
This volume contains the first English translation of Boethius’s main work on “topical” reasoning. In it, after a preliminary explanation of basic concepts and terms (Book I), Boethius sets out two systems or classifications on the topics used in dialectical reasoning: Themistius’s classification (Book II) and Cicero’s (Book III). He then shows how each of the two may be reduced to the other (Book III), and contrasts both classifications with the topics used in rhetorical reasoning (Book IV).

Much of this material will strike the non-specialist as quite foreign — and perhaps of dubious interest. To overcome this, Stump has supplemented her translation with an introduction, very ample and detailed notes and, in Part II of her book, a set of six essays: three on the changes and developments in the notion of dialectic and of a dialectical “topic” from Aristotle to Boethius (“Dialectic and Aristotle’s *Topics,*” “Dialectic and Boethius’s *De topicis differentiis,*” and “Between Aristotle and Boethius”), one on the development after Boethius (“Peter of Spain on the Topics”), and two on technical notions in Boethius’s tract itself (“Differentia and the Porphyrian Tree,” and “Differentia”). Although there is considerable cross-referencing, the six essays are for the most part self-
contained, and may be read independently of one another. (This is less true for “Peter of Spain on the Topics.”) There are also indices and a full bibliography.

Stump’s translation is based on Migne’s text in the *Patrologia latina* (Vol. 64, cols. 1173–1216), supplemented by the editions of Basel 1570 (from which the Migne text is apparently copied) and Paris 1537, and by the Orleans manuscript 267. A spot check against the Latin shows the translation to be quite faithful. I found only two small points to quibble over. At p. 44 line 37, in the phrase “as though the matter were so in all other cases too”, the suggestion of counterfactuality spoils Boethius’s point. The Latin has the present subjunctive, and should be translated “as if the matter should be so,” etc. Again, on p. 72 in lines 36–37, the English sentence is ill-formed. Perhaps a word has been omitted. In any case, it appears that Stump has read the edition’s “ordientes” ad “orientes”. I would translate the sentence, “According to this method, let us set the whole division of Cicero and Themistius side by side from the beginning, and let us,” etc.

There is one point in Stump’s introduction that I think is mistaken. On pp. 25f., she says:

For Abelard, a Topic is an inference rule that helps one find what is missing in enthymemes. Enthymemes, or “imperfect syllogisms”, are valid not formally but because of a certain
relationship between the terms. The Topic makes such inferences formally valid because it provides a rule or law founded on a certain relationship between things signified by the term, for example: Whatever the species if predicated of, the genus [of that species] is also predicated of. (*The addition is Stump’s.*)

This is confusing. An Abelardian Topic appears to be both a statement (“law”) and an inference-rule. If it is rule, formally validating certain inferences, then the inferences so validated are formally valid. But we are told in the second sentence that they are “valid not formally”. On the other hand, if the topic is a statement that, when added to the premiss and conclusion of an enthymeme, makes it formally valid, then Stump’s example will not work. The enthymeme “If it is a man, it is an animal” (Abelard’s illustration) is not made formally valid by adding the premiss Stump gives (unless there is an unusual notion of formality at play here that ought to be explained). One would also have to add the premiss “Animal is the genus of the species man.”

Except for an occasional infelicity like this, Stump’s explanatory material is very helpful and goes a long way toward illuminating the obscurities of what Boethius, and other authors on this subject, are doing. But it also reveals a disturbing sloppiness in Boethius’s tract. Too often, he appears to contradict himself, his points fail to be illustrated by the examples he gives, and in some
cases one simply does not know what he means. Stump’s notes and essay do not hide these difficulties. Where possible, she suggests interpretations that lessen the difficulty — interpretations the reader may or may not find plausible. But in many cases we are left with unresolved problems. One wonders whether Boethius saw them.

For the record, I found only three typographical errors. On p. 109, the diagram in n. 73 appears to be incomplete. In any case, it is not the full contrapositive of the diagram in n. 65 on p. 106, despite Boethius’s text and the suggestion in n. 73. Again, on p. 116 in n. 43 line 2, read ‘in’ for the second ‘is’. Finally, on p. 234 formula (1) lacks ‘(x)~’ immediately after the second arrow.

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