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4. BOETHIUS ON PREDESTINATION AND FREE WILL

This argument is in fact based on an adaptation of the Aristotelian definition of knowledge: if I *know* something, then the object of my knowledge *necessarily*¹⁵⁰ is the way I know it to be, simply because that’s the way knowledge (Greek *epistēmē*, Latin *scientia*, Arabic *‘ilm*) is defined – at least in one of its many Aristotelian senses.¹⁵¹

4.2.1. The distinction between absolute and conditional necessity¹⁵²

One Aristotelian text that is important in this regard is this one from the *De interpretatione* (19a23-6):

*That what exists is when it is, and what does not exist is not when it is not, necessary.*¹⁵³

For Aristotle, there can be *epistēmē* in this strict sense – the sense, that is, in which such knowledge is always true (*APo* II, 19, 100b18) – only of universals.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the reason why knowledge is bereft of falsehood is that it is *necessary* for things to be in the way knowledge understands them to be.¹⁵⁵ This is clear, for instance, from a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VI, 3, 1139b20-25):

¹⁵⁰ As Weidemann points out (1998, 198), Boethius’ addition of the modal operator “necessarily” transforms Aristotle’s consequentiality relation of *being* into a consequentiality relation of *necessity*.

¹⁵¹ “It is impossible for that of which there is knowledge in the absolute sense to be otherwise <than it is>,” says Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* (I, 2 71b9-15).

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¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Cons.* 5.3.21: *Ea namque causa est cur mendacio scientia careat, quod se ita rem quamque habere necesse est uti eam sese habere scientia comprehendit.*

*We all suppose that what we know is not capable of being otherwise (...) therefore the object of knowledge is of necessity. Therefore it is eternal, for things that are of necessity in the unqualified sense are all eternal*¹⁵⁶; *and things that are eternal are ungenerated and imperishable.*

The reason this distinction is important is as follows: the Narrator reasons that (1) necessarily, if an event *p* will happen, then God foresees it ($N(p \rightarrow F(G, p))$); and (2) necessarily, if God foresees *p*, it will happen ($N(F(G, p) \rightarrow p)$). Note that the necessity here bears upon the entire implication: it is a *necessitas consequentiae*. It has been argued¹⁵⁷ that Boethius now makes a simple logical mistake, inferring from (1) and (2) that (3) if *p*, then necessarily God foresees *p* ($p \rightarrow NF(G, p)$), and (4) if God foresees *p*, then necessarily *p* ($F(G, p) \rightarrow Np$), where in both the latter cases the necessity bears upon the consequent (*necessitas consequentis*).

Yet it is not the case that it is necessary now that (*p*) be true, and it is also not the case that it is necessary that ($\sim p$) be true, i.e.

$$\sim(Np) \wedge \sim(N\sim p)$$

I believe this analysis is mistaken. Boethius does believe both (3) and (4) are true, but they are true only *conditionally*, where the condition is God’s knowledge. In other words, the necessity imposed by God’s knowledge of a future event is of the same kind as that which necessitates that Socrates be sitting when I know he is sitting: such conditional necessity (*kath’ hupothesein* in Greek¹⁵⁸; *secundum praecessione*m in the Latin of Chalcidius¹⁵⁹) imposes no constraint upon Socrates, but simply concerns the nature of knowledge.¹⁶⁰ As Boethius will claim, such future events can be said to be necessary with regard to God’s knowledge but free with regard to their own nature.

Вященника ἐσσην (так Иосиф Флавий воспроизводит греческими буквами библейский термин !v,x, хошен) соответствует греческий термин λόγιον, «прорицание» (ср. Септуагинту: λογεῖον).

These considerations go some way toward explaining the key point of how God can know future events, which are by their nature indeterminate, in a determinate way. The reason why this seems counter-intuitive to us is

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