SIMON OF FAVERSHAM ON ARISTOTLE’S CATEGORIES AND THE SCIENTIA PRAEDICAMENTORUM

Martin Pickavé

I.

The question of whether Aristotle’s short treatise on the so-called categories is about words or concepts or things—or in other words, whether the Categories belongs to logic (or even grammar) rather than to metaphysics—is a notorious one in the history of philosophy. Later medieval authors inherit the relevant debate from the ancient commentators on Aristotle’s Categories, but their answers often differ from that of their predecessors in at least two fundamental respects: (1) Later medieval philosophers (from the 13th century onwards) are typically more inclined towards a realist understanding of the categories; for the most part they accept the idea of ten kinds of being. And although not all of them have a realist understanding of the subject-matter of the Categories itself, they regard the treatise as a work in which Aristotle addresses these ten kinds of being from a logical point of view.¹ (2) Later medieval authors tend to broaden the problem of the scientific status of the Categories insofar as they not only discuss whether the Categories belongs to this or that area of knowledge, but whether the doctrine described in this work can count as knowledge at all.²

Simon of Faversham (before 1260–1306), one of the most prolific English commentators on Aristotle at the end of the 13th century, is a good example of this combination of a realist approach and of an approach that focuses on the status of our knowledge of the categories. His conception of the categories will be at the focus of this paper because it helps to understand to what extent, according to some medieval philosophers, the categories are located right at the intersection between logic and metaphysics and why the question regarding the proper scientific place of the categories (i.e., whether they properly belong to logic or to metaphysics) is not just a question which can simply be answered in one or the other direction. I chose Simon as the primary object of my paper because his commentary on the *Categories* and his other related texts are original in the way in which they synthesize different influences and because they provide an interesting example of a doctrine of the categories from around 1280, i.e., the years before Scotus’s masterly commentary and before the appearance of more nominalist accounts of the categories.

The paper will begin with a discussion of Simon’s general understanding of logic and its scientific status. We shall then move on to Simon’s treatment of the scientific character of the doctrine developed in Aristotle’s *Categories*. Like medieval commentators on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, he asks in particular how scientific knowledge (*scientia*) of the categories (or predicaments, to use the medieval term) is able to match the general requirements for knowledge set out in the *Posterior Analytics*: What is the subject-matter of such a piece of knowledge and what are the subject’s parts, properties and causes? Simon’s answers will provide us with a better understanding of what he means by ‘category’ or ‘predicament’ (*praedicamentum*). We will then focus on a related problem, namely, Simon’s contention that predicaments are composed of a *res praedicamenti* and a *ratio praedicamenti*. How are we to understand this theory and what role does it play? The final section of this article is devoted to answer the central question regarding the relationship between logic and metaphysics as far as the categories are concerned.

One of my aims in this article is thus expository. Somewhat undeservedly Simon’s teaching on the categories is almost unknown to modern