

History of Logic from Aristotle to Gödel by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: [rc@ontology.co](mailto:rc@ontology.co)

## Boethius' Logic as a Discourse on Being

### Introduction: An Overview of the Logical Works of Boethius

"According to Minio-Paluello, the editor of most of the translations, the medieval manuscript tradition shows traces of both a first and a second version of the Latin *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Prior Analytics* and *Topics*. (5) Boethius did not take his task as a translator lightly! Only one commentary on the *Categories* is extant, but in it Boethius announces a plan to write a second one, and it seems likely that an anonymously transmitted text may be a small fragment of the second commentary (whether it was ever completed or not). (6) Of the two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, the second is considerably longer and generally more interesting than the first. There is no dedicated companion monograph, but parts of the lore of the *Peri hermeneias* are presented in the works on categorical syllogisms and the one about topical differences. It seems possible that Boethius composed or prepared a commentary on the *Prior Analytics*. While preparing an edition of Boethius' translation of this Aristotelian text, Minio-Paluello discovered that a twelfth-century manuscript contains marginal scholia on that work which must be translations from the Greek or adaptations of a Greek source, and the translator's habits seemed to indicate that he was no one other than Boethius. (7) Possibly, then, these scholia were raw materials intended for use in a commentary. Later I discovered traces of more translated Greek scholia in a twelfth-century commentary on the *Prior Analytics*. (8) This suggests that either (1) Boethius had left more extensive raw materials than the ones discovered by Minio-Paluello, or (2) he had actually left a whole commentary, of which we have only discovered little fragments, or (3) in spite of the agreement with Boethius' habits as a translator, what Minio-Paluello and myself discovered were in fact traces of a twelfth-century translation – complete or partial – of a Greek commentary. The matter is in need of further research. The monograph on categorical syllogisms may reasonably be seen as a handy summary of the subject treated at length and in depth in the *Prior Analytics*, while the one on hypothetical syllogisms is only linked to the Aristotelian work in the sense that it was customary in late antiquity to think that, by laying the foundations of categorical syllogistic in *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle had also laid the foundations of hypothetical syllogistic, and commentators seem routinely to have said something about the latter in connection with *Prior Analytics* I.23.

Boethius' treatment of hypothetical syllogisms is (to put it mildly) very strange; recently a Greek parallel to a little part of it was discovered, (9) but for the most part it is unparalleled in ancient literature, though, admittedly, we do not have much by which to gauge what may have been the standard approach to the matter in late antiquity. Boethius probably never translated or commented on the *Posterior Analytics*, though he obviously had some acquaintance with the work, and must be assumed to have intended to include it in his program. (10) He himself mentions that there was a book by Vettius Praetextatus (c.320–84) which claimed to be a Latin translation of both of Aristotle's *Analytics*, while in fact it contained translations of Themistius' fourth-century paraphrases, "as is obvious to anyone who knows both." (11) Nor does Boethius seem to have commented on the *Sophistical Refutations*, although he did translate it. About Boethius' lost commentary on the *Topics* not much can be said except that it probably depended on a paraphrase-commentary by Themistius, which he also used in his *De topicis differentiis*, and from which he seems to have derived the idea that a topic (Greek *topos*, Latin *locus*) is not only a highly general notion such as "genus" or "form," but also an associated axiom (Greek *axioma*, Latin *maxima*), such as "A thing is capable of exactly as much as its natural form permits" and "Things that have different genera

are also different from one another.” (12)

In a way, *De topicis differentiis* might more properly be classified as a companion to Cicero's *Topics*, which was taught in Roman rhetoric schools, it seems, and on which first Marius Victorinus and then Boethius had composed commentaries. Boethius, however, in *On Topical Differences*, inserts so much material with a background in Aristotelian exegesis that the result is something that might well be taken to contain the essentials of the lore of Aristotle's *Topics* – and, indeed, that was how medieval schoolmen were to read the work." (pp. 37-38)

## Notes

(5) See Minio-Paluello's introductions to volumes I, II, III and V of *Aristoteles Latinus* [= *AL*]. His arguments seem very strong, but I cannot quite suppress a fear that his similar results for each work may be due to some flaw in his methodology. Dod 1982: 54 cautiously says that “[t]he revisions may be Boethius' own, or they may be the work of an unknown editor, possibly working in Constantinople where Boethius' works are known to have been transcribed (and perhaps edited) already in the sixth century.”

(6) See Hadot 1959.

(7) See Minio-Paluello 1957. Cf. Shiel 1982. Edition in *AL* III.4, supplements in Shiel 1984.

(8) See Ebbesen 1981b.

(9) See Bobzien 2002.

(10) A reference to a Boethian commentary on *Posterior Analytics* I is found in a thirteenth-century MS (Munich, clm 14246), but this is surely an error. The work referred to was really the translation of Philoponus' commentary that most schoolmen attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias. I regret having called attention to the Munich MS in a small article of 1973 (*CIMAGL* 9: 68–73), and I beg my readers not to waste their time on looking up that article.

(11) Boethius 2IN [*Second Commentary on On Interpretation*] 3.

(12) For the history of the Boethian theory of topics see Ebbesen 1981a: 1. 106ff. The maxims cited occur at TD [*De topicis differentiis*] 2.7.26: p. 36 (1190A) (page references to TD are to Boethius 1990, with references to Boethius 1847 added in brackets) and 3.3.11: p. 52 (1197C).

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