

# EXEMPLA DOCENT. HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF ARISTOTLE'S EXAMPLES OF THE FALLACY OF ACCIDENT (DOXOGRAPHY MATTERS)

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SUMMARY: 1. *Prolegomena*: the consensus of the perplexed. 2. Aristotle's definition of the fallacy of accident. 3. Aristotle's standard examples of the fallacy of accident. 4. Aristotle's star examples of the fallacy of accident. 5. *Epilogomena*: beware of those who mock the overcultivated straw in the eye of their neighbour and are content with the illiterate beam in their own.

Терез: «Мамо, я не дівчинка» (Terez: «Mom, I'm not a child»)

Мама: «А хто ти?» (Mom: «What are you then?»)

Терез: «Папа сказав, що я сердита дівчинка» (Terez: «Dad told me I'm a hot-tempered child»).

## 1. PROLEGOMENA: THE CONSENSUS OF THE PERPLEXED

THE fallacy of accident has a long established reputation of not being a masterpiece of clarity. Already in the 1860s, Edward Poste berated it as «ill-defined», labelled some of his examples as «eccentric» and suggested we drop it altogether from Aristotle's list of fallacies and apportion its content among the other classes of sophisms.<sup>1</sup> About a century afterwards, Charles Leonard Hamblin still lamented the fact that the fallacy is «seldom understood» and gave Aristotle the blame, since – for one thing – it is unclear what «accident» means here and – for another – it is nowhere precisely stated how

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<sup>1</sup> E. Poste, *Aristotle on Fallacies or The Sophistici Elenchi*, Macmillan, London 1866, p. 158. Among those who have followed Poste's advice, the *secundum quid* fallacy has received the lion's share: cf. for emphasis D.N. Walton, *Ignoring Qualifications (Secundum Quid) as a Sub-fallacy of Hasty Generalization*, «Logique & Analyse», 129-130 (1990), pp. 113-114 and *The Place of Emotion in Argument*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 1992, p. 37. More in general, this solution has found favour with English-speaking authors of logical textbooks, who usually treat them as a converse pair: cf. e.g. W.S. Jevons, *Elementary Lessons in Logic: Deductive and Inductive*, Macmillan, London 1870, p. 176, J.G. Hibben, *Logic Deductive and Inductive*, C. Schribner's Sons, New York 1905, pp. 161-162 and H.W.B. Joseph, *Introduction to Logic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1916, p. 574, note 1 and pp. 588-589 down to W.T. Parry and E.A. Hacker, *Aristotelian Logic*, SUNY, Albany 1991, p. 438.

we are to interpret it.<sup>2</sup> A few years later, Sten Ebbesen's claim that the fallacy's major flaw is that its definition does not match its own examples will meet with everybody's approval.<sup>3</sup>

Since of late the compatibility issue appears to have drawn most of the scholarly dissatisfaction and it is, by its own right, as good a point as any (and better than most<sup>4</sup>) to start looking into the matter, I shall deal with it in some detail hereafter. In order to do so, I will provide, first, a general account of the fallacy of accident; then, I will show accordingly that Aristotle's examples are consistent with it. For convenience and for reasons that will become clear, these will be split into two families, the «standard» and the «star» ones.

## 2. ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF THE FALLACY OF ACCIDENT

### 2. 1. What does *παρὰ τὸ συμβεβηκός* means?

As far as its name is concerned, Byzantine and Latin commentators were ordinarily right. Even if this is not its most distinctive sense nor the very first that springs to mind,<sup>5</sup> *συμβεβηκός* means here whatever predicate is said of a subject, irrespective of its being an essential or an accidental property:

*Anonymi Commentarium II*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's Sophistici Elenchi*, Brill, Leiden 1981, II, 42.1-2: «*πρᾶγμα*» λέγει τὸ σύνθετον,

<sup>2</sup> C.L. Hamblin, *Fallacies*, Methuen, London 1970, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's Sophistici Elenchi*, Brill, Leiden 1981, I, p. 224. H. Goodenough Gelber, *The Fallacy of Accident and the dictum de omni. Late Medieval Controversy over a Reciprocal Pair*, «*Vivarium*», 25 (1987), p. 110; A. Bueno, *Aristotle, the Fallacy of Accident and the Nature of Predication. A Historical Inquiry*, «*Journal of the History of Philosophy*», 26 (1988), p. 9; J.M. Gamba, *Medieval Solutions to the Sophism of Accident*, in K. Jacobi (ed.), *Argumentationstheorie*, Brill, Leiden 1993, p. 431; L.-A. Dorion, *Aristote. Les réfutations sophistiques*, Presses de l'Université Laval, Montréal - Vrin, Paris 1995, p. 233, note 58; C. Shields, *Order in Multiplicity. Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999, p. 166; P. Fait, *Aristotele e i paralogismi dell'identità*, «*Rivista di storia della filosofia*», 2 (2008), p. 206; D. Botting, *Fallacies of Accident*, «*Argumentation*», 26 (2012), p. 270 all agree with Sten Ebbesen's assessment. Aristotle's examples had already been criticised, and viciously at that, by F.C.S. Schiller, *Aristotle's Refutation of «Aristotelian» Logic*, «*Mind*», 23 (1914), pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> If anything, because Aristotle's solution consists precisely in prompting the respondent to offer counterexamples whenever he suspects the argument he is dealing with to be a fallacy of accident (cf. section 2.2 below).

<sup>5</sup> For a preliminary survey of Aristotle's notion of «accident» in dialectical contexts, cf. M. van Aubel, *Accident, catégories et prédicables dans l'œuvre d'Aristote*, «*Revue Philosophique de Louvain*», 61 (1963), pp. 361-401 and J. Brunschwig, *Note sur la conception aristotélicienne de l'accident*, in AA. VV., *Methexis. Etudes néoplatoniciennes présentées au professeur Evangelos A. Moutsopoulos*, CIEPA, Athens 1992, pp. 67-80. More in general, cf. A. Urbanas, *La notion d'accident chez Aristote*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris - Bellarmin, Montréal 1988, and T. Ebert, *Aristotelian Accidents*, «*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*», 16 (1998), pp. 133-159.

“συμβεβηκός” δὲ πᾶν κατηγορούμενον, εἴτε τῶν οὐσιωδῶς ὑπαρχόντων, εἴτε καὶ μὴ [we call “pragma” the composite and “sumbebêkos” any predicate, whether it is an essential attribute or not].<sup>6</sup>

*Ps.-Alexandri I (Michaeli Ephesii) in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos commentarium*, M. Wallies (ed.), Reimer, Berlin 1898, 37.23-26: «πρᾶγμα μὲν λέγων τὸ σύνθετον καὶ ὑποκείμενον, συμβεβηκός δὲ ἀπλῶς πᾶν κατηγορούμενον, ἅν τε τῶν οὐσιωδῶς καὶ καθ’ αὐτὸ ὑπαρχόντων τῷ καθ’ οὗ κατηγορεῖται ἐστὶ ἅν τε καὶ μὴ [Aristotle calls “pragma” the composite, that is to say the subject, and “sumbebêkos” any predicate in general, whether or not it belongs essentially and by itself to what it is predicated of]».

*Anonymi glosae in Aristotelis Sophisticos elenchos*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica Modernorum*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1962, 214.20-22: «notandum quod “accidens” dicitur hic predicatum, sive de se tantum sive de alio predicetur, sive sit substantiale sive accidentale [it should be noted that “accidens” means here predicate, whether it is predicated of itself or of something else, whether it is essential or accidental]»; cf. 214.10: «secundum accidens, idest secundum praedicatum [“secundum accidens”, that is ‘predicate related’]».

*Anonymi summa sophisticorum elenchorum*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica Modernorum*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1962, 356.7-10: «“accidens” enim ibi largo modo accipitur, scilicet pro quolibet predicato, sive accidentale sit sive substantiale [“accident” is taken here in a broad sense and means any predicate, whether accidental or essential]».

*Anonymi parisiensis compendium sophisticorum elenchorum*, S. Ebbesen and Y. Iwakuma (ed.), «Cahiers de l’Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin», 60 (1990), 88.19-22: «Accidens autem hic appellat Aristoteles praedicatum: cum enim subiectum et accidens relativa sunt, et quod in propositione subicitur subiectum dicatur, non debet mirum videri si eius praedicatum accidens appelletur [Aristotle calls here “accidens” the predicate. Since the subject and the accident are relative and the subject is said to be underlying, it does not come as a surprise that its predicate is called “accidens”]».

*Anonymi cantabrigiensis commentarium in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, Cambridge St John’s College D.12, 89vb 17-18: «accidens in hac iunctura locutionis “fallacia secundum accidens” dicitur praedicatum sive ipsum sit accidentale praedicabile sive substantiale [“accidens” within the expression “fallacia secundum accidens” means predicate, whether it is something predicated accidentally or essentially]»; cf. 89vb 4-5: «dicitur accidens omne praedicabile sive accidentale sive quod non <est> accidentale sive substantiale [we call “accidens” everything that may be predicated, either accidental or non-accidental, that is to say essential]».

*Anonymi fallacie londinenses*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica modernorum. A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1967, 669.4-5: «accidens prout hic accipitur idem est quod praedicatum [the way “accidens” is understood here, it means the same as predicate]».

<sup>6</sup> Definition echoed by *Ps.-Alexandri II (Michaeli Ephesii) in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos commentarium*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle’s Sophistici Elenchi*, Brill, Leiden 1981, II, 166.7-9.

*Guillelmi de Montibus (?) fallaciae*, Y. Iwakuma (ed.), *The Fallaciae and Loci of William de Montibus. An Edition*, «Journal of Fukui Prefectural University», 2 (1993), 15.17-18: «secundum accidens dicitur quasi secundum praedicatum [“secundum accidens” means pretty much the same as “predicate related”]».

*Anonymi fallaciae lemovicenses*, S. Ebbesen and Y. Iwakuma (ed.), «Cahiers de l’Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin», 63 (1993), 30.29: «prout hic dicitur accidens idem est quod praedicatus [what is called here “accidens” is the same as “predicate”]».

Some present-day scholars have espoused the view as well,<sup>7</sup> notably Denis Zaslavsky,<sup>8</sup> Louis-André Dorion<sup>9</sup> and Mario Mignucci. The latter pointed out a few years ago that the «accident» involved in the fallacy of the same name refers to essential and accidental properties alike:

M. Mignucci, *Puzzles about Identity. Aristotle and His Greek Commentators*, in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 1985, I, p. 75: «I propose that συμβεβηκός in the formula κατὰ συμβεβηκός παραλογισμοί does not refer to accident in its technical opposition to essence or substance, but simply means “attribute” or “property” without any explicit hint at the distinction between essential and non-essential properties of a substance».

Mario Mignucci also suggested that *Aristotelis sophisticus elenchi*, 7, 169b 4-6 confirms this view. In fact, the way Aristotle states the difficulty of ascertaining which attributes are both attributes of the thing and of what is predicated of the thing makes it clear that the verbs συμβαίνω and κατηγορέω are synonyms:

*Aristotelis sophisticus elenchi*, W.D. Ross (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1958, 7, 169b 4-6: «<ἡ ἀπάτη γίνεται διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι διακρίνειν> τοῖς ποίοις τῶν κατηγορημάτων πάντα ταῦτά καὶ τῷ πράγματι συμβέβηκεν [the deception arises from the incapacity to tell which predicates have the same attributes as their subjects]».

Further terminological confirmation is readily to be found:

1a. συμβαίνω ≈ κατηγορέω → *Aristotelis topica*, J. Brunschwig (ed.), Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2007, VII, 1, 152a 33-37: «ἔτι ἐκ τῶν τούτοις συμβεβηκόντων καὶ οἷς ταῦτα συμβέβηκεν ἐπισκοπεῖν· ὅσα γὰρ θάτερόν συμβέβηκε, καὶ θάτερόν δεῖ συμβεβηκέναι, καὶ οἷς θάτερον αὐτῶν συμβέβηκε, καὶ θάτερον δεῖ συμβεβηκέναι. εἰ δέ τι τούτων διαφωεῖ, δῆλον ὅτι οὐ ταῦτά [moreover one has to examine things <which are the

<sup>7</sup> Others, in return, have rejected it: cf. A. Bäck, *Philoponus on the Fallacy of Accident*, «Ancient Philosophy», 7 (1987), p. 131, *Aristotle’s Theory of Predication*, Brill, Leiden 2000, pp. 256-259 and *Mistakes of Reason. Practical Reasoning and the Fallacy of Accident*, «Phronesis», 54 (2009), pp. 101-104; P. Fait, *Aristotele. Le confutazioni sofistiche*, Laterza, Roma 2007, pp. 115-116; D. Botting, *Fallacies of Accident*, cit., p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> D. Zaslavsky, *Le sophisme comme anomalie*, in B. Cassin (ed.), *Le plaisir de parler. Etudes de sophistique comparée*, Editions de Minuit, Paris 1986, p. 192.

<sup>9</sup> L.-A. Dorion, *Aristote. Les réfutations sophistiques*, cit., p. 233, note 57.

same> from the point of view of their predicates (συμβεβηκότα) and of what they are predicated of (συμβαίνω). In fact, whatever is predicated of either one has to be predicated of the other and of whatever either one is predicated the other one has to be predicated too. If there is discrepancy in any of these respects, clearly those things are not the same]».

1b. κατηγορέω ≈ συμβαίνω → *Aristotelis topica*, VII, 1, 152b 25-29: «καθόλου δ' εἰπεῖν ἐκ τῶν ὁπωσοῦν ἑκατέρου κατηγορουμένων καὶ ὧν ταῦτα κατηγορεῖται σκοπεῖν εἴ που διαφωνεῖ: ὅσα γὰρ θάτερου κατηγορεῖται, καὶ θάτερου κατηγορεῖσθαι δεῖ, καὶ ὧν θάτερον κατηγορεῖται, καὶ θάτερον κατηγορεῖσθαι δεῖ [generally speaking, one should look things <which are the same> from the point of view of their predicates (κατηγορούμενα) and of what they are predicated of (κατηγορέω), in order to establish if there is any discrepancy. In fact, whatever is predicated of either one has to be predicated of the other and of whatever either one is predicated the other one has to be predicated too]».

The symmetrical shift between the two verbs in the wording of Aristotle's topical rule to follow in order to establish whether or not two things are the same clearly indicates that συμβαίνω is a lexical variation of κατηγορέω.

2. συμβεβηκός ≈ κατηγορούμενον → *Aristotelis analytica posteriora*, W.D. Ross (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1949, I, 4, 73b 8-10: «τὰ μὲν δὴ μὴ καθ' ὑποκειμένου καθ' αὐτὰ λέγω, τὰ δὲ καθ' ὑποκειμένου συμβεβηκότα [I call "kath'hauta" things that are not predicated of a subject and "sumbebékota" those which are predicated of a subject]».

It is quite plain that – according to this peculiar sense of their opposition – καθ' αὐτὰ and συμβεβηκότα are sorted out on the grounds that the latter are predicated of a subject, whereas the former are not predicated at all. What appears to be relevant at this juncture is less whether a predicate is an accidental or an essential feature of its subject, but the very fact of predication: an «accident» is just something that may be said of something else.

The strongest evidence available, however, is provided by Aristotle's choice of predicates. As a matter of fact, one can hardly see what else Aristotle might mean by saying that Socrates happens to be a man or a triangle happens to be a figure.<sup>10</sup> Socrates may well be accidentally bald or potbellied but definitely he is not a man by accident, and still Aristotle says «διὰ τὸ συμβεβηκέναι τοῦτον εἶναι ἄνθρωπον» (*Aristotelis sophistici elenchi*, 5, 166b 35-36). A triangle is a figure, it does not happen to be one as it happens to be equilateral or isosceles, and still Aristotle says «συμβέβηκε δ' αὐτῷ σχήματι εἶναι» (*Aristotelis sophistici elenchi*, 6, 168b 1).

<sup>10</sup> Both texts will be studied hereafter, in section 4 and 3 respectively.

## 2. 2. Aristotle's unified account (and solution) of the fallacy of accident

According to its definition, the fallacy of accident occurs when a predicate is said to belong (ὑπάρχειν) likewise (ὁμοίως) to a subject and to one of its predicates (τῷ πράγματι καὶ τῷ συμβεβηκότι):

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 5, 166b 28-32: «οἱ μὲν οὖν παρὰ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς παραλογισμοὶ εἰσιν ὅταν ὁμοίως ὅτιοῦν ἀξιωθῇ τῷ πράγματι καὶ τῷ συμβεβηκότι ὑπάρχειν. ἐπεὶ γὰρ τῷ αὐτῷ πολλὰ συμβέβηκεν, οὐκ ἀνάγκη πᾶσι τοῖς κατηγορουμένοις καὶ καθ' οὗ κατηγορεῖται ταῦτά πάντα ὑπάρχειν [fallacies of “accident” occur when a predicate whatsoever is believed to belong in the same way to a thing and to something that is predicated of it. Since many attributes are predicated of the same thing, it is not necessary that all the attributes belong both to the thing and to all of its predicates]».

Problems with predicates arise when one is led to think that, as a rule, a subject and its attributes share the same ones. Such predicaments are likely to take two forms: on the one hand, one may believe that what is said of a subject may be said of its predicates as well. On the other hand, one may believe that what is said about the predicate can be said about its subject too. As we shall see, this reciprocity – which matches Aristotle's wording enough or, at least, is not ruled out by it – is definitely implied by his examples.

Medieval and contemporary<sup>11</sup> commentators alike have recognised that the transitivity goes both ways:

*Anonymi Commentarium II*, 42.1-3: «τὸ “ὁμοίως” ἀντὶ τοῦ τὸ ὑπάρχον τῷ συμβεβηκότι ὑπάρχειν καὶ τῷ πράγματι καὶ ἔμπαλιν τὸ ὑπάρχον τῷ πράγματι ὑπάρχειν καὶ τῷ συμβεβηκότι [“likewise” stands both for the attribute of the predicate belonging to the thing and for the attribute of the thing belonging to the predicate]».

*Anonymi summa sophisticorum elenchorum*, 356.1-8: «secundum accidens ergo fiunt paralogismi, ut dicit Aristoteles, quando quodlibet similiter fuerit assignatum inesse rei subiectae et accidenti, id est praedicato, et e converso, id est quando idem assignatur convenire accidenti sive praedicato, quod inest et rei subiectae [as Aristotle says, fallacies of accident occur when something whatsoever is similarly said to belong both to the underlying thing and to the accident, that is to say to the predicate, or – the other way round – when it is said to fit the accident, that is to say the predicate, to which it belongs, and the underlying thing]».

*Anonymi Cantabrigiensis commentarium in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, 89vb 19-21: «ut dicatur fallacia secundum accidens deceptio proveniens ex omissione \habitudinis/ unius praedicabilis ad aliud sive praedicati ad subiectum sive subiecti ad praedicatum [what we call the fallacy of accident is a deception which arises from disregarding the relation of one predicate to the other, whether this relation is the predicate's relation to the subject or the subject's relation to the predicate]».

<sup>11</sup> H.W.B. Joseph, *Introduction to Logic*, cit., p. 587; D. Ross, *Aristotle*, Methuen, London 1923, p. 58; L.-A. Dorion, *Aristote. Les réfutations sophistiques*, cit., p. 235, note 235.

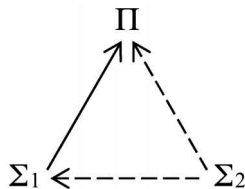


*Anonymi fallacie londinenses*, 669.6-9: «fallacia secundum accidens est deceptio proveniens ex obmissa habitudine praedicati ad subiectum, vel e converso, quia haec fallacia provenit tam ex obmissa habitudine subiecti ad praedicatum quam ex obmissa habitudine praedicati ad subiectum [the fallacy of accident is a deception which arises from disregarding the relation either of the predicate to the subject or of the subject to the predicate, for such a fallacy arises as much from a neglected relation of the subject to the predicate than from a neglected relation of the predicate to the subject]».

*Guillelmi de Montibus (?) fallaciae*, 16.1-7: «incidit autem haec fallacia in argumentatione quandoque aliquid assignatur subiecto quod non potest assignari praedicato vel e converso. Est enim fallacia secundum accidens deceptio proveniens ex ommissa habitudine praedicati ad subiectum vel e converso [such a fallacy occurs in arguments which ascribe to the subject what cannot be ascribed to the predicate and vice versa. As a matter of fact, the fallacy of accident is a deception which arises from disregarding the relation either of the predicate to the subject or of the subject to the predicate]».

*Anonymi salmaticensis-florentini quaestiones super Sophisticos elenchos*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), *Incertorum auctorum quaestiones super Sophisticos elenchos*, G.E.C. Gad, Copenhagen 1977, q. 84, 194.24-31: «accidens est aliquo modo idem subiecto de quo dicitur et aliquo modo non, et sic sumitur accidens in fallacia accidentis, ut dicit Commentator, et secundum hoc dicit modos accidentis: uno modo ex eo quod aliquid quod inest praedicato denotatur inesse subiecto, ut “homo est animal, sed animal est genus, ergo homo est genus”; alio modo ex eo quod illud quod inest subiecto denotatur inesse praedicato, ut “Socrates est homo, Socrates est individuum, ergo homo est individuum”; et sic duo modi principales sunt» [the “accident” is, in a way, the same as the thing it is predicated of and, in another way, it is not. As the Commentator has it, this is how “accident” has to be understood in the fallacy of the same name and how its moods have to be assigned therein. One arises from the fact that what is attributed to the predicate is meant to be predicated of the subject as well, as in: “man is an animal, but animal is a genus, therefore man is a genus”. Another arises from the fact that what is attributed to the subject is attributed to the predicate as well, as in: “Socrates is a man, Socrates is an individual, therefore man is an individual”. This is why there are two main moods of the fallacy of accident]».

A diagram – whose triangular form is reminiscent of a drawing in manuscript Parisinus graecus 1845, 178v – will help us get an overall picture of the fallacy, which we are going to implement with Aristotle’s examples:



where  $\Pi$  stands for  $\pi\rho\tilde{\alpha}\gamma\mu\alpha$  (a subject),  $\Sigma_1$  for  $\sigma\mu\beta\epsilon\beta\eta\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$  (a predicate said of subject  $\Pi$ ) and  $\Sigma_2$  for another  $\sigma\mu\beta\epsilon\beta\eta\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$  (a second predicate presumed

to be said both of subject  $\Pi$  and of predicate  $\Sigma_1$ ). The continuous line ( $\rightarrow$ ) means that the predicative relation is assumed to be the case, the dotted lines ( $\dashrightarrow$ ) indicate that the predicative relations may or may not apply. As a matter of fact – contrary to the relation of the first predicate ( $\Sigma_1$ ) to its subject ( $\Pi$ ), which is always the case ( $\rightarrow$ ) – the relations of the second attribute ( $\Sigma_2$ ), which is believed to belong both to the subject ( $\Pi$ ) and the first attribute ( $\Sigma_1$ ), does not apply ( $\dashrightarrow$ ) at least one time out of two, since:

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 36-37: «οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὸ κατὰ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος καὶ κατὰ τοῦ πράγματος ἀληθεύεσθαι [what is either true of the predicate or of the subject is not necessarily true of the other]».

As a consequence, interlocutors are accident prone whenever they fail to figure out what is the same and what is different, what is one and what is many and, more to the point, which attributes turn out to have the same predicates as their subjects:

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 7, 169b 3-6: «169a 22: ἡ δ' ἀπάτη γίνεται τῶν δὲ παρὰ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι διακρίνειν τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, καὶ ἐν καὶ πολλά, μηδὲ τοῖς ποίοις τῶν κατηγορημάτων πάντα ταῦτά καὶ τῷ πράγματι συμβεβηκεν [in fallacies of accident the deception arises from the incapacity to distinguish what is the same and what is different, what is one and what is many, as well as from the incapacity to tell which predicates have the same attributes as their subjects]».

Now, the unscrupulous questioner takes advantage of the fact that there is no easy way to know beforehand when this happens to be the case or not:<sup>12</sup>

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 27-30: «ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἀδιόριστόν ἐστι τὸ πότε λεκτέον ἐπὶ τοῦ πράγματος ὅταν ἐπὶ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος ὑπάρχῃ, καὶ ἐπ' ἐνίων μὲν δοκεῖ καὶ φασίν, ἐπ' ἐνίων δ' οὐ φασιν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι [for it is indeterminate when the predicate that belongs to the predicate must be said of the thing, sometimes this seems to be the case and it is said to be so, sometimes it is said that it is not necessary]».

<sup>12</sup> Puzzles about identity are a tricky business indeed and they have received a good deal of well-deserved scholarly attention. Among studies concerned with the problem in the *Sophistici elenchi*, we shall mention: N.P. White, *Aristotle on Sameness and Oneness*, «The Philosophical Review», 80 (1971), pp. 177-197, F.D. Miller, *Did Aristotle have the Concept of Identity?*, «The Philosophical Review», 82 (1973), pp. 483-490, K.T. Barnes, *Aristotle on Identity and its Problems*, «Phronesis», 22 (1977), pp. 48-62, F.J. Pelletier, *Sameness and Referential Opacity Aristotle*, «Nous», 13 (1979), pp. 283-311, G.B. Matthews, *Accidental Unities*, in M. Schofield and M. Craven Nussbaum (ed.), *Language and Logos*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 223-240, F.A. Lewis, *Accidental Sameness in Aristotle*, «Philosophical Studies», 42 (1982), pp. 1-36, C.J.F. Williams, *Aristotle's Theory of Descriptions*, «The Philosophical Review», 94 (1985), pp. 63-80, M. Mignucci, *Puzzles about Identity. Aristotle and His Greek Commentators*, cit., pp. 57-97, E. Gobbo, *Identity and the Predicables in Aristotle's Topics*, «Topoi», 19 (2000), pp. 83-98, M. Mariani, *Numerical Identity and Accidental Predication in Aristotle*, «Topoi», 19 (2000), pp. 99-110, P. Fait, *Aristotele e i paralogismi dell'identità*, cit., pp. 205-226.



Wherefore the general solution Aristotle advocates, namely an unrestricted dismissal of the alleged conclusion, which should give pause to any opponent, whether or not he is a dishonest one. As Aristotle himself puts it:

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 30-31: «ρήτέον οὖν συμβεβησθέντος ὁμοίως πρὸς ἅπαντας ὅτι οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον, ἔχειν δὲ δεῖ προφέρειν τὸ “οἶον” [one should therefore, once the conclusion has been reached, deny in every case alike that it is necessary. Still, one must have an example to offer]».

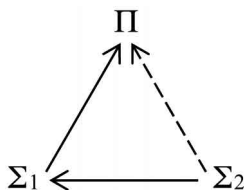
In fact, Aristotle has several. They all seem to follow a similar pattern, which is important to ascertain given that he discourages multiple or hybrid solutions:

*Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 26-27: «πρὸς δὲ τοὺς παρὰ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς μία μὲν ἡ αὐτὴ λύσις πρὸς ἅπαντας [in dealing with arguments that turn upon the predicate, one and the same solution meets all cases]».

For the sake of clarity, I'll resort again to the above diagram in order to show that all of Aristotle's examples of reasonings that fail to prove that all predicative relations apply at the same time fit into the same scheme and are to be divided in two sets according to their inability to settle that either  $\Sigma_2$  predicated of  $\Sigma_1$  ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ ) or  $\Sigma_2$  predicated of  $\Pi$  ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ ) is the case.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. ARISTOTLE'S STANDARD EXAMPLES OF THE FALLACY OF ACCIDENT

Let's study first the examples that fit the second scenario:  $\Sigma_2$  is predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ , but it is not the case that  $\Sigma_2$  is to be predicated of  $\Pi$  ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ , but not  $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ ).



1. *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 33: «ἄρ' οἶδας ὃ μέλλω σε ἐρωτᾶν; [do you know what I am about to ask you?]».

In the first example,  $\Pi$  is «the good»,  $\Sigma_1$  «to be asked» and  $\Sigma_2$  «to be unknown to you». Now, I am entitled to say of  $\Pi$  (the good) that it is what I'll be asking you about ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and I am entitled to say that what I am going to ask you about is unknown to you ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ), but I cannot infer from these premises that what the good is is unknown

<sup>13</sup> One pattern is better than many, especially if the supernumerary ones are a classificatory device which allows interpreters to dump unwieldy examples (cf. e.g. A. Bueno, *Aristotle, the Fallacy of Accident and the Nature of Predication. A Historical Inquiry*, cit., p. 9).

to you because you don't know what I'll be asking you about ( $\Sigma_2 \dashrightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Pi$ ).

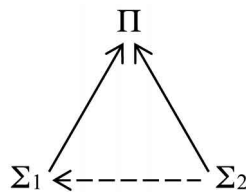
2. *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 33-34: «ἄρ' οἶδας τὸν προσιόντα, ἢ τὸν ἐγκαταλυμένον; [do you know who is approaching? do you know the man in disguise?]».

In the second example,  $\Pi$  is «Coriscus»,  $\Sigma_1$  «to be – either – approaching – or – in disguise» and  $\Sigma_2$  «to be unknown to you». As before, one may say about  $\Pi$  (Coriscus) that he's either approaching or concealed by a veil ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and one may also say that you do not know who's either approaching or concealed by a veil ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is also predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ), but one cannot draw the conclusion that Coriscus is unknown to you because the man approaching or concealed by a veil is unknown to you ( $\Sigma_2 \dashrightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Pi$ ).

3. *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 33-34: «ἄρα τὰ ὀλιγάκις ὀλίγα ὀλίγα; [a small number <multiplied> a small number of times is a small number?]».

In the third example,  $\Pi$  is «a small number»,  $\Sigma_1$  «<to be multiplied> a small number of times» and  $\Sigma_2$  «to be a small number». It is possible both to multiply  $\Pi$  (a small number) a small number of times ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and to say that a small number of times is a small number ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is also predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ), but this is not ground enough for asserting that a small number is still a small number once it has been multiplied a small number of times ( $\Sigma_2 \dashrightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Pi$ ), all the more so if the multiplication is performed more than once.<sup>14</sup>

If we now look at the other half of the diagram, we have the examples that match the first scenario:  $\Sigma_2$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ , but it is not the case that  $\Sigma_2$  is to be predicated of  $\Sigma_1$  ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ , but not  $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Sigma_1$ ).



4. *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179a 34-35: «ἄρ' ὁ ἀνδριᾶς σὸν ἐστὶν ἔργον, ἢ σὸς ὁ κύων πατήρ; [Is the statue your work or the dog your father?]».

5. *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 180a 1-4: «ἄρ' ἐστὶ τοῦτο σὸν "ναί". "ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο τέκνον· σὸν ἄρα τοῦτο τέκνον". ἀλλ' οὐ σὸν τέκνον ὅτι συμβέβηκεν εἶναι καὶ σὸν καὶ τέκνον ["is he yours <slave>?", "yes", "he is a child; then he is your child". For he happens to be both yours and a child, this does not make him your child]».

<sup>14</sup> As the reminder of the example in *Aristotelis sophistic elenchi*, 24, 179b 34-35 is likely to suggest: «ἅπας ἀριθμὸς ὀλίγος [every number is a small number]».

In examples four and five,  $\Pi$  is, in turn, «a statue», «a dog» and «a slave»;  $\Sigma_1$  «to be a piece of work», «to be a father», «to be a child»; and  $\Sigma_2$  «to be yours». One cannot reach the conclusion that the statue is your work, the dog is your father and the slave is your son because the first happens to be a piece of work that belongs to you, the second a father that also belongs to you and the third a child that you own. Nothing prevents one from saying that the statue is both, namely that it is a piece of work ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and that it is yours ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is also predicated of  $\Pi$ ), but one can hardly infer from these premises that the statue is your work ( $\Sigma_2 \dashv\rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ). The same goes for the dog and the slave: one has every right to say both that it is your dog and he is your slave ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and that the dog is a father and the slave is a child ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is also predicated of  $\Pi$ ) but these premises do not warrant the conclusion that the dog is your father and the slave is your son ( $\Sigma_2 \dashv\rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ).

6. *Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 6, 168a 40 - 168b 2: «οὐδ' εἰ τὸ τρίγωνον [168b] δυοῖν ὀρθαῖν ἴσας ἔχει, συμβέβηκε δ' αὐτῷ σχήματι εἶναι ἢ πρώτῳ ἢ ἀρχῇ, ὅτι σχῆμα ἢ ἀρχὴ ἢ πρῶτον τοῦτό ἐστιν [nor if the triangle has its angles equal to two right angles, and it happens to be a figure or an element or a principle, <does it follows> that a figure, a principle or an element have the same character]».

In the sixth example,  $\Pi$  is «a triangle»,  $\Sigma_1$  «to be a figure or an element or a principle» and  $\Sigma_2$  «to have its angles equal to two right angles». One is allowed to say both that the triangle is a figure or an element or a principle ( $\Sigma_1 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$ ) and that its angles are equal to two right angles ( $\Sigma_2 \rightarrow \Pi$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is also predicated of  $\Pi$ ), but one cannot conclude on such terms that to be a figure or an element or a principle is to have its angles equal to two right angles ( $\Sigma_2 \dashv\rightarrow \Sigma_1$ :  $\Sigma_2$  is not to be predicated of  $\Sigma_1$ ).

#### 4. ARISTOTLE'S STAR EXAMPLES OF THE FALLACY OF ACCIDENT

Let's turn now to the examples I kept for last even though they come first in the text:

7. *Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 5, 166b 32-36: «οἷον "εἰ ὁ Κορίσκος ἕτερον ἀνθρώπου, αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ ἕτερος: ἐστι γὰρ ἄνθρωπος". ἢ εἰ Σωκράτους ἕτερος, ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης ἄνθρωπος, ἕτερον ἀνθρώπου φασὶν ὠμολογηκέναι διὰ τὸ συμβεβηκέναι οὐ ἔφησεν ἕτερον εἶναι, τοῦτον εἶναι ἄνθρωπον [for instance, if Coriscus is other than man, he is other than himself, for he is a man; otherwise, if he is other than Socrates, since Socrates is a man, they pretend that it has been admitted that he is other than man because of the fact that man is predicated of Socrates and Coriscus is said to be other than Socrates]».

Obviously, the main question is whether or not these examples follow the same pattern as those encountered so far. At a guess, the most likely answer



would be that they do, for the pattern is modelled on Aristotle's definition of the fallacy of accident and the examples we are talking about follow it immediately in Aristotle's text. Scholars however do not guess and, in this particular case, they appear to have favoured a rather counter-intuitive solution to the problem. In fact, although Aristotle repeatedly took issue in chapter 24 with those who resorted to a linguistic ambiguity (*διττόν*) in order to explain away fallacies of accident, Byzantine and Latin commentators believed more often than not that the snag in these arguments stems precisely from a linguistic ambiguity.<sup>15</sup> They all noticed that, at different stages of the argument, «man» stands for different things: a particular man in one premise («Coriscus is a man»); man as such in the other («Coriscus is not the universal man, is other than man himself»). Since the middle term's reference varies between premises, the word «man» turns out to be equivocal and thereby forbids the syllogism to bring about its intended conclusion.

DIGRESSION. Truth be told, some of them should have known better than to believe that this is proof enough that a linguistic fallacy is involved (be it homonymy or figure of speech). As a matter of fact, such a reading rests on a confusion between what Latin masters called the *causa apparentiae* and the *causa defectus* of a fallacy. Westerners were ordinarily well aware of the fact that there is a distinction to be made between the way an argument goes wrong and the way it fools us. Accordingly, they differentiated between what they called a *principium motivum* or a *causa apparentiae* (what gives an argument a respectable appearance) and a *causa defectus* or *non existentiae* (the reason why – despite looking good – it is defective or fails to deduce its conclusion).<sup>16</sup> All of

<sup>15</sup> In recent times as well, W.D. Ross, *Introduction*, in *Aristotelis metaphysica*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1924, p. lxxxviii (followed by K.T. Barnes, *Aristotle on Identity and its Problems*, cit., p. 57), L.-A. Dorion, *Aristote. Les réfutations sophistiques*, cit., pp. 236-237, notes 59-60 and P. Fait, *Aristotele. Le confutazioni sofistiche*, cit., p. 117 have held similar views in so far they suspected the *ἔστι* (Ross), *ἄνθρωπος* (Dorion) and *ἕτερος* (Fait) of the argument to be ambiguous.

<sup>16</sup> The distinction is virtually ubiquitous in the Latin tradition. As usual, Peter of Spain set it out very clearly: «*principium autem motivum sive causa apparentiae in qualibet fallacia est quod movet ad credendum quod non est. Principium vero defectus sive causa falsitatis est quod facit creditum esse falsum [in any fallacy, the principle or the cause that produce the illusion is what leads to believe what is not; in return, the principle that produces the defect of the argument or the cause of its falseness is what makes false what is believed <to be true>]*» (*Petri hispani portugalensis tractatus*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Peter of Spain (Petrus Hispanus Portugalensis)*). *Tractatus called afterwards Summule logicales*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1972, vii, 98.13-16). Lambert of Auxerre (Lagny) put it to best use, since he organised his investigation of each of Aristotle's thirteen fallacies according to two questions, namely what is – in each and every case – the *causa apparentiae* and what is the *causa defectus* (cf. *Summa Lamberti*, F. Alessio (ed.), *La Nuova Italia*, Firenze 1971, vii, 173.28-35 for the accident). On the subject, cf. S. Ebbesen *The Way Fallacies were Treated in Scholastic Logic*, «*Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin*», 55 (1987), pp. 115-117; R. Huelsen, *Concrete Accidental Terms and the Fallacy of Figure of Speech*, in N. Kretzmann (ed.), *Meaning and Inference in Medieval Philosophy*,

which makes excellent sense, notably for two reasons: first of all, Aristotle makes it clear from the start that his main concern with sophistic arguments is not so much they are poor arguments but rather that they manage not to appear so.<sup>17</sup> Secondly and foremost, their place in Aristotle's classification depends on the way the illusion works: for instance – as Aristotle makes it pretty clear<sup>18</sup> – «homonymy», «amphiboly» and «figure of speech» all involve a double meaning, but they are not deceitful in the same way. And this is indeed why they are distinct fallacies: they may well share the same *causa defectus*, but – their *causa apparentiae* being different – they are different fallacies.<sup>19</sup> This is why one should be very careful about introducing an ambiguity of sorts in a discussion whose focus is the fallacy of accident. All the more so, one might add, that the fallacy of accident is a sophism outside language or independent from expression, that is to say it is not expected to resort to a linguistic feature of any kind (and ambiguity – no need to say – is definitely one).

As a matter of fact, at least a few Latin commentators resisted such temptation by recalling that what produces the illusion that a fallacy is a sound argument – the *causa apparentiae* precisely – is the very same thing that makes it the fallacy it is:

*Anonymi salmaticensis-florentini quaestiones super sophisticos elenchos* q. 76, 172.1-7: «consequenter quaeritur quid sit causa apparentiae huius fallaciae, quia Aristoteles videtur velle quod similitudo dictionis ad dictionem, et ideo quaeritur utrum hoc sit

Kluwer Academic Publications, Dordrecht 1988, p. 177; A. Tabarroni, *Figure of Speech and Aristotle's Division of Fallacies*, in C. Cellucci, M.C. Di Maio and G. Roncaglia (ed.), *Logica e filosofia della scienza*, ETS, Pisa 1994, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. namely *Aristotelis sophisticos elenchi*, 1, 164a 20-26 and 165a 18-19. Albert the Great, Giles of Rome, Simon of Faversham and the Anonymus pragensis all stressed the fact that where there is no such appearance there's no fallacy either (cf. *Alberti magni expositio sophisticorum elenchorum*, P. Jammy (ed.), C. Prost, Lyon 1651, 850b 52-53; *Aegidii romani expositio super libros elenchorum*, per Bonetum Locatellum, Venetiis 1496, 58vb; *Simonis de Faverisham quaestiones novae super libro elenchorum*, S. Ebbesen, T. Izbicki, J. Longeway, F. del Punta, E. Serene, E. Stump (ed.), Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1984, q. 10, 128.122-124 and q. 16, 142.22 - 143.30; *Anonymi pragensis quaestiones super Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, D. Murè (ed.), <http://padis.uniroma1.it/getfile.py?recid=707>, 2009, q. 35, 84.2-7).

<sup>18</sup> *Aristotelis sophisticos elenchi*, 6, 168a 23-25: «τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἐν τῇ λέξει οἱ μὲν εἰσι παρὰ τὸ διττόν, ὅσον ἢ τε ὁμωνυμία καὶ ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ ὁμοιοσχημοσύνη [some fallacies depending on expression have to do with a double meaning, namely homonymy, amphiboly and figure of speech]».

<sup>19</sup> This particular issue is often discussed by medieval authors. Cf. e.g. *Anonymi salmaticensis-florentini quaestiones super sophisticos elenchos*, q. 80, 179.1-3 and 179.21 - 181.59; *Anonymi cordubensis quaestiones super sophisticos elenchos*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), *Incertorum auctorum quaestiones super sophisticos elenchos*, G.E.C. Gad, Copenhagen 1977, q. 820, 307.24 - 308.50; *Anonymi C&G 611-II quaestiones in sophisticos elenchos*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), *Texts on Equivocation. Part II. Ca. 1250 - ca. 1310*, «Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin», 68 (1998), 183.17-30; *Ioannis Duns Scoti quaestiones super librum elenchorum Aristotelis*, R. Andrews, O. Bychkov, S. Ebbesen, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, R. Green, T. Noone, R. Plevano, A. Traver (ed.), The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure 2004, q. 42, 465.7-12 and 19-20; *Radulphi britonis quaestiones super sophisticos elenchos*, S. Ebbesen (ed.), «Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin», 53 (1986), q. 32, 120.34-36.

verum. Et videtur quod non, quia quando mutatur quale quid in hoc aliquid est figura dictionis, non tamen est similitudo dictionis ad dictionem, nam Socrates ad speciem nullam habet similitudinem in voce [therefore the question arises as to what produces the illusion of this fallacy, since Aristotle seems to take it to be the similarity between one expression and another. The question arises as to whether or not this is true. And it appears it is not. For, even if the permutation between a qualified and a this something is associated with the figure of speech, no similarity between expressions is involved, since the expressions “Socrates” and “species” do not have any resemblance]». <sup>20</sup>

Be that as it may, the fact remains that, by anyone’s standard, this is a rather elegant solution. It also had the advantage of being tailored to fit the logical and metaphysical background of ancient and medieval commentators.

BYZANTINES. A scholium from the anonymous corpus, whose materials – as in this case – were extensively incorporated by Michael of Ephesus in his own commentary, attests that to back up such an explanation Byzantines availed themselves of the traditional distinction between the συναμφοτέρος or συγκατατεταγμένος τῷ Κορίσκῳ ἄνθρωπος (the coordinated, compounded or combined man: that is to say the man embodied by the particular man, e.g. Coriscus) and the ἀκατάτακτος ἄνθρωπος ὁ καθόλου (the unranked or undistributed man: that is to say the universal man or man as universal):<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The example is a very ancient one (references below). It belongs to the first family studied above (examples 1, 2 and 3): «Socrates est homo, sed homo est species, ergo Socrates est species», where «Socrates» is P, «to be a man» is  $S_1$  and «to be a species» is  $S_2$  ( $S_1 \rightarrow P$  and  $S_2 \rightarrow S_1$ , but not  $S_2 \rightarrow P$ : «Socrates is a man» and «man is a species», but not «Socrates is a species»).

<sup>21</sup> The distinction goes back at least as far as Porphyry, as attested by Simplicius: «καὶ φησιν ὁ Πορφύριος, ὅτι διττὴ ἡ ἐπίνοια τοῦ ζώου, ἡ μὲν τοῦ κατατεταγμένου, ἡ δὲ τοῦ ἀκατάτακτου· κατηγορεῖται οὖν τὸ ἀκατάτακτον τοῦ κατατεταγμένου, καὶ ταύτη ἕτερον ἔστιν [Porphyry says that the notion of animal is double: one refers to the coordinated <animal>, the other to the uncoordinated. The latter is predicated of the former and, under this respect, they are different]» (*Simplicii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, K. Kalbfleisch (ed.), Reimer, Berlin 1907, 53.6-9). Cf. A.C. Lloyd, *Neoplatonists’ Account of Predication and Medieval Logic*, in M.P.M. Schuhl and P. Hadot (a cura di), *Le néoplatonisme. Royaumont, 9-13 juin 1969*, Editions du CNRS, Paris 1971, pp. 359-362; S. Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle’s Sophistici Elenchi*, cit., pp. 224-225; C. Luna, *Commentaire*, in P. Hoffmann, *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote. Chapitres 2-4*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2001, pp. 448-452. Simplicius is – in all likelihood – quoting from Porphyry’s lost commentary on *Categorias* (*ad Gedalios*), since the latter does not dwell on the problem in his extant questions-commentary. The distinction was passed down to the Latins by Magister Iacobus (James of Venice), quoted as early as the anonymous *Summa sophisticorum elenchorum*, 357.15-23: «ut cum dico “Socrates est homo, sed homo est species, ergo Socrates est species”: sophisma est secundum accidens secundum illum <scil. Magistrum Iacobum>, quia “homo” in prima propositione significat illam speciem coniunctam illi individuo, scilicet Socratei; sed postea, cum dico “homo est species”, significat illam speciem non ut iunctam alicui individuo sed seorsum vel separatim [When one says “Socrates is a





*Anonymi Commentarium II*, 43.15-19 = *Ps.-Alexandri II (Michaeli Ephesii) in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos commentarium*, 38.11-14: «ὁ λέγων “ὁ Κορίσκος ἄνθρωπος” τὸ συναμφοότερον λαμβάνει, τὸν συγκατατεταγμένον τῷ Κορίσκῳ ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὸν Κορίσκον, ἐν δὲ τῇ “ἄνθρωπος ἕτερος Κορίσκου” τὸν ἀκατάτακτον ἄνθρωπον τὸν καθόλου [he who says “the man Coriscus” speaks of the compounded <man>, that which is combined to Coriscus, that is to say Coriscus. The expression “the man other than Coriscus” <refers to> the undistributed man, that is to say the universal]».

LATINS. Starting from Magister Albericus,<sup>22</sup> Latin scholars made the most of the fact that the ambiguity between the universal and the particular man is a textbook case of *variata suppositio* of the middle term.<sup>23</sup> This solution occurs in the anonymous *Fallaciae vindobonenses*<sup>24</sup> and *Tractatus de sophistica argumentatione (dialectica monacensis)*,<sup>25</sup> Peter of Spain,<sup>26</sup> the Anonymus Monacensis (quoted below), Roger Bacon,<sup>27</sup> Lambert of Auxerre (Lagny),<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas (?),<sup>29</sup> the Anonymus salmaticensis-florentinus (also quoted below), Giles of Rome,<sup>30</sup> the anonymous note about accident in Ms Oxford Bodleyan Library Digby 24,<sup>31</sup> Duns Scot<sup>32</sup> and John Buridan (quoted below as well):

*Anonymi monacensis commentarium in sophisticos elenchos*, L. Gazziero (ed.), *The Latin «Third Man». A Survey and Edition of Texts from the XIII<sup>th</sup> Century*, «Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin», 81 (2012), 42: «quaeritur de isto parallogismo: “homo est diversus ab homine; Callias est homo; ergo, Callias est diversus a se”,

man; man is a species; therefore, Socrates is a species”, the sophism involved is, following Master James, one of accident, since “man” in the first sentence refers to the human species compounded with the individual, namely Socrates. On the other hand, when one says “man is a species” the expression refers to the human species by itself or separated and not combined with an individual whatsoever]».

<sup>22</sup> *Anonymi summa sophisticorum elenchorum*, 357.25 - 358.4.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S.G. Schreiber, *Aristotle on False Reasoning. Language and the World in the Sophistical Refutations*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2003, pp. 128-129 for a less than accurate, source-allergic account of the same story.

<sup>24</sup> *Anonymi fallaciae vindobonenses*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica Modernorum*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1962, 527.11-29.

<sup>25</sup> *Anonymi tractatus de sophistica argumentatione (dialectica monacensis)*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica Modernorum*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1967, 585.23-26.

<sup>26</sup> *Petri hispani portugalensis tractatus*, VII, 106, 148.19-293.

<sup>27</sup> *Rogeri Baconi summulae dialectices*, A. de Libera (ed.), *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 54 (1987), p. 261, 627-629.

<sup>28</sup> *Summa Lamberti*, VII, 181.28 - 182.11.

<sup>29</sup> *Thomae de Aquino (?) de fallaciis*, H.F. Dondaine (ed.), *Editori di San Tommaso*, Roma 1976, IX, 411a 75-88.

<sup>30</sup> *Aegidii romani expositio super libros elenchorum*, 17ra 40-45.

<sup>31</sup> *Anonymi de fallaciis*, L.M. de Rijk (ed.), *Logica Modernorum*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1962, 73.8-15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ioannis Duns Scoti quaestiones super librum elenchorum Aristotelis*, q. 44, 471.1-4.

quia videtur ibi esse fallacia consequentis a superiori ad inferius. Item videtur ibi esse paralogismus accidentis, quia homo in maiori et in minori pro alio et alio sumitur, quare videtur quod non sit ibi fallacia figurae dictionis [questions arise about the sophism “a man is different from man; Callias is a man; therefore, Callias is different from himself”, since it appears to be a fallacy of consequent (whose inference proceeds from a superior to an inferior). Moreover it appears to be a fallacy of accident, since “man” stands for one thing in one premise and for another thing in the other premise; wherefore it appears not to be a fallacy of figure of speech]».

*Anonymi salmaticensis-florentini quaestiones super Sophisticos elenchos*, q. 83, 192.20-35: «dicendum quod fallacia accidentis non tantum fit ex variatione medii in <comparatione ad> maiorem et minorem extremitatem, quia cum fallacia accidentis accidat ex comparatione unius secundum naturas extraneas ad diversa, cum medium aliquando posset secundum naturas diversas comparari extremis, et maior extremitas aliquando secundum diversas naturas et extraneas comparatur medio et minori extremitati, et minor extremitas aliquando medio et maiori, ideo dico quod potest fieri fallacia accidentis ex diversitate cuiuscumque illorum trium. Exemplum autem omnium patet; si enim sic arguatur “Coriscus est alter ab homine, Coriscus est homo, ergo est alter a se” hic est variatio medii; si autem sic dicatur “omnis triangulus in eo quod triangulus habet tres, sed figura est triangulus, ergo figura in eo quod figura habet tres” hic variatur maior extremitas; si autem sic arguatur “hoc est tuum, et est opus, ergo hoc est tuum opus” hic variatur li “tuum”, primo enim fuit li “tuum” ut possessum, modo autem “tuum” ut opus [it should be said that the fallacy of accident arises no less from the variation of the middle term in its relation to the major and the minor one than from a variation of the latter. In fact, since the fallacy of accident arises from the comparison of some one thing to different things according to dissimilar natures, this may happen indifferently when the middle term is so coupled with the major and the minor terms, or when either the major term or the minor one is similarly related to the middle term and alternatively the minor to the major and the major to the minor. Examples make this clear in each case. In fact, if one argues: “Coriscus is other than man; Coriscus is a man; therefore, he is other than himself”, here is a case of variation of the middle term. On the other hand, if one says: “in so far as it is one, every triangle has three angles; but the triangle is a figure; therefore, a figure, in so far as it is one, has three angles”, here is a case of variation of the major term. Again, if one argues: “this is yours; and this a piece of work; therefore, this is your doing”, “yours” is the term which varies and means first “what is yours”, then “what is your doing”]».

*Ioannis Buridani quaestiones elenchorum*, R. van der Lecq and H.A.G. Braakhuis (ed.), Ingenium, Nijmegen 1994, q. 14, 73.138-143: «aliter potest variari medium, videlicet sic quod secundum eandem rationem sumitur in unaquaque premissarum, verificatur tamen in una earum pro uno et in alia pro alio. Et sic causat fallaciam accidentis, sicut hic: “ab homine Coriscus est alter; Coriscus est homo; ergo a Corisco Coriscus est alter”. In maiori enim ly “homine” verificatur pro alio, sed “homo” in minori verificatur pro Corisco [the middle term may vary in another way, namely when it is taken according to the same relation in both premises, but in each it is true of different things; which results in a fallacy of accident, as

follows: “Coriscus is other than man; Coriscus is a man; therefore, Coriscus is other than Coriscus”].».

All of which is fair and square, so far as it goes. For there is no way this explanation may be stretched enough to cover the one point that should not be overlooked: how does it come that of all the examples Aristotle might have chosen, the very ones which follow his definition of the fallacy of accident and – for that reason – enjoy the best visibility, have no real business here and, if taken seriously, are more likely to obscure the issue rather than to help clarify it?

While involving less metaphysics and logical subtlety, another solution looks more attractive. Lambert of Auxerre (Lagny), Albert the Great and Giles of Rome were on the right track when they took notice of the fact that the conclusion of the second example (*Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 5, 166b 34-35: «they say it has been agreed that Coriscus is other than man (ἕτερον ἀνθρώπου φασὶν ὁμολογηκέναί)») is nothing else but the premise of the first (*Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 5, 166b 32-33: «Coriscus is other than man (ὁ Κορίσκος ἕτερον ἀνθρώπου)»):

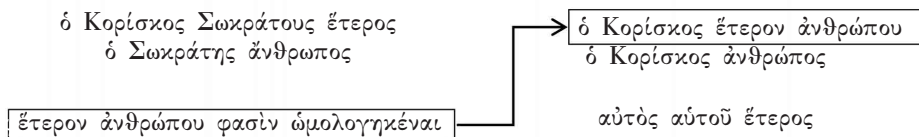
*Summa Lamberti*, VII, 182.43-47: «fallacia accidentis praemissae debent esse verae et conclusio falsa; sed illa: “ab homine Coriscus est alter” in primo paralogismo Aristotelis est praemissa, in secundo conclusio. Quare videtur quod Aristoteles habeat eam pro vera et pro falsa, quod est impossibile [when a fallacy of accident occurs, the premises have to be true and the conclusion has to be false. But “Coriscus is other than man” is the premise of Aristotle’s first syllogism and the conclusion of the second. It appears so that Aristotle held it both for true and false, which is impossible]». <sup>33</sup>

*Alberti magni expositio sophisticorum elenchorum*, 865a 67 - 865b 13: «propter exemplum quod ponit Aristoteles de [865b] ista “Coriscus est alter ab homine”, et quod ponit in uno paralogismo pro praemissa et in altero pro conclusione, notandum quod, meo iudicio, haec falsa est “Coriscus est alter ab homine”, quia alter notat diversitatem, et in termino circa quem ponit diversitatem, notat diversitatem formalem, et tunc patet quod propositio est falsa. Et cum dicitur “Coriscus est alter a Socrate, Socrates autem homo”, cum medio comparatur homo, hoc est, Socrati attribuitur homo. Sic enim potest convenire Corisco alterum esse a Socrate, quum non sit idem cum Socrate [According to Aristotle’s example of the fallacy of accident, “Coriscus is other than man” is in turn the premise of one sophism and the conclusion of the other. It should be noted that, in my opinion, the sentence itself is false, since in either case it refers to a difference which Aristotle takes to be a formal one as far as the term which it

<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Lambert had a similar situation in mind when discussing the relation between two more sophisms (of accident, precisely!) whose conclusion and one of the premises are one the counterpart of the other: «maior enim falsa est et habet apparentiam a praedicto paralogismo cuius fuit conclusio [the first premise is false but it appears not to be so in virtue of the first sophism, whose conclusion it is]» (142.18-19).

affects is concerned. It is clear then that the sentence is false. And by saying “Coriscus is other than Socrates, but Socrates is a man”, man is compared to the middle term, that is to say man is predicated of Socrates. Thus, it befits Coriscus to be other than Socrates, since they are not the same]».

*Aegidii romani expositio super libros elenchorum*, 17ra 58-60: «ponit secundum paralogismum per quem probatur maior prioris paralogismi. Fuit enim maior praedicti paralogismi hic quod Coriscus est alter ab homine [Aristotle introduces a second sophism by means of which he proves the premise of the first. In fact, according to the premise of the first sophism, Coriscus is other than man]».



As a matter of fact, the symmetry between the two clauses and Aristotle’s wording makes it clear that the main function of example two is to achieve consensus (ὁμολόγεῖν) around the very assumption example one takes as its starting point.

Once we acknowledge that Aristotle introduced the second example in order to provide a suitable prosyllogism for the first, we may avoid two major predicaments other interpretations land themselves in:

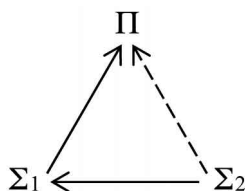
1. First of all, we can stop worrying about metaphysical puzzles. Coriscus and man are assumed to be different not in virtue of some fancy metaphysical footwork, but through a straightforward procedure readers of Aristotle’s dialectic were perfectly familiar with:<sup>34</sup> an honest piece of sophistry, one which doesn’t play highly speculative guessing games about humanity and assorted specimens, like: «is man other than Man?», but goes about its business asking simple unchallenging questions like «is Coriscus other than Socrates?», «Is Socrates a man?».

2. Second, we are not bound to treat example two as an unrelated instance of the same fallacy-type, which it is not. In point of fact, unlike the «Coriscus other than himself, etc.» argument, the «Coriscus other than Socrates, etc.» is not just another fallacy of accident.

Since this may come as a surprise, let us be more specific.

The first example is cast in the same mould as the others and allows for the same analysis:

<sup>34</sup> *Aristotelis topica*, VIII, 1, 156a 7-9: «κρύπτοντα δὲ προσυλλογίζεσθαι δι’ ὧν ὁ συλλογισμὸς τοῦ ἐξ ἀρχῆς μέλλει γίνεσθαι, καὶ ταῦτα ὡς πλεῖστα [when one is dissimulating, he had better establish by means of a prosyllogism the premises through which he intends to infer the initial thesis and produce as many preliminary deductions as possible]».



Where  $\Pi$  is Coriscus,  $\Sigma_1$  «to be man» and  $\Sigma_2$  «to be other than» (alternatively Coriscus and Man) or – even better – «to be other than Coriscus *tout court*». As usual,  $\Sigma_1$  is predicated of  $\Pi$  («Coriscus is a man»). With the proviso that the *ἕτερότης* is a symmetrical relation,<sup>35</sup>  $\Sigma_2$  is predicated of  $\Sigma_1$  («man is other than Coriscus») in virtue of the prosyllogism; wherefore the insidious conclusion:  $\Sigma_2$  should be predicated of  $\Pi$  as well («Coriscus is other than Coriscus» or «Coriscus is other than himself»).

If we now look into the structure of the prosyllogism, it is another matter entirely. The main difference is that we have no longer one single subject and two predicates which may or may not form a mutually compatible triad. We have instead two different subjects («Socrates» and «Coriscus») and at least as many predicates («to be a man», «to be other than» alternatively Socrates or man). Without being altogether compelling, this suggests that the prosyllogism is a fallacy of consequent rather than a fallacy of accident.

The text strongly supports this view, seeing that it both confirms why we should not mistake it for a fallacy of accident and how we are to understand the consequence involved:

1. On the one hand, Aristotle himself tells us that the fallacy of consequent differs from the fallacy of accident in that it requires more than one subject:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Even if *ἕτερον* and *αὐτόν* are *πολλαχῶς λεγόμενα*, their opposition – being mutually exclusive (*Aristotelis metaphysica*, I, 3, 1054b 15-16: «τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ἀντικειμένως καὶ τὸ ταυτό, διὸ ἅπαν πρὸς ἅπαν ἢ ταυτό ἢ ἄλλο [“other” in one sense is the opposite of the same, for everything is either the same as or other than everything else] and 1054b 25: «πᾶν γὰρ ἢ ἕτερον ἢ ταυτό ὅ τι ἂν ᾗ ὄν [everything that is a being is either different or the same]») – implies that if A is other than B, then B is other than A (since – precisely – they are not the same). Cf. *Anonymi Commentarium II*, 43.33-35: «“ὁ Κορίσκος ἕτερος ἀνθρώπου” ἴσον ἐστὶ τῷ “ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἕτερος Κορίσκου” [“Coriscus is other than man” and “man is other than Coriscus” are tantamount]». *Ps.-Alexandri I (Michaeli Ephesii) in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos commentarium*, 39.14-17: «κατὰ δὲ τὴν λέξιν εἰ μὲν τὸ ὁ “Κορίσκος ἕτερον ἀνθρώπου” ὡς ἴσον ληφθεῖη τῷ “ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἕτερον Κορίσκου” (σύνηθες δὲ ἐστὶ τῷ Ἀριστοτέλει τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ πολλαῖς τοιαύταις ἐρμηνείαις χρῆσθαι), σαφές ἐστὶ τὸ λεγόμενον [Provided that “Coriscus is other than man” is taken to be tantamount to say that “man is other than Coriscus” (as Aristotle does as a matter of routine using many similar expressions as well), what Aristotle says is clear].

<sup>36</sup> William of Sherwood is likely to be the medieval master who best grasped the difference between *accidens* and *consequens* on account of the number of subjects involved: «non

*Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 6, 168b 28-31: «διαφέρει δὲ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος, ὅτι τὸ μὲν συμβεβηκὸς ἔστιν ἐφ' ἑνὸς μόνου λαβεῖν, [...], τὸ δὲ παρὰ τὸ ἐπόμενον ἀεὶ ἐν πλείοσιν [the sophism of consequent differs from the sophism of accident insofar as the accident refers to one single subject, (...) whereas the consequent always involves more than one]».

Now, this is precisely what happens in the sophism at hand, where Coriscus is said to be other than Socrates and Socrates is said to be a man.

2. On the other hand, Aristotle gives us a valuable clue as to the kind of consequence we are dealing with:



*Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 28, 181a 23-27: «ἔστι δὲ διττὴ ἡ τῶν ἐπομένων ἀκολούθησις: ἢ γὰρ ὡς τῷ ἐν μέρει τὸ καθόλου, οἷον ἀνθρώπῳ ζῶον (ἀξιοῦται γὰρ, εἰ τόδε μετὰ τοῦδε, καὶ τόδ' εἶναι μετὰ τοῦδε), ἢ κατὰ τὰς ἀντιθέσεις (εἰ γὰρ τόδε τῷδε ἀκολουθεῖ, τῷ ἀντικειμένῳ τὸ ἀντικείμενον) [consequents follow in two ways: either as the universal follows from the particular, as for instance animal follows from man (in fact, one deems that if that follows from this, it is also the case that this follows from that) or else according to oppositions (κατὰ τὰς ἀντιθέσεις) (if this follows from that, the opposite of this follows from the opposite of that)]».

Again, this is precisely what happens in our sophism. First we have a straightforward consequence where a universal (man) follows from a particular (Socrates). Then we have a consequence from what qualifies as a form of ἀντίθεσις: if Coriscus is not Socrates or is other than Socrates, then he is not a man or is other than man in so far as Socrates is one.

It would appear then that a few Latin commentators – as the Anonymus pragensis quoted below – hit the nail on the head and solved the puzzle of Aristotle's most baffling example long before it became one in the eyes of modern scholars:

*Anonymi pragensis quaestiones super Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos*, q. 32, 75.14-23: «quandocumque ad antecedens sequitur consequens, si antecedens est verum, et consequens erit verum; sed sequitur: “a Socrate Coriscus est alter; ergo ab homine Coriscus est alter”, ut probabo, et antecedens est verum; ergo consequens debet esse verum. Maior est vera. Probatio minoris, scilicet quod sequitur: “a Socrate <Coriscus est alter>, ergo etc.”, quia illa consequentia est bona, quando ad oppositum consequentis sequitur oppositum antecedentis; sed ad istud oppositum consequentis,

tamen accidens et consequens [214] sunt unus locus. [...]. Et hoc est quod dat intelligere consequenter, ubi ostendit differentiam accidentis et consequentis, quod “accidens est in uno solo sumere” et “consequens in pluribus” [however, the fallacy of accident and the fallacy of consequent are not the same. (...). And this is what Aristotle means next, when he displays the difference between the two, which is that “accident refers to one single subject”, while “consequent refers to more than one”]» (*Introductiones magistri Guillelmi de Shyrewode in logicam*, H. Brands and C. Kann (ed.), F. Meiner, Hamburg 1995, VI, 212.614 - 214.619).



scilicet “a nullo homine Coriscus est alter”, sequitur oppositum antecedentis, scilicet “a Socrate Coriscus non est alter”; et haec contradicit primae “a Socrate Coriscus est alter”; ergo consequentia prima bona. Ergo ista est vera “ab homine Coriscus etc.” [whenever a consequent follows an antecedent, if the latter is true, the former will be true too. Now, as I will prove, it does follow: “Coriscus is other than Socrates; therefore, Coriscus is other than man”. The antecedent is true; therefore, the consequent has to be true too. The major premise is true. Here is the proof of the minor premise: it follows that “Coriscus is other than Socrates; therefore, etc.” since the consequence is sound when the consequent’s opposite follows the antecedent’s. Now, the antecedent’s opposite, that is to say “Coriscus is not other than Socrates”, follows from the consequent’s opposite, that is to say “Coriscus is no different than any other man” and it is at variance with “Coriscus is other than Socrates”. Therefore, the first consequence is a sound one. This is why “Coriscus is other than man, etc.” is true]».

5. EPILEGOMENA: BEWARE OF THOSE WHO MOCK  
THE OVERCULTIVATED STRAW IN THE EYE OF THEIR NEIGHBOUR  
AND ARE CONTENT WITH THE ILLITERATE BEAM IN THEIR OWN

Even if one refrains from comparing the fallacy of accident to others, it would seem that its situation is not so desperate after all. Our survey may not have sufficed to establish that there is a perfect agreement between its definition and the examples we read in the text. It should be proof enough however that there is no major discrepancy either. The only exception turns out to be a minor one, mainly for two reasons:

1. First of all, as we have seen, it affects an argument Aristotle set forth less for its own sake than in order to ensure that its counterpart was properly introduced. In keeping with a well-honed dialectical routine, the «Coriscus other than Socrates, etc.» argument functions as a subsidiary syllogism whose purpose is to secure – by means of a preliminary or preparatory deduction – one of the premises called for by the other example, namely the «Coriscus other than man, etc.» sophism.

2. Second, one might add, the most natural way of understanding the argument is also the less disruptive of Aristotle’s taxonomical balance among different families of paralogisms. As a matter of fact, making sense of the «Coriscus other than Socrates, etc.» sophism in terms of a fallacy of consequent instead of accident is – if at all – a minor twist, in so far as occasional overlaps between the two are vouched for by Aristotle himself:

*Aristotelis sophisticis elenchi*, 6, 168b 27-28: «οἱ δὲ παρὰ τὸ ἐπόμεινον μέρος εἰσὶ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος [the sophisms of consequent are part of those of accident]».

Although one may (or may not) agree with Nicholas of Paris’ assessment of the difficulties involved in the fallacy of accident:

*Nicholai Parisiensis notulae super librum elenchorum*, Praha Knihovna Metropolitni Kapituli L.76 (1322), 56vb: «secundum fallaciam accidentis decipiuntur sapientes [even the wise fall for the fallacy of accident]».

There is little doubt that in the matter at hand sometimes the wise have tricked themselves. Still, every cloud has a silver lining and it is also true that scholars of all ages may help each other out, provided that one does not mistake philological laziness and academic pressure for sobriety and an understandable concern for felling trees without reason. In top of that, if one has the patience and the humility to look at all places, she might be surprised to discover – as we did – that some answers are older than the questions we usually ask.

**ABSTRACT:** *Scholarly dissatisfaction with Aristotle's fallacy of accident has traditionally focused on his examples, whose compatibility with the fallacy's definition has been doubted time and again. Besides a unified account of the fallacy of accident itself, the paper provides a formalized analysis of its several examples in Aristotle's Sophistici elenchi. The most problematic instances are dealt with by means of an internal reconstruction of their features as conveyed by Aristotle's text and an extensive survey of their interpretation in the Byzantine and Latin exegetical tradition. Carefully handled a doxographical approach, as opposed to rapid results oriented practices, proves to be most effective in that it supplies both useful albeit ordinarily overlooked insights and a comprehensive framework of reference for further investigations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Aristotle, Sophistici elenchi, fallacy of accident, fallacy of consequent, Byzantine and Latin doxography.*