

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 *epistêmê*, 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 *epistêmê* 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).

152 Cf. Obertello 1989, 95ff.; Weidemann 1998; Bechtle 2006, 274f.

153 Το μεν ούν εἶναι το ον ὅταν η, και το μη ον μη εἶναι ὅταν μη η, ἀνάγκη. Cf. Frede 1972.

154 Cf. *Metaph.* K 1, 1059b26; 2, 1060b20; B 6, 1003a15; M 9, 1086b5.10; 1086b 33; *Anal. pr.* 31 87b33, *De an.* 2.5417b23; *EN* 7, 6, 1140b31; 1180b15. The Narrator begins by speaking not of knowledge but of opinion, only to slip into talking about knowledge by virtue of the (Platonic!) equivalence true opinion = knowledge.

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.*

cation: 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 ($p \longrightarrow NF(G, p)$), and (4) if God foresees p, then necessarily p ($F(G, p) \longrightarrow Np$), 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 praecessionem* 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 ἐσθήν (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

156 Cf. *De Caelo* I, 12, 281a28-282a4.

157 Graeser 1992; Marenbon 2003a, 533ff.

158 Cf. Eustratius, *In EN VI*, p. 293, 1-2 Heylbut (CAG 20): ὡς εἶναι τὰ ἀπλῶς ἐξ ἀνάγκης πάντα αἰδία. ἀπλῶς δὲ λέγομεν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὅσα μὴ καθ’ ὑπόθεσιν ἐξ ἀνάγκης, οἷον τὸ καθῆσθαι τινα ἔστ’ ἂν κάθηται ὁ καθημένος, ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι λέγομεν τὸ καθῆσθαι αὐτόν, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ ἀπλῶς ἀλλ’ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως (“thus, all things that are simply by necessity are perpetual [*aidia*]. We call ‘simply by necessity’ whatever is not hypothetically (*kath’ hupothesein*) by necessity: for instance, the fact of sitting: as long as the seated person is sitting, we say that the fact that he is sitting is necessary, yet not simply but by hypothesis (*ex hupotheseôs*)”).

159 Chalcidius, *In Tim.*, p. 186, 15 Waszink.

160 In the words of Bächli 2001, it is an “epistemological necessity”.