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Anonymus Cantabrigiensis: Commentarium in Sophisticos Elenchos Aristotelis edited by Sten Ebbesen

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The publication of the critical edition of this anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* is something to be celebrated for numerous reasons. Needless to say, it is of great value for scholars interested in the reception of this particular item of the *corpus Aristotelicum*, especially since the editor is responsible for much of our current knowledge within the field. But as Sten Ebbesen himself points out in his introduction to this volume (as well as in other contributions [see below]), the interest of many medieval commentaries on ancient sources—and this particular commentary is a great example—lies greatly in the discernment and acumen of their authors, even if their names remain unknown. "Mr. *Anonymus*", to quote Ebbesen,[1] "is a very important medieval philosopher", indeed. But before going into any examples of the acuity of this particular unknown medieval scholar, a few general remarks about the commentary and the present edition are in order.

As the acknowledgments makes clear, an edition of this magnitude implies many years of labor and many keen eyes and brains willing to engage in what is, inevitably, a collaborative effort, even in cases where a single person takes up the task of preparing a volume such as this. Ebbesen was first acquainted with the manuscript transmitting this commentary (Cambridge, St

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[1] The quotation is taken not from the present volume but from the introduction to Sten Ebbesen's *Festschrift* [Fink and Mora Márquez 2013, 2]. Ebbesen's words do not refer exclusively to Anonymus Cantabrigensis, but, more generally, to all valuable texts with no attribution of authorship.

John's College, MS D 12) in 1973, and has often pointed out the interest of its contents [Ebbesen and Iwakuma 1983, and Ebbesen 2011, 2014, and 2017]. Other scholars who have followed Ebbesen's lead in digging deeper into the contents of Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' commentary include Christopher Martin [2013], Jakob Leth Fink [2013], and Julie Brumberg-Chaumont [2017]. All those previous contributions leave their mark, in one form or another, in the present volume.

The edition also engages with a long list of scholars who studied aspects of that fascinating period ranging from the last decades of the 12th century to the first decades of the 13th, when the slow decline of Parisian schools gave way to the new type of organization represented by the University of Paris, where the *Sophistical Refutations* soon became mandatory reading in the faculty of arts. Ebbesen's arguments for identifying Anonymus Cantabrigiensis as a scholar active in Paris at the end of the 12th century, probably belonging to the school of *nominales*, are convincing; and so is his tackling of the difficulties arising from this characterization. In all likelihood, the author was a master well-versed in Aristotle, who had been teaching the *Sophistical Refutations* for many years, probably revising his notes over time. As Ebbesen points out, this might force some adjustments in the chronology of texts from the Parisian schools, although it should also be noted that, as usual, we are dealing here with overlapping timelines: the personal *curriculum vitae* of an author, and the overarching history of the institution(s) that he belonged to. In other words, a young witness to the decline of the Parisian schools might very well grow up to be a white-haired witness to the rise of the university—this exaggerated example is not Ebbesen's but my own and is meant simply to illustrate the point that something as apparently plain and concise as a date is in fact loaded with several trajectories at different stages of development. This is sometimes overlooked, and editions like this serve the purpose of reminding us that many of the difficulties that any editor must cope with derive precisely from this dynamic character of many commentary traditions.

Moreover, and given that our current inventory of 12th-century schools is reconstructed from sources like this one, it seems only fair to expect that the availability of new material may eventually derive from the revision of previous hypotheses regarding the dating and authorship of individual items. This is well reflected in the introduction to the present volume. Here Ebbesen's thorough knowledge of these sources is deployed to both ends: he aims not only to propose a date of composition of the present commentary (sometime between 1185 and 1205, perhaps with several stages of revision),

but also to suggest corrections to the dating and attribution of other sources close in content or spirit to Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' text [17–24].

As usual, Ebbesen's introductory remarks and *ratio edendi* serve as a model for scholars working on the critical edition of similar sources. A special mention must be made of Ebbesen's attention to the influence of the Greek commentary tradition, many times overshadowed by the attention given to Latin translations. Section 6 of the introduction, which is devoted to the identification of material taken from Greek sources, is, among other things, a worthy reminder of this influence, which is also evident in the *apparatus*, furbished as it is with both Latin and Greek references.

Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' commentary stops short at *Soph. elen.* 20 177a35, leading Ebbesen to estimate that two quires of the manuscript are missing, nearly one third of the total work. Missing sections notwithstanding, this is quite a long commentary, prolix in its treatment of the source material and, as pointed out above, offering much food for thought. Given its length, many of the doctrinal points of interest of the commentary are only hinted at in the introduction. Some of them are dealt with elsewhere, however, either by Ebbesen himself or by different scholars—see the Bibliography [p. 224 below]—and will most likely continue to be by future researchers, now that the text has been made available in a proper critical edition.

A growing field of research that will in all likelihood benefit from this edition is, arguably, the medieval tradition of commentaries on the *Topics*, given the proximity of the two works. Their success in the period in which Anonymus Cantabrigiensis composed his text was quite disparate[2] and, in this respect, Ebbesen's caution regarding a mention by our anonymous author of an earlier commentary on the *Topics* of his own is reasonably judicious [90]: certainly, the author could be referring either to a commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* or on Boethius' *De differentiis topicis*. However, a quick survey of references to both works yields a strong contrast: merely 8 references to Boethius' *De differentiis topicis* against 34 to Aristotle's *Topics* are to be found in Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' text. This suggests that our author's commentary was on Aristotle's work.

[2] See, for instance, Ebbesen 1997, 338:

> To all appearances what happened was this: the exegesis of the *Elenchi* was developed first; when scholars began to deal with the *Topics*, they concentrated on the parts that resembled the *Elenchi*, and were especially alert to possible discrepancies between the *Topics* and the well-known *Elenchi*.

Not surprisingly, book 8 is more referenced in the text than the other seven books of Aristotle's *Topics*, which receive, however, their fair share of attention. One such instance can be found in the passage on *Soph. elen.* 5 167b31, which includes the following reference to Aristotle's *Topics*.

> …secundum methodos quas in Topicis ponit Aristoteles: si enim aliqua duo contraria sunt, et alia duo sunt contraria, si[ve] unum sub uno, reliquum oppositum sub reliquo opposito continebitur, cum neutrum secundum superabundantiam dicatur.[3] [94]
>
> …according to the methods which Aristotle presents in the *Topics*, namely: if there are two contrary [terms] and two other contrary [terms], if one [of the first] is contained under one [of the others], the remaining opposite [term] will be contained under the remaining opposite, when neither is predicated with respect to overabundance.

In the *apparatus*, Ebbesen identifies the reference as *Top.* 4.6 127b8–11. But other candidates could be mentioned as well, since the parallel attribution of contraries is found in several passages of book 4, as well as in books 1, 2, and 6, and in similar terms to the ones mentioned by Anonymus Cantabrigiensis. The choice of *Top.* 4.6 127b8–11 as a more likely reference than the others is certainly supported by the formula "unum sub uno, reliquum…sub reliquo", found in both cases. But the main purpose of the passage in *Top.* 4.6 127b8–11 is not to introduce that relation but rather to refer to it as a reason, or even as a τόπος itself (*eo quod contraria in contrariis generibus*), to support the claim that the attribution of the lower species to the higher genus, and *vice versa*, will render an inadequate argument. Such seems to be the general μέθοδος proposed by Aristotle in the *Topics*, to which the passage brought forward in the *apparatus* presents an example among many.

A more likely reference, then, could be *Top.* 4.4 124b4–5:

> nam si oppositum in opposito, et propositum in proposito erit.
>
> if the opposite is included in an opposite, the proposed [term] will also be included in the proposed [genus].

[3] The notion of *super<h>abundantia* was treated by Aristotle in an earlier passage [*Top.* 4.3 123b20–30]. The notion refers to opposites considered with respect to a middle term and not with respect to each other. The clause in the previous rule (or μέθοδος) indicates that it cannot be applied when the case involves this type of "overabundant" opposites.

Certainly, the turn of phrase is not the same, but it has the advantage of presenting four terms forming two pairs of opposites, as Anonymus Cantabrigiensis does. Moreover, the commentary on the *Topics* attributed to Robert Kilwardby explains this passage in this way:

> quattuor sint quorum primum similiter se habet ad secundum sicut se habet tertium ad quartum. Si primo dicitur de secundo sicut genus, et tertium dicitur de quarto sicut genus. [Ms. Firenze, Conv. Soppr. B.IV.1618, p. 120a]
>
> Let there be four terms of which the first is related to the second as the third is related to the fourth. If the first is predicated of the second as its genus, so the third is predicated of the fourth as its genus.

Notably, there are no references to opposition in this passage, but a few lines later Aristotle does in fact present τόποι that deal with opposites, stating that "if the pleasant is essentially good, the non-good will be non-pleasant" [*Top*. 4.4 124b7–12], and that "if the non-good is non-pleasant, the pleasant is good" [*Top*. 4.4 124b12–14]. The author of the commentary on the *Topics* in the Firenze manuscript adds a few lines later:

> Consequenter considerat in relative oppositis comparando due ad duo, et est consideratio talis: Considerandum cum sit aliquid generi relatione oppositum et aliquid specie, utrum oppositum generis sit opposite speciei; et si non, interimitur propositum.
>
> Then, he [*scil*. Aristotle] considers relative opposites by comparing two by two. And the consideration is of this sort:[4] It must be considered, when there is an opposite term related to a genus and another one to a species, whether the opposite of the genus is [the genus] of the opposite species. And if that is not the case, the position [of the adversary] is defeated.

In all these passages, the main goal seems to be to support the attribution of opposites (be it accidents, genera, species, or definitions) to opposite terms. The recurrent pattern (A:B :: C:D) seems to support Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' use of the plural ("methodos quas") since, in fact, there does not seem to be one single τόπος dealing with pairs of opposites in Aristotle, but rather several uses of this pattern, which Robert Kilwardby, in the second half of the 13th century, seems to have named "proportion of the double opposition".[5]

[4] "Consideratio" is the term commonly used by the author of the commentary to refer to τόποι or *loci*.

[5] See Robert Kilwardby, *Epistola ad Petrum de Confleto*:

> Si forma corrumpitur in pure nichil, ergo forme corruptio est annichilatio, ex quo sequitur, quod generatio est creatio, proprie accipiendo creationem; quia

As mentioned, close readings of both *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* centered in or including Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' commentary have been recently attempted, with a particular focus on the concern raised by some medieval scholars regarding the apparent discrepancies in Aristotle's classification of syllogisms. The peirastic syllogism ("temptativus", in Boethius' translation) seems to cause the more pressing exegetic challenges.[6] Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' solution to this conundrum is quite original, surpassing even, as Ebbesen has claimed elsewhere [2017], contemporary readings of Aristotle that fail to identify a problem there in the first place. Be that as it may, Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' treatment of the peirastic syllogism confirms Ebbesen's suggestion that commentaries on the *Topics* in the first half of the 13th century are in more than one way influenced by the tradition of commentaries on Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*. When the same question is raised in the parallel passages of both works, it is usually the commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* that includes the more extended treatment of the problem.

When a medieval commentator is as perceptive a reader as Anonymus Cantabrigiensis, it could be said that he produces a true "companion" (in the modern, editorial sense of the word) to the work commented on. In that case, even if medievalists are likely to be the main target of this volume, curious readers of Aristotle would greatly benefit from this insightful take on the *Sophistical Refutations*. Or, to borrow a more eloquent case made by Ebbesen himself:

> For modern interpreters of Aristotle there are things to be learned from their medieval counterparts. We may not always be able to adopt their solutions of the problems raised by the text, but they can open our eyes to problems we have not seen, or make us realize that problems we have seen are even more complex than we thought. [Ebbesen 2017, 187]

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talis est proportio duplicis oppositionis, quod si oppositum de opposito et proportionatum de proportionato. [Ehrle 1920, 614–615]

If a form is corrupted into pure nothing, then the corruption of a form is annihilation; from which it follows that generation is creation, understanding "creation" in its strict sense: since such is the proportion of the double opposition, namely, that if an opposite [is predicated] of an opposite, the proportionate [of the first is] also [predicated] of the proportionate [of the second].)

[6] Besides Fink 2013, Ebbesen himself deals with the issue in Ebbesen 2017 and briefly in Ebbesen 1997. A similar case has been made by Julie Brumberg-Chaumont [2017] regarding Anonymus Cantabrigiensis' treatment of the distinction of form and matter as it bears on the classification of fallacies.

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