

## Aristotle's *Categories* in the Greek and Latin Medieval Exegetical Tradition.

### The case of the Argument for the Non-Simultaneity of Relatives.

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Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to understand something they say, they always just repeat the same signal.

Plato<sup>1</sup>

No Latin person can understand correctly the wisdom either of Holy Scripture or of Philosophy unless he understands the languages from which Scripture and Philosophy were translated. .... It is impossible for the peculiarities of one language to be preserved in another.

Roger Bacon<sup>2</sup>

As I was translating St. Anselm's *Proslogion* (1078) into Modern Greek and consulting translations into other languages, I noticed an interesting disagreement about how to translate the title —and consequently about how to interpret the content— of chapter 6: "Quomodo (Deus) sit *sensibilis*, cum corpus non sit". What does *sensibilis* mean? In some translations (e.g. in Ward's 1973, 247) the title of chapter 6 is rendered "How *he* (God) *can be perceived* though he is not a body"; in others (e.g. in Charlesworth's 1965, 121) "How *He* (God) *is perceptive* although He is not a body" - while some others (e.g. that of Corbin 1986, 251) maintain the ambiguity of the original text: "Comment *est-il*

1. Plato, *Phaedrus* 275D: Δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τοῦτ' ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁμοιον ζωγραφία. Καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἔκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ' ἀνέρῃ τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾷ. Ταῦτόν δὲ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἂν ὥς τι φρονοῦντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἐν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτόν αἰεῖ.

2. Roger Bacon, *Opus majus* 3,1 (1962, 360,14-15 and 361, 2-5): "Nullus Latinus sapientiam sacrae scripturae et philosophiae poterit ut oportet intelligere, nisi intelligat linguas a quibus sunt translatae [...] Impossibile est quod proprietates unius linguae servetur in alia".

(*Dieu*) *sensible*, bien qu'il n'est pas un corps". The problem emerging here is clear: the term *sensibilis* may refer either to the subject or to the object of the *sensus*. Which sense did Anselm intend?

Let us first examine Anselm's text. In chapters 5-26 of *Proslogion* Anselm poses and tries to solve several interconnected problems related to the exact meaning, logical consistency, and fair verbal denotation of the fundamental Christian dogmas *de Deo uno*. In chapter 6, after indicating briefly the problems to be discussed in chapters 6-11, he tackles the problem whether it is possible for God to be *sensibilis* although He is not a body. This is one of the earliest medieval instances of a dialectic discussion between faith and an ancient authority (in this case Aristotle, as we shall see) about an article of faith. Centuries before Anselm, Augustine, the leading theological authority of the Latin world, had written: "oportet ut eum (Deum) ... cuncta sentire atque intelligere ...fateamur" ("we must profess that he [God] perceives and comprehends everything"; *De Trinitate* 15,4,6, P.L. 42, 1061). Anselm's concessive clause ("although He is not a body": Schmitt, vol. I, 104,19,21,24-25, and 105,4-5), the solution he proposes (*op. cit.*, 105,1-6), and the whole tenor of the chapter, all make it perfectly clear that by *sensibilis* Anselm means "being capable of perceiving". In other words, he uses this term to denote the subject of the process of sensation. Now, the use of *sensibilis* to denote sometimes the object, at other times the subject of sensation, was well-established in Anselm's days, as the word had traditionally been used to render both the Greek *αἰσθητός*, i.e. "object of the senses", and *αἰσθητικός*, i.e. "(animated) subject of the senses". For the latter meaning of the Latin word, see, e.g., Boethius, *De topicis differentiis* 3,2,3 (Nikitas 1990: 50.14-15) on the definition of animal: *animal est substantia animata sensibilis*, or the eleventh-century translation of Nemesisius' *Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου* (*On Human Nature*) by Alfano of Salerno, 8,5; 8,9; 11,2-3 (Burkhard 1917: 82,5-6; 82,22-24; 86,20 - 87,3, and *passim*). Anselm had no reason to modify this semantic field of Latin; so, in some passages of his oeuvre the term *sensibilis* refers to the subject (e.g. Schmitt 1946: 49,25-26; 50,4; 104,19-24, and 105, 5), while in some others it refers to the object of the senses (*op. cit.*, 24,31 and 25, 1-3 & 8). However, such homonymy, in conjunction with the impossibility for a medieval thinker to have direct recourse to the original Greek text, could, and —it seems— occasionally did cause confusion as regards the correct understanding of

translated texts in which *sensibilis* rendered αἰσθητός. I think that is what happened in the case of Anselm's reading of a passage from the Aristotelian *Categories* in Boethius' translation.

### The tacit borrowing.

Chapter 6 of *Proslogion* (Schmitt 1946: 104, 23-24) includes a phrase which, as far as I know, has not as yet been recognised as a tacit quotation of *Categories* 7, 7b38-39: αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ σῶμα καὶ ἐν σῶματι εἶσιν — in Boethius' translation, from which Anselm cites: *Sensus enim circa corpus et in corpore sunt*.<sup>1</sup> Anselm quotes *verbatim*, with the insignificant exception that he substitutes *quoniam* for *cum*. The occurrence of such a loan is by no means surprising. It is a well-known fact that the Anselmian corpus includes many quotations from, or allusions to, Boethius' translations of *Categories* and *Peri hermeneias*.<sup>2</sup> Besides, that the *Categories* is the underlying text-source of *Proslogion* 6 seems indicated not only by the way the problem is formulated but also by the solution proposed by Anselm in order to reconcile God's incorporeality with His sensibility (*op. cit.*, 105, 1-6): the medieval *philosophus Christi* classifies *sentire* as a species of the generic notion *cognoscere*,<sup>3</sup> in order to conclude from this subordination that the predication of the term *sensibilis* of God is metaphorical — in this context it actually means *cognoscens*:

Nam si sola corporea sunt sensibilia, *quoniam sensus circa corpus et in corpore sunt*: quomodo es sensibilis, cum non sis corpus sed summus spiritus, qui corpore melior est? Sed si sentire non nisi cognoscere aut non nisi ad cognoscendum est — qui enim sentit cognoscit secundum sensuum proprietatem, ut per visum colores, per gustum sapes —: non inconvenienter dicitur aliquo modo sentire, quidquid aliquo modo cognoscit. Ergo domine, quamvis non sis

1. In *Categorias* Aristotelis, Book II, P.L. 64: 231D

2. For parallel passages between Anselm's *De grammatico*, *Monologion*, *Proslogion* and *Cur Deus homo*, and Boethius' works and translations, see Schmitt's edition of Anselm's works.

3. This relation between *sentire* and *cognoscere* (in Aristotle's Greek: αἰσθάνεσθαι and γινώσκειν) was already established in the semantic fields of the two ancient classic languages, and had already been noticed by Aristotle with respect to Greek (*De anima* 3,3, 427a 19-27). This relation survives in many modern European languages.

corpus, vere tamen eo modo summe sensibilis es, quo summe omnia cognoscis, non quo animal corporeo sensu cognoscit.

For if only corporeal things are capable of perception, since senses have to do with a body and are in a body, how are You perceptive, since You are not a body but the supreme spirit who is better than body? But if perceiving is nothing else than knowing, or if it has no other purpose than knowledge — for he who perceives knows in the way proper to each sense, as, e.g., colours are known through sight and flavours through taste —, one can say not inappropriately that whatever in any way knows also in some way perceives. So it is, Lord, that although You are not a body You are supremely perceptive, in the sense that You know supremely all things and not in the sense in which an animal knows through a bodily sense. [My translation.]

This logical ordering of the notions in *Proslogion* 6 (sense as a species of the genus of knowledge) happens to correspond to the serial (and, the reader may surmise: logical) order of the same notions in Aristotle's *Categories* 7b23-8a12:

7b23-35: ἐπιστήμη — scientia — knowledge

7b35-8a12: αἴσθησις — sensus — sense.

Now, the ambiguity of the term *sensibilis*, plus the suspicion of a real possibility of a double reading of Aristotle's text at 7b35-8a6, raised a two-fold question in my mind: could it be that by ἐν σώματι Aristotle did not mean the subject but the object of animal sensation? And if this can be argued with some plausibility, aren't we then justified in inferring from Anselm's use of the Aristotelian passage 7b38-39 that he misunderstood, or at least misused it, in a dialectical attempt to harmonize an article of the Christian doctrine *de Deo uno* with generally accepted Aristotelian philosophical doctrines? So, I want first to examine the meaning of Aristotle's passage, and second to critically examine the validity of the Anselmian reading of the *Categories*. Evidently, the first problem is more important than the second, and enjoys absolute autonomy from it. Still, I intend to discuss both problems, as the second will permit us to make some comments on Anselm's relation to the Greek philosophical literature.

### The two possible interpretations.

The problem of the relationship of the subject to the object of senses is discussed by Aristotle in *Categories* ch. 7, 7b35 - 8a12, in the context

of the category of "relatives", τὰ πρὸς τι. The couple "sense-sensible" (αἴσθησις-αἰσθητόν) is cited and commented on as an example of relatives, and more specifically as an example of such relatives one of which (in this case: sensible) is "prior" (πρότερον) to the other (in this case: sense). It is in this context the phrase under discussion, αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ σῶμα καὶ ἐν σώματί εἰσιν, appears.

Now, before trying to develop my own view on the possible meaning of ἐν σώματι, I shall present the comments of the Late Ancient Greek and Latin commentators on *Categories* 7.

i) Philoponus (c. 490-570); C[ommentaria in] A[ristotelem] G[raeca] XIII,1, 1898, 121,22 - 122,6): Τὸ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητὸν συναναιρεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν, ἡ δὲ αἴσθησις τὸ αἰσθητὸν οὐ συναναιρεῖ· εἰ γὰρ ἡ αἴσθησις ἐν ζῳῳ, τὸ δὲ ζῶον ἔμψυχον σῶμα, πᾶν δὲ σῶμα αἰσθητόν, ἀνάγκη αἰσθητοῦ ἀναιρουμένου συναναιρεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ σῶμα, σώματος δὲ ἀναιρεθέντος μὴδὲ ἔμψυχον εἶναι, ἔμψυχου δὲ μὴ ὄντος μὴδὲ ζῶον εἶναι, ζῶου δὲ ἀναιρεθέντος μὴδὲ αἴσθησιν εἶναι, ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ζῳοῖς ἡ αἴσθησις τὸ εἶναι ἔχει. Αἰσθητοῦ μὲν οὖν ἀναιρεθέντος οὐδὲ αἴσθησις ἔσται, ὥς ἐδείξαμεν, διότι π ᾶ σ α α ἴ σ θ η σ ι ς ἐ ν σ ῶ μ α τ ι ἔ χ ε ι τ ὸ ε ἶ ν α ι καὶ περὶ μόνον αὐτὸ θεωρεῖται· τὰ γὰρ ἀσώματα ἐκπέφηνγε πᾶσαν αἴσθησιν, μήτε αὐτὰ αἰσθήσει ὑποπίπτοντα μήτε δεκτικὰ ὄντα αἰσθήσεως. Οὐ μὴν γε καὶ ἀντιστρέφει· οὐ γὰρ ἀναιρεθείσης αἰσθήσεως ἀναιρεῖται καὶ τὸ αἰσθητόν· τί δὴ ποτε; Ἐπειδὴ πᾶν ζῶον ἔμψυχον, πᾶν δὲ ἔμψυχον σῶμα, οὐ πᾶν δὲ σῶμα ἤδη καὶ ἔμψυχον ζῶον, πᾶν δὲ σῶμα αἰσθητόν, ὥστε καὶ ζῶου ἀναιρεθέντος οὐδὲν κωλύει πλείονα ἄλλα εἶναι, οἷον πῦρ γῆν ὕδωρ ἀέρα γλυκὺ πικρὸν καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα.

The perceptible, if destroyed, destroys perception, too, while perception, when destroyed, does not destroy the perceptible: for, if perception is in animal, and animal is animated body, and every body is perceptible, it is a necessity that: if the perceptible is destroyed, the body should also be destroyed; and if the body has been destroyed, the animated no longer exists; and if the animated does not exist, neither does the animal; and that if animal has been destroyed, perception no longer exists; for perception has its being in the animals. So: if the perceptible has been destroyed, perception, as we have just shown, ceases to exist, *because every perception has its being in a body and only in relation to it can one see it*; for incorporeal things have nothing to do with perception, since they neither fall into the realm of perception nor can have perception as a property. The reverse, however, is not true; for, it is not the case that if perception has been destroyed, the perceptible is destroyed. Why? Because every animal is animated, every animated (thing) is a

body, but it is not true that every body is also animated and animal, but that every body is perceptible; so, even if the animal has been destroyed, nothing prevents that many other things may be, e.g. fire, earth, water, air, sweet, bitter and the like.

We see that Philoponus (or perhaps his teacher Ammonius) transcribes Aristotle's argument for the priority of the perceptible to perception into an argument that presupposes an arrangement of the notions of "perception", "animal", "body" and "perceptible" as four *notiones subordinatae*, in a gradually expanding climax, so that he can draw from this (logically consistent, of course) arrangement the force of the more general notion to destroy the less general one and consequently the natural priority of the more general to the less general. It is evident that for this argument it is of great importance that the interpretation of the phrase ἐν σώματι be "in animal body", because otherwise the subordination of "perception" to "animal" would be legitimate only from a logical point of view, while it would lack support in Aristotle's text, and so it could not constitute a legitimate interpretation of the passage under discussion.

ii) Simplicius (*floruit* c. 515-545; CAG VIII, 1907, 193, 3-16):

... πρῶτόν ἐστιν τὸ αἰσθητὸν τῆς αἰσθήσεως, διότι συναναιρεῖ μὲν, οὐ συναναιρεῖται δέ. Εἰ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα τῶν αἰσθητῶν τί ἐστιν, τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἀναιρεθέντος ἀνήρηται τὸ σῶμα, σώματος δὲ ἀναιρεθέντος ἀνήρηται ἡ αἴσθησις· αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ σῶμα καὶ ἐν σώματι, ὡς φησιν· σωματικαὶ γάρ εἰσιν γνώσεις αἱ αἰσθήσεις. Ἡ δὲ αἴσθησις ἀναιρεθεῖσα τὸ αἰσθητὸν οὐ συναναιρεῖ· ἀναιρεθέντος γὰρ πάλιν καθ' ὑπόθεσιν τοῦ ζῶου ἀναιρεῖται καὶ ἡ αἴσθησις (ζῶον γὰρ ἴδιον καὶ ἐν ζῷῳ ἡ αἴσθησις), αἰσθητὰ δὲ εἶναι οὐ κωλύεται τὰ ἀπλὰ σώματα, ἐξ ὧν τὸ ζῷον. Εἶτα ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ τοῦ ἐπιστητοῦ αὐτόθεν ἐδείκνυτο πρότερον εἶναι τὸ ἐπιστητὸν καὶ οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ τοῦ συναναιρεῖν μὲν μὴ συναναιρεῖσθαι δέ, οὕτως καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως· καὶ γὰρ ἡ μὲν αἴσθησις ἅμα τῷ αἰσθητικῷ ἐστιν, τουτέστιν τῷ ζῷῳ, τὸ δὲ αἰσθητὸν προϋπάρχει, ὥσπερ τὰ ἀπλὰ σώματα, ἀφ' ὧν τὸ ζῷον, προϋπάρχει πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι τὸ αἰσθητικόν.

...the perceptible is first in relation to perception, because its destruction leads to the destruction of the other, too, while the reverse is not true. For, if the body is a particular case of perceptible things, the destruction of the perceptible leads to the destruction of the body, and the destruction of the body leads to the destruction of the perception; for perceptions are to do with body and are in body, as he [Aristotle] says; for perceptions are corporeal knowledges. But if perception is destroyed, it does not destroy the

perceptible; if, again, we suppose that the animal has been destroyed, perception is destroyed, too (for perception is an exclusively animal property and exists in an animal), but the simple bodies of which the animal is made up are not prevented from being perceptible. Besides, just as it has been shown from the same premisses in the case of [the relatives of] knowledge and the knowable that the knowable is prior [to knowledge] — and the proof was based not only on the ground that the knowable, if it has been destroyed, destroys also, while the reverse is not true —, the same thing is true in the case of perception and the perceptible. For perception exists at the same time as the capable-of-perceiving, i.e. the animal, while the perceptible preexists — as e.g. the simple bodies of which the animal is made up naturally preexist before the capable-of-perceiving comes to be.

As one can easily see, Simplicius' comment is in full accordance with Ammonius' (or Philoponus') view: *ἐν σώματι* means "in the animal body" as the subject of sense knowledge ("for perceptions are bodily knowledges").

iii) Olympiodorus (*floruit* c. 535; CAG XII,1, 1902, 109, 4-12):

... οὐχ ἅμα εἰσὶν ἡ τε ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὸ ἐπιστητόν. Ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ζῶον ἀναιρούμενον τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀναιρεῖ, οὐ μέντοι γε καὶ τὸ αἰσθητόν. Εἰ οὖν τὸ ζῶον μόνην τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀναιρεῖ, δῆλον ὅτι πρότερον τὸ αἰσθητόν τῆς αἰσθήσεως, καὶ εὗρεθήσεται μὴ ἅμα τὰ πρὸς τι. Ἄλλως τε δὲ τὸ ἀναιροῦν τὸ καθολικώτερον, ἐκεῖνο πρότερόν ἐστι. Τὸ μὲν οὖν αἰσθητόν ἀναιρεῖ τὸ σῶμα καθολικώτερον ὄν, τὸ δὲ ζῶον τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀναιρεῖ, οὐ μέντοι γε καὶ τὸ σῶμα. Εἰ οὖν τὸ σῶμα καθολικώτερόν ἐστιν τῆς αἰσθήσεως, ἀναιρεῖ δὲ τὸ σῶμα τὸ αἰσθητόν, τοῦτ' ἐστὶ τὸ καθολικώτερον, πρότερον ἄρα τὸ αἰσθητόν ὡς τὸ αἰσθητικὸν ἀναιροῦν.

Knowledge and the knowable are not simultaneous. This is also true in the case of perception; for animal, if it is destroyed, does destroy perception, but does not, of course, destroy the perceptible. If, then, animal destroys perception only, it is evident that the perceptible is prior to perception — and the conclusion will be that the relatives are not simultaneous. Besides, that which destroys the more universal is prior, and so it is that the perceptible destroys body, since it is more universal, while animal destroys perception but it by no means destroys body. So, if body is more universal than perception, and if, also, body is destroyed by the perceptible, i.e. by the

more universal, it follows that the perceptible, by virtue of its destroying that-which-is-capable-of-perception, is prior.

It is evident that Olympiodorus follows in essence Philoponus'-Ammonius' view, arranging the notions of "perception", "animal", "body" and "perceptible" as four *notiones subordinatae* in a gradually expanding climax, drawing from this arrangement the same conclusion as Philoponus (or Ammonius) about the force of the more general to destroy the less general, and linking this force with the notion of "priority".<sup>1</sup>

iv) Elias (*floruit* c. 550; CAG XVIII,1, 1900, 214, 17-26):

Αἰσθητοῦ ὄντος σῶμα ἔστι (τὸ γὰρ αἰσθητὸν ἢ σῶμα ἢ ἐν σώματι), σώματος δὲ ὄντος αἴσθησις ἔστι (δεῖται γὰρ ἡ αἴσθησις τοῦ σώματος, καὶ ἵνα ὑποστῇ καὶ ἵνα ἐνεργήσῃ), αἰσθητοῦ ἄρα ὄντος αἴσθησις ἔστι· πρότερον οὖν τὸ αἰσθητὸν φύσει. Ἀλλὰ καὶ χρόνῳ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητὸν ἀναιρεθὲν συναναιρεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν· αἰσθητοῦ γὰρ ἀναιρεθέντος ἀνήρηται καὶ τὸ σῶμα (τῶν γὰρ αἰσθητῶν καὶ τὸ σῶμα), σώματος δὲ μὴ ὄντος καὶ αἴσθησις ἀναιρεῖται (ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ ἡ αἴσθησις)· αἰσθητοῦ ἄρα ἀναιρεθέντος ἀνήρηται καὶ ἡ αἴσθησις. Ἡ δὲ αἴσθησις τὸ αἰσθητὸν οὐ συναναιρεῖ· ζῶον γὰρ ἀναιρεθέντος αἴσθησις μὲν ἀναιρεῖται, τὸ δὲ αἰσθητὸν ἔσται, τοῦτ' ἔστι τὰ στοιχεῖα ἐξ ὧν τὸ ζῶον.

If there is a perceptible, a body does exist (for the perceptible is either a body or in a body); and if a body does exist, perception does exist, too (for perception needs a body in order both to exist and to have an object to perceive); so, if there is something perceptible, perception exists; and from this it follows that the perceptible is naturally prior [to perception]. The same, however, is true with regard to time; for, on the one hand, if the perceptible is destroyed, perception is destroyed, too; for if the perceptible is destroyed, body is destroyed, too (because body belongs to perceptible things), while if body does not exist, perception is destroyed, too (for perception is in a body and is to do with a body); if, then, the perceptible has been destroyed, perception is destroyed, too. On the other hand perception, if it is destroyed, does not destroy the perceptible; for if animal has been destroyed, it is true that perception is destroyed, too, but the perceptible will nevertheless continue to exist — i.e. the component elements from which the animal is made up.

1. This ontological priority of the more general to the less general as well as to particular is a crucial point not only of the exegetical positions but also of the ontology of the Greek Neoplatonic commentators cited here (see e.g. Benakis 1978-79, 318 ff.).



Elias is the last ring in the chain of the followers of Philoponus' (or Ammonius') original exegetical position.

v) I deliberately left Boethius (c.480-425/6; *In Aristotelis Categorias*, II, P.L. 64, 232ABC) last, because only he seems to propose a different view about the meaning of the phrase *ἐν σώματι*: Neque enim esse poterit sensus, cum quod possit sentire non invenit. Quod si sensus omnino depereat, sensibile permanebit; et hoc [Aristoteles] evidentibus firmat exemplis. Nam cum ea quae sunt in rebus vel incorporea sint, vel certe corporea, et quidquid ad corporis materiam referri potest, hoc sensuum varietati subiaceat, quidquid ad incorporea, intellectus ratione et speculatione teneatur. Cum sit sensus omnis in corpore, si corpus intereat, cum omnino corpus non sit, quoniam quae sunt incorporea sentiri non possunt et quae sentiri poterant interempta sunt, omnino sensus evertitur. Sed si sensus auferatur, sensibilia permanebunt; et quoniam sensus animalium effectivus est, aequa est utrorumque perditio; sive enim sustuleris animal, sensus peribit, sive sensus evertantur, animalia quoque sublata sunt. Sed eversis atque interemptis animalibus cum propriis sensibus, permanent corpora quae anima non utuntur, quod si sublatis animalibus sensibusque deperditis, corpora inanimata subsistunt, cum corpora sint quae sentiri possunt, animalia quae sentire valeant si interempta sint, manente sensibili sensus eversus est.

For it will be impossible for perception to exist, when it finds nothing to perceive. If perception disappears entirely, the perceptible will remain; and he [Aristotle] confirms this with some clear examples. Since, namely, these which are in things are either incorporeal or, certainly, corporeal, and since everything which can be referred to the matter of a body is subjected to the various senses, everything which can be referred to the incorporeal things is grasped by means of the intellect's reasoning and speculation. Since every sense is *in corpore*, if the body has been destroyed, then: for the reason that the body will be then absolutely non-existent, and as it is generally impossible for the entities which are incorporeal to be perceived, and at the same time the entities which were before apt to be perceived will be then destroyed, sense will be altogether deleted. But if sense is destroyed, the perceptible things will remain in existence; and as the existence of the sense implies the existence of animals, the loss will concern both of them; for, in the case you destroy animal, the result will be the disappearance of senses, too; and similarly, in the reverse case that someone destroys the senses, the result will be the disappearance of the animals, too. But in the case that we delete and destroy the animals with their sensitive properties, the bodies lacking soul will nevertheless remain in existence.

And this happens because: if in the case that we have removed the animals and destroyed the senses, the inanimated bodies will nevertheless exist (since by "bodies" are meant the things which can be perceived and by "animals" the things which have the ability to perceive), if these [i.e. the animals] have been destroyed, sense will indeed disappear, while perceptible will nevertheless remain in existence.<sup>1</sup>

I left the ambiguous phrase *in corpore* untranslated, in order that it be evident that Boethius' version of the Aristotelian argument cannot be formally correct unless *in corpore* means "in reference to a body", i.e. unless it refers to the object of animal senses. So I think that we are justified in inferring that Boethius sees a hendiadys in the Aristotelian phrase *περὶ σῶμα καὶ ἐν σώματι*.

To sum up: the large majority of the commentators agree that the denotatum of the phrase *ἐν σώματι* is the animal as a perceiving being or the perceptive bodies or the possessor and subject of the senses. The only dissenting voice is the interpretation proposed by Boethius, who construes *σῶμα* as always referring to the object of the animal senses. What I wish to do now is: i) to advance some arguments in favour of Boethius' interpretation, and ii) to suggest an interpretation of the ambiguous passage that agrees with Boethius' but is worked out in more detail.

I readily admit that the first interpretation that would come to one's mind is the one adopted by the majority of the commentators cited, i.e. that *ἐν σώματι* refers to the perceiving bodies of animals. It has on its side the weight of important arguments such as: i) the literal-grammatical meaning of the preposition *ἐν* ("in") could hardly be construed as meaning "in relation to", and ii) the evident textual contrast between the prepositional phrases *περὶ σῶμα* and *ἐν σώματι* leaves no room for a hypothesis that they were meant to signify one and the same thing, i.e. the object of the senses; this would be a mere pleonasm. I have no problem in admitting the premisses of these arguments; but I deny the legitimacy of moving to the conclusion that it is impossible for

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1. As H. Chadwick (1992, 259) remarks, there is no good edition of Boethius' commentary on *Categories*, and the Migne text that I use suffers from many defects. So, until a critical edition appears, we must be cautious in our interpretations.

ἐν σώματι to mean an object of the senses. So I now have to present my own arguments in defense of the interpretative view just stated, after making a necessary preliminary remark: I do not think that either these or any other supporting or counter-arguments about the meaning of the phrase ἐν σώματι are — or could ever be — conclusive; their value consists only in proving that, whichever interpretation we adopt, we are not justified in feeling certain that we have chosen the right one.

### In defense of Boethius' position.

My first argument is drawn from the logical context of the phrase under discussion: if we construe this ambiguous Aristotelian sentence (7b38-39) as meaning that the senses concern a body perceived and that they take place in a body, the phrase καὶ ἐν σώματι seems logically useless — if not an obstacle — in the development of Aristotle's ad locum argument, since it displaces the crux of the issue from the dominant axis of the object to the complementary (and only implicitly present) and irrelevant axis of the subject of the senses — this latter axis is commented on only at 8a6-12 in order that a second argument for the priority of perceptible to perception be constructed. This can be clearly seen if we proceed to a logical analysis of the *Categories* 7, 7b35-8a12. At this point let me make a preliminary remark similar to the other already made above: I do not pretend that the following logical analysis is the only possible and consequently a conclusive one; what I claim is that it is a possible and perhaps likely one. My idea is simple: if we arrange the text logically in such a manner that we can be certain to a degree about the meaning of all its phrases except the ambiguous ἐν σώματι, it will then be easy to select a meaning for it which can fit its logical context. To enable the reader to check for himself the degree of validity of Boethius' interpretation, I thought advisable to translate the ambiguous phrase in accordance with Boethius' view. So:

In *Categories* 7b35-8a12 Aristotle argues for the position that "perceptible" αἰσθητόν is "prior", πρότερον to animal "perception" or "sense" (αἴσθησις); and proceeds by advancing two arguments for it.

*Demonstrandum:* Perceptible is prior to perception (7b36).

*First argument* (7b36-8a6):

- (1) If we destroy the perceptible, perception is destroyed, too (7b36-37).
- (2) If we destroy the perception, perceptible is not destroyed (7b37-38).

(1) & (2)  $\Rightarrow$  (3): perceptible is prior to perception. QED.

*Proof of (1) (7b38-8a3)*

(1.1) Perceptions always have to do with a perceptible [this is an objective implicit consequence of their being a pair of relatives, as also of their being discussed by Aristotle in chapter 7: see the definition of "relatives" in 7, 6a36-37 and *passim*].

(1.2) Perceptions have to do with body and with its accompanying embodied qualities (7b38-39). An extended form of this crucial proposition could be: αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰ ἐν σῶματί εἰσιν ("for senses have to do with bodies and their embodied qualities"). The style of the whole passage is so elliptic that one cannot reject *a priori* such an extension of the form and the meaning of the sentence. We may be dealing with a double ellipsis, the omission of the definite article τὸ from the first phrase περὶ σῶμα having led to an analogical omission of an only implicitly present definite article τὰ from the second phrase ἐν σῶματι.

(1.3) Body belongs to perceptible things [i.e. bodies constitute one of the groups of perceptible things; cf. 8a5-6, where other groups of perceptible things are enumerated, too] (8a1).

(1.3)  $\Rightarrow$  (1.4) If we destroy the perceptible, the body [as a part of the whole of the perceptible] will be destroyed, too (7b39-8a1).

(1.1) & (1.2) & (1.4)  $\Rightarrow$  (1.5) If we destroy the body [because (1.2) body together with its qualities constitute the whole of the perceptible things], perception will be destroyed, too [since (1.1) there will be no object of perception] (8a1-2).

(1.1) & (1.2) & (1.5)  $\Rightarrow$  (1) If we destroy the perceptible, perception is destroyed, too. QED.

*Proof of (2) (8a3)*

(2.1) Perception exists in animals [an implicit assumption and a classical Aristotelian thesis.]<sup>1</sup>

(2.2) If we destroy the animal, perception will be destroyed, too.

(2.3) If we destroy the animal, perceptible will continue to exist.

1. See the explicit or implicit Aristotelian definitions of animal (ζῷον) in: *De sensu et sensibilibus* 1, 436b10-12; *De somno et vigilia* 1, 454b24; *De juventute* 1, 467b24-25 & 4, 469b4; *De anima* 2,12, 424a32-33 & 3,12, 434a 30.

(2.1) & (2.3)  $\Rightarrow$  (2) If we destroy perception, perceptible will continue to exist. QED.

From these two *demonstrata* Aristotle infers the validity of his position about the priority of perceptible to perception, and so his first argument has come full circle. Let us note here that by such an interpretation of *ἐν σώματι* we avoid the problem of a presence of an annoying pleonasm in the sentence containing this phrase, since on this interpretation "body" in the phrase *περὶ σῶμα* is construed as identical with the "primary substance" *οὐσία πρώτη*, while "body" in the phrase *ἐν σώματι* is taken to refer to the qualities of the primary substances. This distinction is absolutely legitimately drawn and used for exegetical purposes, since it is clearly contained at 8a5-6.

### *Second argument (8a6-12)*

(1) Animal and perception come into existence at the same time (8a7-8).

(2) Every animal is a perceptive being [an implicit Aristotelian commonplace.]<sup>1</sup>

(1) & (2)  $\Rightarrow$  (3) Perception comes into existence at the same time as the perceptive being (8a6-7).

(4) Every perceptive being is composed of the [four] natural elements [a commonplace of the ancient Greek physiology].

(5) The components are always prior to the composed being [an implicitly used truism].

(4) & (5)  $\Rightarrow$  (6) The [four] natural elements of which every perceptive being is composed are prior to the perceptive beings.

(7) Every perceptible thing is composed of the [four] natural elements [a commonplace of the dominant stream of Greek ancient sublunar cosmology].

(6) & (7)  $\Rightarrow$  (8) Perceptible exists even before the perceptive being [an implicit consequence].

(3) & (8)  $\Rightarrow$  (9) Perceptible exists even before perception exists (8a8-9).

(9)  $\Rightarrow$  (10) Perceptible would seem to be prior to perception (8a11-12). QED.

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1. Cf. preceding note.

The difference between the analysis suggested above and Philoponus' (Ammonius') transcription of Aristotle's argumentation can be also seen in regard to the meaning which is ascribed by each of the two interpretations to the term "body" (σῶμα) in the passage 7b38-8a6. Philoponus'-Ammonius' analysis implicitly refers to "body" in the light of Aristotle's general definition of body as τὸ ἐπιπέδοις ὠρισμένον or τὸ τριχῇ διαιρετὸν κατὰ τὸ ποσόν ("that which is bounded by surfaces" or "that which is quantitatively divisible in three dimensions"),<sup>1</sup> and consequently includes not only inanimate but also animate terrestrial things, i.e. animals, in the term, while in the analysis just presented "body" means only inanimate beings, i.e. only the objects of the senses. So, the degree of legitimacy of each of the two views can be tested by testing the degree of legitimacy of their corresponding interpretations of the term "body". One can in principle easily admit that "body" in the Aristotelian corpus means not only inanimate things, i.e. the object of the senses, but also the animated bodies of animals; it is, however, important to note that throughout the text of *Categories* "body" is never used with the latter meaning, except, perhaps, in the passage we are now examining — in my opinion, most likely as a consequence of the fact that, in this work, Aristotle is concerned either with the language or with the things as they are denoted by language,<sup>2</sup> but in no case with either the both intelligent and sensitive or only sensitive subjects (i.e. the rational and irrational animals respectively) and the mental or physiological processes taking place in them during thought or sensation.<sup>3</sup> In all its uses in the whole text, even in cases in which the word denotes animal bodies, "body" is construed either as the object of sensation or as the subject of a predication which results from it being perceived by an animal perceiving (αἰσθητικόν) being. Is it, then, plausible to suppose that the only terminological exception is to be found in the passage under discussion?

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1. See the explicit or implicit Aristotelian definitions of "body", σῶμα, in *Physics* 3,5, 204b5-6; *Metaphysics* 3,5,3, 1002a4-7; 5,6,19, 1016b27-28; 7,2,2, 1028b15-16; 11,10,6, 1066b23-24; *De anima* 2,11, 423a 22-23.
  2. This is one of the most controversial points through the centuries, among both ancient and modern commentators on the *Categories*. I do not intend to touch on it here.
  3. For a different approach to "animal" from the point of view of its possibility to be perceived, cf. e.g. *Metaphysics* 7,11,9, 1036b28-30.

Moreover, the plausibility of such a hypothesis is drastically diminished if we consider that it is in this very passage that we read the sentence (8a1): *τῶν γὰρ αἰσθητῶν τὸ σῶμα* ("for body belongs to the perceptible things"). So, one can at least doubt the probability of this hypothesis.

### The Anselmian use of *Categories* 7b38-39.

As we have already noticed, Anselm construes the phrase *in corpore* as referring to the bodily dimension of a sensitive subject, i.e. as referring to the animated body of either a rational or an irrational being. And it was according to this interpretation that Anselm used the term *sensibilis* as meaning "capable of perception" and consequently judged suitable for predication of God. So Anselm's interpretation of the Aristotelian passage coincides with the dominant view among Aristotle's interpreters.

Yet, in the case of Anselm's agreement with the dominant interpretation of the passage under discussion, there is an evident peculiarity: Anselm had read Aristotle's *Categories* in Boethius' version, and we know with certainty that he had read Boethius' commentary, too.<sup>1</sup> Isn't it, therefore, surprising that he did not adopt the exegetical view of the great teacher of logic of the early Middle Ages? One could legitimately give the following answer to this question: Historical experience does not encourage looking at Anselm as if he were a good modern writer dominated by a sense either of objective philological responsibility or of subjective fear lest a reader check his work (or by both). Such sensitivities seem to have been infrequent during the Middle Ages in the West. But in the case of Anselm's use of *Categories* 7b38-39 there is one more indicator of lack of high terminological sensitivity. As we have already noticed, the Latin term *sensibilis* was used to render *αἰσθητός* as well as *αἰσθητικός*. Yet, Aristotle himself throughout the *Categories*, and also Boethius in his translation and commentary, are consistently terminologically univocal: *αἰσθητός/sensilis/sensibilis* and *σῶμα/corpus*, refer only to the object of the senses, while *αἰσθητικός/sensatus* (sensitive, endowed with senses) means, on the one occasion it is used (8a7), the subject or possessor of senses. Yet, as we have seen, the absolutely

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1. See e.g. Southern 1963, 17 and Hopkins 1972, 28.

stable reference of *sensibilis* and *corpus* to the object of the senses did not prevent Anselm from using both of them to refer to the subject of senses. Now, I readily admit that it would be indeed too much to demand of Anselm to have prepared an *index notionum* before daring to make use of any passage of *Categories*; but the very absurdity of this demand is but a consequence of implicitly admitting that Anselm did not use any consistent philological method in his reading and interpretation of the ancient text.

We should then examine all the explanatory possibilities of circumstances in which Anselm read and used the Aristotelian passage; these possibilities are not so many as to forbid us to conjecture about them. First, no one can reject in advance the possibility of a mere slip; Anselm might have read his Boethius too fast, or he might be quoting from memory. Second, the explanation that Anselm was aware of Boethius' view but did not follow him because he simply disagreed with him, seems highly unlikely; as far as I know, this would have been the first instance of a direct and conscious Anselmian dissension from a Boethian view.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, one could say that this implausibility corroborates the first explanation. Third, that the second explanation is really extremely implausible is reinforced by a datum which introduces us to a theme extremely crucial for the whole of Latin Medieval exegesis on ancient Greek works: Anselm had practically no knowledge of the Greek language. This means that even if he had concentrated his attention on Boethius' interpretation of the passage under discussion, he would have at least some troubles in understanding the way in which Boethius had been led to his view. As we have already suggested, if one wishes to keep Boethius' view logically coherent it may be susceptible of no other clarification than the one we have formulated above: the sentence αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ σῶμα καὶ ἐν σώματί εἰσιν must be explicated as αἱ γὰρ αἰσθήσεις περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰ ἐν σώματί εἰσιν. Yet, this extension of an elliptical Aristotelian phrase cannot be accepted by anyone who does not know the functions of the article in the Greek language and specifically its capacity to turn an adverbial phrase into a noun or an adjective.

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1. Henry's (1959, 19) counter-example concerning the Boethian and Anselmian distinction between antecedent and concomitant capacities (see Anselm's *De casu diaboli* 12, 1946: 254,4 ff.) is, to my view, exaggerated.



And since Anselm was not reading the original Greek text but a translation in a language, Latin, that lacks articles, he could not accept Boethius' interpretation at first glance, nor could he find out that it was a possible one by looking up the original Greek. So the probability for Anselm to have ever thought of such an interpretation of *Categories* 7b38-39 is almost zero. Boethius had done his best as a translator, but the real effects of his work remain always within the objective limits of a translation and especially of a translation from ancient Greek into Latin. What a translation can never give its reader, is: i) the familiarity with the original text (it is the very impossibility of reading the original work that urges one to read it in translation) and, consequently, ii) the possibility of giving a personal interpretation not of the translation, which in many cases constitutes *per se* an interpretation, but of the original text, which remains for ever hidden from the eyes of a monolingual reader.<sup>1</sup>

To conclude: even if we are eager to say that in the case of Anselm's use of the Aristotelian passage 7b38-39 we notice a medieval misconception of the text of the great ancient philosopher, first we should not hasten to infer from this that the medievals couldn't understand Aristotle or generally ancient writers; and second, we should not be at all surprised. Commentators and users of Aristotle's works have often been exceptional men, but not super-human. Complaining about the texts' language and so implicitly apologizing for the value of his interpretive work, one commentator notes that the interpretation of many Aristotelian texts presupposes something like oracular powers of divination (Sophonias, CAG XXIII,2, 2, 8-13). Such modesty on the part of one of the Greek commentators of Aristotle ought to shake any confidence we might have in definitive interpretations of certain difficult or ambiguous Aristotelian passages, which, as often as we insist on examining them intensely, constantly answer our exegetical anxiety with a spiteful silence.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. the quotation from Roger Bacon at the beginning of this paper.

2. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 275D, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

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