Ancient and Medieval Interpretations of Aristotle’s *Categories*

The idea for this journal issue sprang from a conference of the same name which took place in April, 2011 at Franciscan University of Steubenville under the joint auspices of the departments of Classics and Philosophy. The great interest which the conference elicited among scholars indicates an even greater interest in the history of the interpretation of Aristotle’s *Categories*. The papers published here, when taken together, describe the development of thought from the Middle Platonists to Duns Scotus on Aristotle’s *Categories*. What is of particular interest here is the place of continuity in the history of interpretation; the tradition of reading the *Categories* in the light of the Platonic principle of being—beginning in the second century with Plotinus, and reaching its height in the fourteenth century—which belies a harmony between Plato and Aristotle, as understood by their interpreters. Namely, the commentators come to understand that the Platonic category of Being, found in the intelligible realm, can be reached when one comes to understand the process of signifying things, as explained in Aristotle’s *Categories*. The mark of the late antique Platonist and the medieval Scholiast readings of the *Categories* is more ontological than logical.

As a prolegomena to a study on the history of interpretation of the *Categories*, Lloyd Gerson’s, “The Aristotelian Commentaries and Platonism,” provides a context for understanding the interpreters of the *Categories* with respect to the Platonic tradition. Gerson argues that the Platonists of late antiquity used Aristotle’s *Categories* in a manner much more akin to that of the medieval scholastics than of contemporary scholars. Namely, both the ancient and medieval commentators view the aim of the *Categories* as the beginning of an ascent to the intelligible world. Gerson looks to Simplicius, in particular, who shows the utility of the *Categories* for the ascent to the intelligible realm by first studying things of this realm. Simplicius, according to Gerson, shows that Aristotle recognizes the universal nature of concepts—another major theme developed in other papers in this volume.

The next five papers treat ancient interpretations of Aristotle’s *Categories*. Michael Griffin’s, “What is *aisthēton*? ‘Ordinary things’ among the Neoplatonist commentators on the *Categories*,” outlines Neoplatonic approaches to reading the *Categories*, particularly their methods of turning attention from things to the reality signified by those things. Griffin shows how the meth-
of division, or “cuts” between genera, is an important trend among the Platonists to understand things signified and the signifier. Charlene Elsby’s, “Plotinus on the Reality of the Category of Relation,” and Sarah Klitenic Wear’s, “Syrianus the Platonist on Aristotle’s Categories 8a13–b24: The Ontological Place of Skhesis in Later Platonic Metaphysics,” both treat Aristotle’s category of relation coupled with the assertion of the reality of relations by the Platonists. For the later commentators it appears that relation can function not only as a reality, but as a dynamis with a generative force for creation. Joseph Almeida’s paper, “Simplicius on Categories 1a16–17 and 1b25–27: An Examination of the Interests of Ancient and Medieval Interpreters of the Categories,” examines the place of Simplicius in the philosophical tradition of the Categories, particularly, Simplicius’s use of the Categories as a means to return to first principles. Gary Gabor caps off the section on ancient interpreters by also treating Simplicius, along with Ammonius on the Categories. Gabor, providing original translations, affirms that Ammonius treats the categories as universals and provides sophisticated attempts to justify the categorical scheme described by Aristotle. He shows how Simplicius’s derivation of Aristotle’s categories are a development from Ammonius’s account.

The second half of this issue consists of five papers on the medieval commentaries on Aristotle’s Categories. In “Platonic Elements in Albert the Great’s Commentary on the Categories,” Lloyd Newton develops Albert’s harmonist reading of Plato and Aristotle by examining Albert’s description of the transcendentals which are predicated of the categories. Gregory Doolan and Mark Roberts both discuss Aquinas’s interpretation of the Categories. Doolan’s “Aquinas on the Metaphysician’s vs. the Logician’s Categories” shows the implications of Aquinas’s views on the logician’s and metaphysician’s treatment of the categories. Aquinas says that a logical account of the categories is pedagogically prior to a metaphysical account because logic is learned before metaphysics however metaphysics is prior to logic in terms of importance because real being is prior to intentional being. In Roberts’s, “The Second Sense of Being,” Roberts considers whether the dispositio rei is the second sense of being in Aquinas. Mark Gossiaux shows how James of Viterbo’s theory of the categories casts light on his metaphysics of finite being in his article, “James of Viterbo and the Nature of the Division of the Categories.” The last article, Andrew LaZella’s, “The Simplicity of Being in Duns Scotus’s Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis and Later Works,” argues that Scotus claims being is said equivocally of the ten categories.

From this collection of ten papers, it seems that the ancient and medieval commentary tradition on Aristotle’s Categories is unified in its understanding of the role of being in Aristotle’s Categories. Namely, both traditions are, in fact, a single tradition which finds continuity between the thought of Plato and Aristotle, in part due to Aristotle’s Categories. For, Aristotle’s
Categories points to the being in the categories and things of this world which signifies being in the intelligible realm; thus, the ancient and medieval minds both see the categories as the first step in the path towards the soul’s quest for the intelligible realm.

—Joseph Almeida & Sarah Klitenic Wear, Special Guest Editors