A Neglected Source of Boethius’s *De syllogismo categorico*

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* A1, 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, patetfaciamus exemplis. Praedicatum a subiecto abundat, quotiens genus aliquod de aliquo praedicatur, ut si dicas: ‘Omnis homo animal est’; non enim potes convertere, ut dicas: ‘Omne animal homo est’, quia ‘animal’ ab ‘hominem’ plus est et abundat. Aequatur autem praedicatum subjecto, quotiens proprium quoddam cuiuspiam praedicatur, ut ‘Omnis homo risibilis est’ potes convertere: ‘Omne risibile homo est.’ Ut autem minus sit id, quod praedicatur, ab eo, quod subiectum est, fieri nequit. Dicitur etiam praecedere praedicatum, sequi quod subiectum est; idonior est enim praedicatio constituere propositionem, quam id, quod subiectum est.\(^2\)

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

The apparatus fontium of C. Thomsen Thörnqvist’s edition fails to provide the exact source of this passage, 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, οὐκ ἀεὶ μὲν τούτῳ ἐστὶ γάρ ποτε καὶ ἐπ’ ἱσης· ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἐπ’ ἱσης ποτὲ γίνεσθαι κοινὸν ἐστὶ τῷ τε ὑποκειμένῳ καὶ τῷ κατηγορουμένῳ, ὅτε δὲ μὴ εἶσιν ἵσοι, ἵδιον τοῦ μὲν κατηγορουμένου τὸ ἐπὶ πλέον λέγεσθαι τού ἔπει ὑποκειμένου τὸ ἐπ’ ἐλαττων λέγω δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀληθείς προτάσεις: οὐδὲποτε γάρ ἀνάπαλιν.

2. ἐπειδὴ ἐν παντὶ προβλήματι καὶ πάση προτάσει ἐστὶ τι κατηγορούμενόν τινος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν κατηγορούμενων αἱ τε διαφοραὶ καὶ τὰ εἴδη τῶν προτάσεων καὶ τῶν προβλήματων (λέγοιτο δ’ ἂν τὸ αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ τῶν ὑποθετικῶν προτάσεων καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἔκεινας τὸ ἐπόμενον, δ’ κατηγορουμένου χώραν ἔχει, τούτων τι ἐστὶ λαμβάνειν), ὅτι πάντ’ ἐν κατηγορούμενον τινος ἀνάγκη ἢ ἐπ’ ἱσης αὐτῷ λέγεσθαι (καὶ ἀντικατηγορεῖται ταῦτα ἀλλήλων) ἢ μὴ ἐπ’ ἱσης, ὅτι τὸ μὲν ἀντικατηγορούμενον ἢ ὅρος ἢ ἵδιον, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀντικατηγορούμενον ἢ ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ καὶ τῷ ὁρισμῷ τοῦ πράγματος ἐστὶν ἢ ὦ. καὶ εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν τῷ ὁρισμῷ, γένος ἢ διαφορά ἢ εἰ, εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐν τῷ ὁρισμῷ, συμβεβηκός ἢ ἐν τῷ γάρ συμβεβηκός ἢ δ’ ὑπῆρξε τῷ πράγματι.

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 figures 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, 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

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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. in APr. 47.30-48.2.

5 Alex.Aphr. in Top. 63.22-64.2 (cf. Arist. Top. A8, 103b1-19).