

Habent sua fata libelli: Aristotle's *Categories* in the first century BC¹

Why did the study of Aristotle's work known to us as the *Categories* become such a major concern from the first century BC onwards? Hans Gottschalk comments: "It would be interesting to know why the *Categories* came to exercise so much fascination, but there is no evidence."² Perhaps, however, an examination of some aspects of the interest taken in the work, in so far as our fragmentary evidence allows, and of the historical context, may at least lead to informed speculation; and that is the purpose of this paper. First, though, more needs to be said about the background to the question and about its importance.

The attention given to Aristotle's *Categories* in antiquity had major consequences for the future direction of philosophy. The prominence in subsequent discussion of the problem of universals, and more generally of questions concerning the relation between being, knowledge and language, is due in large part to the *Categories* coming in antiquity to occupy the place it did at the start of the philosophical curriculum. This has also affected approaches to Aristotle himself. Marwan Rashed has shown how Alexander of Aphrodisias, by reading the *Metaphysics* and *De anima* with an eye to the *Organon* rather than to the biological works, gave the study of Aristotle a particular slant which it has retained almost till the present day;³ and Arthur Madigan has commented that "Alexander reads the *Metaphysics* in the light of the *Categories* rather than vice versa"⁴

If one compares the place occupied by such issues from late antiquity to the present day with what we find in Aristotle's immediate Hellenistic successors,⁵ one is struck by the contrast. Questions of form and substance, of how forms and in particular souls relate to form-matter compounds, are conspicuous by their relative absence. Theophrastus and Eudemus wrote works entitled *Categories*, but we have no knowledge of their content.⁶ They do make reference to the Aristotelian categories, for example in connection with the theory of motion, but this reflects Aristotle's own discussion in his *Physics*.⁷ In some passages,

¹ This is a revised version of a paper given in Cambridge in May 2007 in the context of that university's programme of research on philosophy in the first century BC. It was my intention to present a revised version of the paper at the meeting in Budapest in September 2007, but I was unfortunately prevented from doing so by illness. I am grateful for comments which have improved the paper to, in particular, Ricardo Chiaradonna, Roberto Polito, Malcolm Schofield, David Sedley and Robert Wardy; the responsibility for remaining errors and infelicities remains my own.

² Gottschalk 1987, 1103. The explosion of interest in the *Categories* is indicated by Dörrie 1944, 29 (cited by Szlezák 1972, 155): "Der Kategorienstreit hat sich also in einer Generation so weit entwickelt, daß später kaum mehr neues Material beigebracht zu werden braucht."

³ Rashed 2007.

⁴ Madigan 1994, 90.

⁵ Which I have attempted to do in two forthcoming papers: Sharples, forthcoming (a) and (b).

⁶ Gottschalk 1987, 1102 and nn.118-119 (sharing Bocheński's doubts about the existence of the Theophrastean work; Theophrastus, fr.71 FHS&G. After a preliminary section identifying works on logic by Theophrastus, FHS&G proceeds immediately to material corresponding to the *De interpretatione*).

⁷ Theophrastus fr. 153ABC FHS&G; = Eudemus fr.59 Wehrli. Eudemus fr.35 picks up discussion of the relations of dependence between the categories from *Physics* 1.2 185a22. Cf. also Eudemus fr.37a.13-14 = Simplicius, *In Phys.* 97.17-18.

however, Eudemus does introduce the terminology of substance into discussions in which it does not appear in Aristotle's own *Physics*. One may for example compare the following addition by Eudemus to Aristotle's discussion of the various senses of "in":⁸

καὶ Εὐδήμιος δὲ τούτοις παρακολουθῶν καὶ εἰπὼν “ἄλλως δὲ τὰ πάθη καὶ αἱ ἕξεις ἐν ταῖς οὐσίαις” ἐπήγαγεν· “ἐπισκεπτέον δὲ εἰ οὕτως καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ ὅλως ἡ μορφή ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ” καὶ αὐτὸς δηλονότι τὴν διαφορὰν ἐνδεικνύμενος.

And Eudemus, going along with these points⁹ and saying “in a different way affections and states are in substances” adds “But we should consider whether it is in this way that the shape and in general the form are in the matter”, clearly himself too showing the difference (between the case of affections and states in substances on the one hand, and that of form in matter on the other) (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 552.24-27 = Eudemus fr. 77 Wehrli).¹⁰

We will have occasion to return to Eudemus, and indeed to this specific text, later on.

After Theophrastus and Eudemus we have even less. The summary of Aristotle's doctrines in Diogenes Laertius book 5, which seems to go back at least in part to the Hellenistic period,¹¹ contains just enough ontology to give a shaky interpretation of the meaning of the *De anima* definition of soul (5.32-34),¹² and no more. There is no mention of the doctrine of the categories in the summary at all, and the term “substance”, οὐσία, does not appear – in fact it appears nowhere in Diogenes' book 5 on the Peripatetics. So much for what Aristotle in *Metaphysics Z* 1 describes as the question that is always being asked and always causing perplexity.¹³ Diogenes' *Organon* – a term he explicitly applies to logic – is the *Topics* and *Analytics*.¹⁴

⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* 4.3 210a14-24. See below, at nn.59-63.

⁹ See below, n.63.

¹⁰ Cf. also Eudemus fr. 46-47. On the atypical character of Eudemus' interests as compared with most other Peripatetics of his time, with the exception of Theophrastus, cf. Gottschalk 2002, 28.

¹¹ Cf. Moraux 1986, 268 and 289; Mejer 1992, 3574-3576; Sollenberger 1992, 3859.

¹² Moraux 1986, 283 is scathing about Diogenes' account: “L'auteur y accumule ineptie sur ineptie. Il est manifeste qu'il parle de choses qui ne lui sont pas du tout familières, et qu'il n'y a rien compris ... ce tissu de sottises ...”. Cf. Mejer 1992, 3575; Sollenberger 1992, 3859. Diogenes certainly muddles his explanation of potentiality and actuality; however, his account does preserve some elements of Aristotle's hylomorphic doctrine, and that in itself is notable in a document of Hellenistic date. Against Moraux, Bodéüs 1995 argues that Diogenes' account (generally) is not confused, but rather shows the result of forcing a systematising agenda derived from Stoicism on to the Aristotelian material; at the same time, Bodéüs himself notes that Diogenes' source distinguishes between the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* without knowledge of the actual contents of either (576).

¹³ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία. Aristotle, *Metaphysics Z*1 1028b2-4.

¹⁴ 5.28-29. Whatever the Μεθοδικά referred to along with the *Topics* was (cf. Moraux 1986, 271 n.75; Mejer 1992, 3574; Bodéüs 1995, 576 and n.108), I assume it is unlikely to have been the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*. Diogenes' summary of Aristotle's doctrines is in

From this perspective the Aristotelian tradition in the early Roman empire (I use this expression as shorthand including the whole of the first century BC), with its emphasis on the *Categories*, seems to have more in common with late antiquity and with more recent philosophy than it does with Hellenistic Aristotelianism. We are not therefore dealing just with the effects of the place of the *Categories* in the specifically *Neoplatonist* curriculum. So we can now come back to the initial question. The interest shown in the *Categories* in the first century BC seems to be either a sign or a cause of a change of emphasis in the Peripatetic tradition, or indeed both a sign and a cause; either way, can we say more about why it came to exercise the fascination that it did?

The writers on the *Categories* with whom we will be concerned include Andronicus of Rhodes, Boethus and Ariston of Alexandria among the Peripatetics, Athenodorus the Stoic, and Eudorus and possibly Lucius the Platonists.¹⁵ The treatise *On λόγος as a whole or <on> the ten categories* purporting to be by the fourth-century BC Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum, henceforth referred to as “pseudo-Archytas”, also belongs to this period.¹⁶ Andronicus and Boethus wrote commentaries;¹⁷ some at least of the others discussed particular issues rather than producing full-scale commentaries. The inclusion of a Stoic and Platonists in the list may suggest that the question why the *Categories* was found so interesting might usefully be considered against the background of existing philosophical preoccupations in the first century BC generally.¹⁸ The desire of Aristotelians to establish themselves as a distinctive philosophical tradition should also be borne in mind.¹⁹

One answer to our question might be somewhat as follows. Aristotle’s esoteric works were in *some* sense “rediscovered” in the first century BC. Andronicus arranged them in

the order logic-ethics-physics, which was standard in later antiquity and may have been that adopted by Andronicus; cf. Düring 1957, 242 and 244. The division of philosophy with which Diogenes introduces the summary is not entirely consistent either internally or in relation to the order of the summary that follows: Mejer 1992, 3574, cf. Sollenberger 1992, 3857.

¹⁵ Andronicus was active probably in the second quarter of the first century BC, Athenodorus and Eudorus in the middle of the century; Boethus was Andronicus’ pupil and, probably, Strabo’s teacher. (Cornutus, often coupled with Athenodorus, was active in the time of Nero.) Lucius the Platonist, regularly coupled with the later Nicostratus, may have been this early (Sedley 1997, 117 n.26). See Gottschalk 1987, 1095-1096 and 1110-1111. – Roberto Polito has asked whether the Stoic Athenodorus who wrote against the *Categories* was the same as the Stoic Athenodorus who became librarian at Pergamum, the implication being that this might have implications for his interest in Aristotelian texts. The answer seems to be that we do not know, but if the Athenodorus in question was rather the Stoic who taught Octavian, he was a pupil of Posidonius of *Rhodes*, which might also suggest acquaintance with Andronicus and with the Aristotelian tradition.

¹⁶ Szlezák 1972, 14; Moraux 1984, 606. Significantly, Themistius, reported by Boethius, *In Cat.* 1 (vol.64 162A Migne), held that the author was a Peripatetic: pseudo-Archytas, test.4 in Szlezák 1972, 30.

¹⁷ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 26.17 describes Andronicus’ commentary as a paraphrase; but it is clear that Andronicus’ discussion too was a critical one (Moraux 1973, 98).

¹⁸ Pseudo-Archytas has a special reason for being interested in the *Categories* – the special significance for Pythagoreans of the number 10. Cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.24 = pseudo-Archytas, test.1 in Szlezák 1972, 29.

¹⁹ Cf. Szlezák 1972, 154; Sharples 2006, 324-324.

order. He placed the *Organon* first because he saw it as a necessary prerequisite for the rest of philosophy. He placed the *Categories* first in the *Organon* because it deals with single terms. Even if the curriculum was not yet standardised in the way it came to be later, it is a familiar phenomenon that people pay more attention to what comes at the beginning of a work or series of works.²⁰ Hence, on this story, the positioning of the *Categories* at the start of Aristotle's works was in itself enough to make it the focus of particular attention, with all the consequences this had for the emphasis that developed in the study of Aristotle even before he was incorporated into the Neoplatonist curriculum.²¹

Andronicus held that the study of Aristotle's works should start with logic, his pupil Boethus that one should start with physics.²² Tarán has suggested that Boethus' starting with physics reflects his rejection of form as substance and what is presented by Platonist sources as his conceptualist doctrine of universals.²³ More on this later; for the moment I will just say that Tarán's argument suggests, in my view at least, an over-schematic approach to the history of philosophy, as if one's views on a particular issue necessarily determined one's approach to all others, including the order in which topics should be studied. It is questionable whether human thought is that systematic, even among those who are trying to construct philosophical systems.

It is not clear that there is much to be gained for our question by considering the availability and circulation of Aristotle's esoteric works before the first century, and in particular the truth or otherwise of the claim that for most of that time the only copies in existence were buried in a ditch in Asia Minor; for whether the story in that extreme form is true or (as I suppose) false, either way it does nothing in itself to explain why a particular interest developed in the *Categories* as opposed to other texts. To be sure, there is the possibility, that, as David Sedley has suggested, *other* Aristotelian esoteric works were available in the Hellenistic period but the *Categories* in particular was in some sense a new discovery.²⁴ But even if that is the case, one may still ask why it was such an interesting and

²⁰ Cf. Sharples 2001, 595, on the relative frequency with which Alexander cites the first Bekker page of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. David Sedley has pointed out that the point about the *Categories* being at the start of the Aristotelian corpus does not apply in quite the same way at a time when a collection of many book-rolls, rather than a collection of Aristotle's works in a series of codex volumes, would have been the norm. Nevertheless, conventions might quite rapidly develop as to the order in which Aristotle's works were to be arranged and read, even if the conventions were not physically embodied in their arrangement within codices.

²¹ One might at this point ask why there was not more interest in the *De interpretatione*. I suspect that, with the exception of certain notorious passages, it seemed less problematic. There is also the question why, given that Andronicus regarded the *De interpretatione* as not by Aristotle (Alexander, *In An. pr.* 160.32-161.1; Ammonius, *In De int.* 5.28-6.4), and that there were doubts about the latter part of the *Categories* (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 379.8-10, mentioning Andronicus as one who held these doubts), the authenticity of the earlier part of the *Categories* was not apparently questioned. (I am grateful to Malcolm Schofield and David Sedley for raising these issues; cf. Bodéüs 2001, who notes that the question of the authenticity of the earlier part of the *Categories* was not raised (xci), while himself expressing doubts about it (xc-cx).

²² Philoponus, *In Cat.* 5.16ff.; Gottschalk 1987, 1099.

²³ Tarán 1981, 743.

²⁴ Sedley 1997, 112 n.7.

influential discovery.

We may, indeed, be at risk of exaggerating the particular importance of the *Categories*. We only know of the earlier discussions of the work through second-hand reports from the later commentary tradition, and this may have introduced a distortion of its own. We have more commentaries on the *Categories* than on other Aristotelian works – twice as many as on any other work, if we go by *CAG*, which is itself selective.²⁵ Even given the state of our evidence, it is clear that not all Peripatetics of the first century BC focussed just on the *Categories*; Xenarchus, known chiefly for his views on the heavens, springs to mind as one exception. There is also a danger of assuming that the views of Andronicus and Boethus concerning form, for example, were advanced in the context of discussion of the *Categories* just because Simplicius refers to them in *his* commentary on that work. But the later commentary tradition did tend to record observations made in relation to a given work in commentaries on that work rather than elsewhere. And, as we will see later, there is further evidence to suggest that this was indeed the original context.

What aspects of the *Categories*, then, were of particular interest in the first century BC? Here we are at the mercy of our later sources, which may have given preferential treatment to comments on the issues that interested *them*. Nevertheless, we can have some confidence that the topics which aroused particular interest included the following. What should be the title of the work, and to which other Aristotelian works should it be related? Is it concerned with words, or things, or both? What is the relation between Aristotle's ten categories on the one hand and the Platonic contrast between absolutes and relatives on the other? Does Aristotelian form belong in the category of substance or in other, non-substance categories?

Some regarded the *Categories* as preliminary to the *Topics* rather than to the *De interpretatione*, and gave it the title "Preliminaries to the *Topics*". This view was endorsed by Adrastus in the second century AD,²⁶ but was already challenged in the first century BC by Andronicus²⁷ – which suggests either that someone even before Andronicus had taken an interest in the work, or else that Andronicus was engaging in debate concerning it with his contemporaries. It seems likely that "Categories" was not Aristotle's own title for the work, and indeed Michael Frede has argued that Aristotle's doctrine of categories is to be found in *Topics* 1 rather than in the so-called *Categories*.²⁸ This point itself highlights the problematic nature of the latter work. It also prompts the question whether the *Topics* may have been more familiar than the *Categories* and would thus have provided ancient readers of the latter with a context in which to place it. Theophrastus in his *Topics*, interestingly in view of the later arguments about the number of the categories, of which more below, reduced the four

²⁵ Eight commentaries on the *Categories* (Porphyry, Dexippus, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus, Elias, Anon.). Next equal with four each are *An. Pr.* (Alexander, Ammonius, Philoponus, Anon.), *DA* (Themistius, Simplicius(?), Philoponus, Sophonias), *Metaph.* (Alexander, Themistius, Syrianus, Asclepius) and *EN* (Aspasius, Eustratius + Anon., Michael, "Heliodoros"). We do on several other central works have commentaries by Simplicius, who is particularly assiduous in citing his predecessors, and this may give us a fuller picture of the whole range of activity of the early commentators than we would otherwise have, though even Simplicius may be citing them through their successors.

²⁶ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 16.1. It is attributed to pseudo-Archytas by Elias, *In Cat.* 132.26 = test.8 in Szlezák 1972, 31, but apparently as the result of a confusion with Adrastus (Szlezák 1972, 93-94).

²⁷ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 379.8; Moraux 1973, 99 and n.12; Gottschalk 1987, 1102-1103.

²⁸ Frede 1981. Cf. Szlezák 2007, 107 for the influence of the *Topics* on pseudo-Archytas.

predicables— definition, property, genus and accident – for practical purposes to two, definition and accident, though the ancient reports differ on how he subsumed the others under these.²⁹ Cicero, not surprisingly, saw topics in a rhetorical context. There are notorious problems about his knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of Aristotle’s *Topics* in particular.³⁰ Tony Long has however pointed out that Cicero “treats logical categories – genus, species, contraries, etc. – as material from which to derive arguments”, even if his knowledge of Aristotle’s work in this area was second-hand.³¹ And Cicero was not alone in the first century BC in doing this.³² The *Categories* might then naturally have seemed to belong in the same area. Indeed Richard Bodéüs has argued that the *Categories* and *De interpretatione* were added to the *Organon* as recognised in the account in Diogenes Laertius³³ in an attempt to construct for Aristotle a systematic account of “logic” in something approaching its broader, Stoic sense, this being part of a tendency, inspired by Stoicism, retrospectively to construct a system for Aristotle.³⁴

The question whether the *Categories* is concerned with words, or things, or with words as signifying things³⁵ is one that is naturally prompted by the text itself. Andronicus supplied at the start of the work a reference to utterances that are simple and those that involve combination, connecting with the former the account of homonymy at the abrupt start of Aristotle’s own text:

Ἐπὶ τῶν ὁμώνυμων λέγεται ὅτι ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος, οἷον ζῷον ὃ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ γεγραμμένον· τούτων γὰρ ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος.

Those are said homonymously which share the name only, but the account of the being that corresponds to the name is different, for example “animal” applying

²⁹ Theophrastus, fr.124-125 FHS&G. See also fr. 127-130.

³⁰ See Huby 1989; Barnes 1997, 55-57.

³¹ Long 1995, 56.

³² Cf. Long 1995, 54-55, on Philo of Larissa, Cicero’s teacher, and in general van Ophuijsen 1994. David Sedley has pointed out to me that the *Topics* is the only Aristotelian work that was demonstrably known to the author of the anonymous *Theaetetus* commentary; Bastiniani and Sedley 1995, 249, 508-509.

³³ Above, n.14.

³⁴ Bodéüs 1995, especially 581-585. See also below, n.43. As Bodéüs 565 points out, the very notion of “logic” as a distinct subject is Stoic in origin, and (id. 585) the ten categories have no relevance to the *De interpretatione* or to the *Analytics*.

³⁵ The view of Boethus, which eventually prevailed: Porphyry, *In Cat.* 59.17; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 11.23, 13.13. Moraux 1973, 150; Gottschalk 1987, 1104 n.126. Pseudo-Archytas speaks of words indicating *thought* (22.10-11 Thesleff, cf. 26.16, 31.11), but refers to substances as *existing* (22.16) and presents the categories (31.30-32.9 Thesleff) and number (32.10-23 Thesleff; cf. above, n.18) as the means by which human beings are able to grasp the truth of *the things that are* (cf. especially 32.2 Thesleff). The reference to thought may be compared with Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 1 16a4-5 (what is spoken is a symbol of affections in the soul); for links between pseudo-Archytas and the *De interpretatione* see also Szlezák 1972, 142-143.

both to a human being and to a picture;³⁶ these share the name only, but the account of the being that corresponds to the name is different (Aristotle, *Categories* 1 1a1-4).

τῶν λεγομένων τὰ μὲν ἄνευ συμπλοκῆς λέγεται, τὰ δὲ μετὰ συμπλοκῆς· καὶ τῶν ἄνευ συμπλοκῆς ὁμώνυμα μὲν λέγεται, ὧν ὄνομα μόνον ταυτόν, ὃ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος ἕτερος.

Some acts of saying do not involve combination, others do involve combination.³⁷ Of those that do not involve combination, those are said homonymously which have only the name the same, but the account that corresponds to the name is different (Andronicus' text reconstructed by Moraux 1973, 102-103 from Simplicius, *In Cat.* 21.22-24, 26.18-19, 30.3-5 and Dexippus, *In Cat.* 21.18-19).

What, if anything, this implies for Andronicus' view on the question whether Aristotle is here concerned with words or things is not immediately clear, for "saying" may apply to words, to what is said or indicated by using the words, or indeed to both if we suppose that there is a correspondence between them.³⁸ That the subject of the *Categories* was words was the view of the Stoic Athenodorus.³⁹ But we also know of one, perhaps two⁴⁰ variant texts which inserted a reference to *beings* at the start, and at least the first of these was earlier than Adrastus in the middle of the second century AD:

ἱστορεῖ δὲ ὁ Ἄδραστος ἐν τῷ Περὶ τῆς τάξεως τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους συγγραμμάτων, ὅτι φέρεται καὶ ἄλλο τῶν κατηγοριῶν βιβλίον ὡς Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ αὐτὸ ὄν βραχὺ καὶ σύντομον κατὰ τὴν λέξιν καὶ διαιρέσεσιν ὀλίγαις διαφερόμενον, ἀρχὴν δὲ ἔχον "Τῶν ὄντων τὸ μὲν ἐστίν". πλῆθος δὲ στίχων ἑκατέρου τὸ αὐτὸ ἀναγράφει, ὥστε τὸ βραχὺ κατὰ τὴν λέξιν εἶπεν ὡς συντόμως ἑκάστου τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων ἐκτιθεμένων.

Adrastus, in his *On the ordering of Aristotle's writings*, records that another book on categories too is in circulation as Aristotle's; it too is short and concise in expression and differs by only a few distinctions; its beginning is, "One (class) of the things that are ...". He records the same number of lines in each, so that he

³⁶ Portrait-painting in Greek is **ζωγραφία**, literally "drawing of living creatures". Cook 1938, 12-13 note (b), observes that in English one can speak both of a living creature and of a "living portrait".

³⁷ The former being simple terms, and/or what they refer to; the latter being sentences and/or the states of affairs which they report. Cf. *Metaph.* E4 1017b17-25.

³⁸ Andronicus and Boethus omitted Aristotle's reference to *being* or substance (**οὐσία**) from the above definition of homonymy (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 29.30-30.5; Dexippus, loc. cit.). Moraux, loc. cit., interprets this as indicating that homonymy was not to be confined to the category of substance. Tarán 1981, 745 n.69 however suggests that we are not dealing with a deliberate omission; rather, the words were simply missing from the text of the *Categories* to which Andronicus (and Boethus) had access.

³⁹ Porphyry, *In Cat.* 59.10; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 18.26. Moraux 1973, 149; Gottschalk 1987, 1103 n.124.

⁴⁰ The wording in the two reports is slightly different. Moraux 1973, 103.

said “short in expression” (meaning) that the arguments of each are set out concisely (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 18.16-21).

Εἰδέναι δὲ δεῖ ὅτι ἐν ταῖς παλαιαῖς βιβλιοθήκαις τῶν μὲν Ἀναλυτικῶν τεσσαράκοντα βιβλία εὑρήνται, τῶν δὲ Κατηγοριῶν δύο· τὸ μὲν ἕτερον εἶχεν ἀρχὴν “τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν ὁμώνυμα λέγεται τὰ δὲ συνώνυμα”, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον, ὅπερ νῦν προκείμενον ἔχομεν· καὶ προτετίμηται τοῦτο ὡς τάξει καὶ πράγματι πλεονεκτοῦν καὶ πανταχοῦ πατέρα τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην κηρῦττον.

One should be aware that in the ancient libraries there were found four books of *Analytics* and two of *Categories*; (of the latter) one had the beginning “Of the things that are some are spoken of homonymously, others synonymously”; the second is the one that we now have before us. (The latter) has been preferred as having the advantage in order and content, and everywhere proclaiming Aristotle as its author (Ammonius, *In Cat.* 13.20-25).

There was also debate over whether the list of categories was complete. Athenodorus the Stoic and Lucius the Platonist, interpreting the work as concerned with language, criticised Aristotle for not taking account of all the parts of speech;⁴¹ Boethus defended Aristotle on the grounds that this was not the purpose of the work.⁴² It is natural to connect this debate with Stoic interest in grammatical expressions; and this suggests that the *Categories* may have been an object of interest in the context of what was already familiar in philosophy.⁴³ Richard Bodéüs has pointed out that the Stoics used *κατηγορημα* in the sense of “predicate”.⁴⁴

Another connection between interest in the *Categories* and debates that were already familiar may concern the Platonic distinction between absolute and relative, based ultimately on *Sophist* 255c. Eudorus noted the absence of this distinction from the *Categories*.⁴⁵ We know that Andronicus endorsed such a distinction, though opinions have varied over how far he intended so in doing to diverge from Aristotle’s view in the *Categories*, and indeed over how he related Aristotle’s ten categories to the Platonic two-fold distinction.⁴⁶ There was also

⁴¹ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 18.22, 64.18; Gottschalk 1987, 1104 nn.129-130 and 1151. Pseudo-Archytas, 30.18 Thesleff, insists, in accordance with the overall agenda of his work (above, n.18) that the *system* (σύστημα) of *λογος* constituted by the ten categories is complete; Szlezák 1972, 141.

⁴² Simplicius, *In Cat.* 11.23; Gottschalk 1987, 1104 n.131.

⁴³ Not only do Stoics and Platonists take an interest in the *Categories*; Peripatetics commenting on it also relate it to Stoic doctrine; thus Boethus defended the Stoic distinction between the relative and the relatively disposed (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 167.22, Moraux 1973, 158 and n.52).

⁴⁴ Bodéüs 1995, 584; 2001, xviii. See above, n.34. I am grateful to Ricardo Chiaradonna for drawing my attention to Bodéüs’ discussion. For Stoic influence on, and opposition to Stoic views by, pseudo-Archytas see Szlezák 1972, 99-100, 126, 143, 149-150.

⁴⁵ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 174.14. Szlezák 1972, 130.

⁴⁶ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 63.22, where Andronicus is coupled with Xenocrates; Gottschalk 1987, 1104 n.132. Moraux 1973, 103, followed by Gottschalk 1987, 1105 held that Andronicus distinguished substance on the one hand from all the other categories on the other; Tarán (1981) 741 that Andronicus was distinguishing the relative in the narrow sense of the term from all other categories and was influenced by the Stoics in this. As Moraux and Gottschalk

debate about the *order* of the Aristotelian categories;⁴⁷ one might suppose that this reflected the fact that for the so-called Stoic “categories” there is a clear order of ontological dependence, but the Stoic “categories” were never so called in antiquity,⁴⁸ and David Sedley has pointed out in this connection that Athenodorus, far from wanting to reduce the Aristotelian categories to the Stoic four, argued, as we have already seen, that they were too few in number as not including all the parts of speech.⁴⁹

Boethus placed form in the non-substance categories,⁵⁰ whereas Andronicus argued that some attributes were said of (rather than present in) the subject, the implication being that they fall under the category of substance.⁵¹ It seems likely that Andronicus and Boethus made these points in the course of seeking to relate what Aristotle says in the *Categories* to his other works. Simplicius reports that Boethus introduced his argument that form was quality rather than substance by referring to Aristotle’s dividing substance into matter, form and the compound “in other works” or “in other places” (ἐν ἄλλοις).⁵² This is important in several respects. First, the most likely candidates for the “other works” are the *Metaphysics* or the *De Anima*.⁵³ Unfortunately, although the expression ἐν ἄλλοις indicates that the reference is to

point out, we know that elsewhere Andronicus referred to all ten Aristotelian categories (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 342.24); Tarán minimises the significance of this as simply reflecting the necessary structure of a commentary on the Aristotelian text. Mueller 1995, 148 notes that Hippolytus (*Ref.* 7.18.5) reporting Aristotle, in the context of *Categories* 2, simply contrasts substance on the one hand and accident, identified as quality, on the other; Mueller compares Simplicius, *In Cat.* 63.24, where those who take this view are compared to Andronicus (above) but not themselves named, and Dexippus, *In Cat.* 31.10-14, where the proponents are not named. Mueller also notes that in the *first* book of the *Refutations* (1.20.1 = *Dox.* 570.8-12) Hippolytus attributes the ten categories to Aristotle, though this too is in the context of a contrast between substance and accident. Pseudo-Archytas is reported by Syrianus ap. Simplicius, *In Cat.* 199.17 (test.5 in Szlezák 1972, 30) as describing substance as *per se* (cf. ps.-Archytas 26.21 Thesleff), but nothing is said in the context about other categories such as quality and quantity, and Elias, *In Cat.* 201.23-25 (test.8 in Szlezák 1972, 31; cf. id. 93) suggests that for pseudo-Archytas all the categories other than the relative in the narrower sense were *per se*. The twofold “Platonic” distinction is also found in the *Divisiones Aristotelicae*, Diogenes Laertius 3.108 (at the very end of the list); Gottschalk 1987, 1104-5 n.133. It “had retained some currency throughout the Hellenistic period”: Sedley 1997, 117 n.25. Tarán 1981, 742 suggests that Andronicus and Boethus may themselves have played a major part in reviving interest in the doctrines of the Old Academy.

⁴⁷ Eudorus: Simplicius, *In Cat.* 206.10; Lucius: *ibid.* 156.15; [Archytas] 23.21 Thesleff, noted also e.g. by Simplicius, *In Cat.* 121.13, 206.8. Gottschalk 1987, 1110-11 and nn.160, 163, 1151 and n.346, citing for the Stoics Rist 1971, 54f.

⁴⁸ Cf. Sandbach 1985, 40-42; Long and Sedley 1987, p.165.

⁴⁹ Sedley cited by Sandbach 1985, 76 n.93.

⁵⁰ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.4. Moraux 1973, 156; Gottschalk 1987, 1109 n.152.

⁵¹ Simplicius, *In Cat.* 54.8; Gottschalk 1987, 1106 n.140.

⁵² Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.6. I was alerted to the importance of this reference through a discussion by Riccardo Chiaradonna, and am grateful to him for further discussion of the topic. Pseudo-Archytas 24.17 Thesleff, on the other hand, presents matter, form or shape (μορφή: see below, at n.63) and the compound as subdivisions of substance, as part of his programme of subdividing each category; cf. Szlezák 1972, 119.

⁵³ *Metaph.* Z3 1029a2-3, Z10 1035a2, H1 1042a26-31; *DA* 2.1 412a6-9, 2.2 414a14-16.

something other than the work under discussion, the plural does not necessarily indicate a reference to *several* other works – it could be vaguer than that and indicate one or more passages in a single other work. Second, assuming ἐν ἄλλοις is a fair reflection of what Boethus himself said, even if the actual wording may be Simplicius’ own, it is evidence that Boethus discussed the issue in the context of his own discussion of the *Categories*. And thirdly, Simplicius’ report is evidence that Boethus was ready to interpret the *Categories* in a way that *conflicted* with other Aristotelian works. The issue is somewhat blurred, indeed, by Boethus’ claiming that the *Categories* account of *primary* substance fits matter and the compound rather than form; but he does not go on to argue that form is secondary substance, rather that it is not substance at all. We have, as far as I am aware, no evidence that Andronicus explicitly stated that *his* view agreed with the *Metaphysics* and/or *De Anima*, but it does not seem unlikely that he had noted the fact.

This may not however be the whole story. Later on, at any rate, Alexander of Aphrodisias, in defending the substantiality of soul and form, refers to the claim at *Categories* 5 3a7 that no substance is in a subject,⁵⁴ and argues that it is indeed the case that soul, and form generally, are not present in subjects that already exist independently of them. Alexander’s discussion shows that he was not the first to find problems in reconciling this with remarks made by Aristotle at *Physics* 2.1 192b34,

φύσις μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ ῥηθέν· φύσιν δὲ ἔχει ὅσα τοιαύτην ἔχει ἀρχήν. καὶ ἐστὶν πάντα ταῦτα οὐσία· ὑποκείμενον γάρ τι, καὶ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἐστὶν ἡ φύσις αἰεί.

Nature, then, is what has been said; and all those things have a nature which have a principle of this sort (*sc.* a principle of motion and rest in the thing itself). And all these are substance(s); for each of them is) a thing that underlies, and nature is always in something that underlies.

and *De anima* 2.1 412a16-21,

ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ σῶμα καὶ τοιόνδε, ζῶν γὰρ ἔχον, οὐκ ἂν εἴη σῶμα ἢ ψυχή· οὐ γάρ ἐστὶ τῶν καθ’ ὑποκειμένου τὸ σῶμα, μᾶλλον δ’ ὡς ὑποκείμενον καὶ ὕλη. ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶντος.

Since it is both a body and of a certain sort, possessing life, the soul will not be a body; for the body is not one of the things that apply to something that underlies; rather it is (itself) something that underlies, and matter. So it is necessary that the soul should be substance, as being the form of a natural body which possesses life potentially.

In the latter case, indeed, Alexander interprets καθ’ ὑποκειμένου, “apply to something that underlies” as equivalent to ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ “in something that underlies”,⁵⁵ presumably, as Silvia Fazzo has pointed out, taking this rather odd interpretation over from whoever had

⁵⁴ *Mantissa* 119.22; cf. Sharples 2004, 61-64. Alexander also refers, at *mantissa* 119.33-34, to the definition at *Categories* 2 1a24-26 of what it is to be in a subject.

⁵⁵ These are the two expressions standardly rendered in English discussions of the *Categories* by “said of a subject” and “(present) in a subject” respectively.

used it to connect the *De anima* passage with the problem in the first place.⁵⁶ As well as Diogenes Laertius' discussion of Aristotle's definition of soul, mentioned earlier, there is other evidence too in the doxographical tradition to suggest that Aristotle's *De anima* definition of soul at least continued to be known in the Hellenistic period.⁵⁷ But in the absence of a detailed knowledge of Aristotle's own works, it would seem easy enough to suppose that form and soul are qualities present in a material subject or substrate. What corresponds to Aristotelian forms in Stoicism is qualities,⁵⁸ and it is natural to see Boethus, regarding form as non-substantial, as reading the *Categories* in the light of Stoicism.

The issue of how form is in matter had indeed already been raised in connection with form by Eudemus, in a passage we have already encountered, in connection with *Physics* 4.3 210a14-24, where Aristotle says

Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ληπτέον ποσαχῶς ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ λέγεται. ἓνα μὲν δὴ τρόπον ὡς ὁ δάκτυλος ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ ὅλως τὸ μέρος ἐν τῷ ὅλῳ. ἄλλον δὲ ὡς τὸ ὅλον ἐν τοῖς μέρεσιν· οὐ γάρ ἐστι παρὰ τὰ μέρη τὸ ὅλον. ἄλλον δὲ τρόπον ὡς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐν ζῳῳ καὶ ὅλως εἶδος ἐν γένει. ἄλλον δὲ ὡς τὸ γένος ἐν τῷ εἶδει καὶ ὅλως τὸ μέρος τοῦ εἶδους ἐν τῷ λόγῳ. ἔτι ὡς ἡ ὑγίεια ἐν θερμοῖς καὶ ψυχροῖς καὶ ὅλως τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ. ἔτι ὡς ἐν βασιλεῖ τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ὅλως ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ κινητικῷ. ἔτι ὡς ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ καὶ ὅλως ἐν τῷ τέλει· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα. πάντων δὲ κυριώτατον τὸ ὡς ἐν ἀγγείῳ καὶ ὅλως ἐν τόπῳ.

After this we must understand how many ways one thing is said to be “in” another. Well, one way is as the finger is in the hand and, in general, the part in the whole. Another is as the whole is in the parts; for the whole is not (something else) alongside the parts. Another is as the genus is in the species and, in general, a part of the form is in the definition.⁵⁹ Then there is the way in which health is “in”⁶⁰ hot and cold (bodily constituents), and in general the form is in the matter. Then there is the way in which the affairs of the Greeks are “in”⁶¹ the King of Persia and in general “in” the Prime Mover. Then there is the way in which things are “in”⁶² the good and in general in the end; i.e., that for the sake of which. And the principal use of all is that in which (things are) in a vessel and generally in place.

In the passage already encountered Simplicius, at least, sees Eudemus as holding that the

⁵⁶ Fazzo 2002, 104 and n.225, cited at Sharples 2004, 68 n.208. One might be tempted to think that the treatment of the two expressions as equivalent shows that the person who connected them did not know *Categories* 2; but then it is not clear why he should have thought that there was a problem in the first place.

⁵⁷ Aëtius 4.2.6, 4.3.10, and, referring to ἐνδελέχεια, Epiphanius, *De fide* 9.35 (= DG 592.14), which may go back to Critolaus, and also, if it reflects Hellenistic sources, Arius Didymus, fr. phys. 3 = Stobaeus 1.12.1b, p.135.5-7 Wachsmuth. See Sharples (forthcoming, b).

⁵⁸ To discuss the relation between individual and common qualifieds would take us too far afield here.

⁵⁹ “animal” is a part of the definition of the species “human” as “two-legged rational animal”.

⁶⁰ I.e. consists in, or depends on.

⁶¹ I.e. depend on, rest with.

⁶² I.e. depend on, are to be found in or judged by.

relation between form and matter is not like that between attribute and substance:

καὶ Εὐδήμος δὲ τούτοις παρακολουθῶν καὶ εἰπὼν “ἄλλως δὲ τὰ πάθη καὶ αἱ ἕξεις ἐν ταῖς οὐσίαις” ἐπήγαγεν· “ἐπισκεπτέον δὲ εἰ οὕτως καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ ὅλως ἡ μορφή ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ” καὶ αὐτὸς δηλονότι τὴν διαφορὰν ἐνδεικνύμενος.

And Eudemus, reproducing these points and saying “in a different way affections and states are in substances” adds “But we should consider whether it is in this way that the shape and in general the form are in the matter”, clearly himself too showing the difference (between the case of affections and states in substances on the one hand, and that of form in matter on the other) (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 552.24-27 = Eudemus fr. 77 Wehrli).⁶³

One wonders whether the Aristotelians of the first century BC were influenced by Eudemus’ work in this area.⁶⁴

The commentators concerned themselves not only with the question where among the categories Aristotelian forms are to be placed, but also with that of the status of secondary substances. One modern way of expressing a problem in Aristotle’s metaphysical theory goes something like this: in the *Categories* it is the individual that is primary substance, but in the *Metaphysics* it is form, or the form-matter compound *because* of the form. In the *Metaphysics* there is then a problem because universals are not substance, but forms are universals.

Whether this is a correct interpretation of Aristotle or not is not our present concern.⁶⁵ What is more relevant in the present context is whether the early commentators raised the question of the status of universals in connection with the *Categories*.⁶⁶ According to Syrianus commenting on the *Metaphysics*, Boethus identified Forms with generic *concepts*;⁶⁷ he may have done this in connection with the *Categories*, but we do not know. Syrianus himself clearly understands the reference as being to Platonic Forms (and uses the term

⁶³ Above, nn.9-10. Cf. Sharples 2002, 122. (The same passage of the *Physics* is referred to by Simplicius in his discussion of *Categories* 1a24-25; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 47.7.) Eudemus’ term is μορφή, but this is used for “form” by Theophrastus: Sharples, forthcoming (a). The reference of τούτοις in Simplicius’ τούτοις παρακολουθῶν is to Alexander whom he has just been quoting; παρακολουθῶν is not being used in a chronological sense. Eudemus himself had argued (fr.47) that substance could not be composed of non-substances, but he also (fr.48) described matter as “like body” (σωματοειδής) rather than body, which Simplicius at least cites in support of the view that form and matter considered separately are *like* substance rather than *being* substance simply.

⁶⁴ Scholars have pointed out, chiefly in connection with the question of the history and accessibility of Aristotle’s writings, that Andronicus as well as Eudemus came from Rhodes, and Stephen White has noted that the first extant reference to Eudemus is in a list of Rhodian philosophers in Strabo, the pupil or fellow-student of Boethus; White 2002, 213. White here surveys the evidence for use of Eudemus by commentators up to the time of Alexander. On the neglect of Eudemus in the Hellenistic period before Andronicus see Gottschalk 2002, 26-28.

⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. Lloyd 1981; Sharples 2005.

⁶⁶ It is on this issue that Madigan makes the comment on Alexander cited at n.4 above.

⁶⁷ Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 106.5-7; Moraux 1973, 156 and n.38.

ἰδέαι); his report is part of an account of interpretations of the Forms from Cleanthes the Stoic onwards. However, it is likely enough that Syrianus has included in his account of views concerning Platonic Forms what Boethus originally had to say about forms as Boethus himself understood them; putting it another way, what earlier philosophers have to say about forms is for Syrianus their more or less inadequate account of Forms as they really are, that is to say Platonic Forms.⁶⁸ In the context of discussing *Categories* 5 both Dexippus and Simplicius say that Alexander made universals posterior to particulars; Dexippus also says that Boethus did so.⁶⁹ It seems a reasonable surmise that Alexander's commentary on *Categories* 5 was Dexippus' source for the statement about Boethus. And this makes it at least likely that it was in his *Categories* commentary that Boethus himself made this claim.

My suggestion, then, is that interest in the *Categories* should be seen in the context of interpreters, both Peripatetic and non-Peripatetic, trying to make sense of the work against the background of philosophy known to them. In physics and in ethics discussion in the Hellenistic period had continued in recognisably the same areas with which Aristotle himself was concerned. The general subject-matter, at least, of much of the Aristotelian *Physics* and *Ethics* would be recognisable.⁷⁰ Even if the answers were different, the questions were similar. Moreover, many features of Aristotle's own contributions in these areas would be more or less familiar through the secondary tradition even to those who did not know his works themselves. The *Categories* was different in that it did not obviously fit into the existing agendas. Thus it may have seemed both interesting and perplexing.⁷¹

One might then ask why the same interest was not also taken in the central books of the *Metaphysics*. A possible counter-example here is Nicolaus of Damascus, whose work *On the Philosophy of Aristotle* included an account of the *Metaphysics* in which substance is discussed from the perspective of *that* work and with no reference, at least in the summary that is all that we have, to the doctrine of the categories at all. Silvia Fazzo has raised doubts as to whether this work is in fact by the Nicolaus who was a courtier of Herod the Great, or rather by an author of the same name but later date.⁷² However that may be, Nicolaus' interest in the *Metaphysics* reflects his taking something like our *Corpus Aristotelicum* as his starting-point; the question is rather why he was not interested in the *Categories*. We also know that Eudorus was interested in *Metaphysics* A, to the extent of discussing textual variants (in the context of interpreting Plato, indeed), though the details are disputed.⁷³ And, as we have seen, Boethus appears to refer either to *Metaphysics* ZH or to the *De anima* in introducing his argument for the non-substantiality of form.

⁶⁸ Boethus himself held that the *Categories* is not concerned with intelligible substance (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.5). But that would only be an objection to his having discussed forms in the context of the *Categories* if the forms in question were Platonic forms.

⁶⁹ Dexippus, *In Cat.* 45.12; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 82.14. Moraux 1973, 156 and n.38.

⁷⁰ Which is not to say that the *Categories* did not itself provide a context for, and prompt, further discussion in these areas. Andronicus subordinated When and Where to Time and Place (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 347.6; Gottschalk 1987, 1106 n.141); Boethus made Time an objective reality, like Strato (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 434.2; Huby 1981; Gottschalk 1987, 1108 and nn.).

⁷¹ The place of being or substance in the so-called Stoic categories is not a counter-example, for it is clearly something very different from the primary substances of the *Categories*.

⁷² Fazzo 2005, 288-289 n.52.

⁷³ See Gottschalk 1987, 1112, and the full discussion citing earlier literature in Dooley 1989, 88-90.

I cannot claim to have answered Gottschalk's question why the *Categories* came to exercise so much fascination in the first century BC and thereafter; but, as I said at the beginning, the purpose of this paper was to provoke discussion. What I hope I have at least suggested is the point, which is I am afraid after all rather an obvious one, that in seeking to answer that question the existing philosophical background should be our starting-point. The *Categories*, I think, was fascinating to philosophers in the first century BC because it was different and did not fit. Ironically enough, it may be the very familiarity of the work to us that makes it harder to see why it was such a focus of interest then.

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