foundations of a genuinely propositional logic. This, I think, was the first and perhaps greatest achievement of mediæval logic as it moved beyond the limits of its ancient inheritance.

I will begin by reviewing the important points made about propositional relations in *De Interpretatione* 5–8. Next I will say something about what is required for an account of propositional relations to

\(^2\) For a further discussion of this point see Martin 1991.