If one accepts the conclusions of Prm. as establishing Plato’s revised thinking about forms and takes seriously Plato’s plain words, as R. rightly purports to do, one cannot claim that Plato came to reject P and RP. Plato admits them in half of the Deductions and the conclusion of the last Deduction comes as close as possible to accepting these two premisses without admitting the possibility of any predicates to the one. Moreover the general conclusion of the dialogue (166c2–5) asserts the conjunction of all the partial conclusions of the Deductions. R. takes it to confirm the hypothesis that the one is, because it says that if the one is not, the others both are and are not, and this impossible, since it is a contradiction. But Plato is careful to point out that these results are καὶ πρὸς αὐτά καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλα (c4), thus dissolving the contradiction into different aspects.

R.’s work usefully brings to the fore the advantages and shortcomings of a logical reconstruction, by trying to rescue Plato from the common accusation of inexact thinking, but, on the other hand, assuming the neutrality of propositional logic and imposing a concept of consistency that may not be applicable to all philosophical positions.

It is regrettable that the bibliography is all in English, except for an indirect reference to Wundt’s 1935 study.

Jerusalem  

Samuel Scolnicov

Rainer Thiel: Aristoteles’ Kategorienschrift in ihrer antiken Kommentierung. Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 2004. XII, 324 S. (Philosophische Untersuchungen. 11.)

This book is a revised and enlarged version of T.’s Marburger Habilitationschrift (1997). It contains a bibliography, short indices of historical names, modern names, and an index rerum. Unfortunately, the bibliography does not cover the period 1997–2004, and the book does not mention the fruits of Richard Sorabji’s ‘Ancient Commentators on Aristotle’ project, e.g., the annotated translations of the ancient Categories commentaries (edited with Duckworth from 1997 onwards).

The express aim of the book is twofold (1–2). T. wishes to show that the ancient commentaries on the Categories are still relevant today for the interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of substance and the tension between ontology and logic which that theory appears to hold for modern interpreters. Secondly, T. argues that the relation between Plotinus and Porphyry with regard to the Categories is less problematical than many believe. Porphyry does not oppose Plotinus, but rather builds his own commentary on hints taken from Enn. 6.1 [42] and 6.3 [44].

T. has chosen to avoid detailed confrontations with the immense secondary literature on the Categories, so as to bring out the quality of the late ancient arguments more clearly (10). For the most part T. follows Simplicius’ commentary, which he considers ‘most scientific’ (9), while occasionally adding clarifications from the commentaries by Dexippus, Ammonius, Philoponus, and Boethius. Chapters deal with the aim (skopus) of the Categories (ch. 1), the problem of universals (ch. 2), substance and accident (ch. 3), the fourfold division by means of the criteria of inherence and predication in Cat. 2 (ch. 4–5), the relation be-
tween genus, species and differentia in *Cat.* 3 (ch. 6), and the list of categories in *Cat.* 4 (ch. 7). A survey of the aim of Plotinus *Enn.* 6.1–3 (42–44) *On the kinds of being* and its relation to Porphyry (ch. 8) is followed by an elaborate discussion of the commentary tradition on *Cat.* 5 on substance (ch. 9). The final chapter 10, which reads as an appendix, deals with the category of place or space, and its interpretation in the hands of Philoponus and Damascius in the context of their (and Simplicius’) comments on Aristotle’s *Physics*.

For the most part the chapters consist of a careful paraphrase of selected discussions from Simplicius’ commentary, with additional material from other commentaries. T. adds thoughtful comments and elucidations, and compares various ancient sources. As T.’s first aim leads us to suspect, he discusses Simplicius’ interpretation as helpful and illuminating for modern readers of Aristotle’s *Categories*. He does not really argue why Simplicius’ reading is to be preferred, so that this approach has to be judged from its results. But often it is difficult to see why one should accept Simplicius’ interpretation of the *Categories*, esp. where Simplicius introduces, e.g., Platonic degrees of knowledge and being (e.g. 27–29), or where Simplicius (and Philoponus) present their interpretation of the ‘confused’ universal in *Physics* 1.1 (31ff). This interpretation is part of a long tradition of creative philosophizing which modern scholars should hesitate to ascribe to Aristotle.¹

The modern discussion on the tensions between the *Categories* and *Metaphysics* Zeta (31) is squarely addressed by T., who acknowledges the inspiration of his Doktorvater Arbogast Schmitt in this respect (Ch. 2, with 220–7). The *Categories* regards both individual composite substances and their corresponding species and genera as ‘substance’. In *Metaphysics* Zeta universals are explicitly denied substantiality, and the form, not the composite, gets pride of place. T. develops a clever solution which exploits a particular interpretation of the Neoplatonic distinction between three levels of universals (*ante rem*, *in rebus*, *post rem*). T. follows the commentators in making clear that the transcendent universal *ante rem* is never predicated as such; it is of a different order, and the cause of the immanent universals in *rebus*. The immanent universal form is never predicated either, but it shares its individual existence with the primary substance of the *Categories* to which it is therefore the proper heir. The universal concepts that come to be in the soul *post rem* are acquired by abstraction in encounters with different immanent universals. Only the universal concepts are properly predicated of the individual substances from which they were abstracted. T. argues that Plotinus designed, and Porphyry developed this interpretation which allows for a natural shift of focus from *Categories* primary substances to *Metaphysics* primary substances. This, one might say, is an elegant theory indeed – though much work remains to be done before modern scholarship could accept this theory as a viable interpretation of *Aristotle*. T. does not ask whether perhaps the

Neoplatonists developed and applied the three levels of universal precisely with the aim of providing a comprehensive and consistent picture of Aristotle, whatever the real tensions in Peripatetic philosophy. And are the three levels of universals really present in Aristotle’s philosophy in this way? I doubt it, but T. mostly proceeds as if Simplicius and other commentators are expounding the truth in these matters.

T.’s discussion of the relation between Plotinus and Porphyry is most interesting. He challenges the received interpretation of their relation which he presents as consisting of three related claims: (a) Plotinus flatly rejected Aristotle’s theory of categories because it wrongly promotes sensible substance to the rank of primary substance; (b) Porphyry opposed his master Plotinus and integrates the categories into Neoplatonism by reducing their ontological value; hence, (c) the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Categories is useless as an interpretation of Aristotle. T. argues that (a) and (b) are simply false, so that (c) has to be considered anew, with a positive outcome this time (182–3). Indeed, there is an impressive range of arguments against (a) and (b) both of which turn out to rest on rather speculative grounds. For instance, T. follows Steven Strange in regarding as a typical Plotinian approach to his topic through older commentaries on Plato and Aristotle. In such a context raising problems and formulating counter-arguments is not equivalent to rejecting the position under scrutiny. T. shows that Plotinus’ initial response to some of the questions often prepares further developments in Porphyry and other commentators (192–6), despite their criticism of Plotinus (see further ch. 9). Throughout Enn. 6.1–3 Plotinus focuses strictly on the contribution of any notion of category to a division of the realm of Being as he, as a Platonist, conceives it. He knows that Aristotle never even meant to apply his categories to the intelligible Forms – which Aristotle denied existence. Hence, Aristotle’s categories cannot be used to illuminate intelligible being, although, after scrutiny, Plotinus believes they can contribute to a logic and metaphysics of the sensible realm. This constitutes a correct evaluation of Aristotle’s intentions, and one that is clearly present in Plotinus, often as a response to earlier, misguided, criticism of Aristotle’s work. In this respect T. professes to go beyond Strange’s more moderate interpretation (cf. 218ff). This evaluation is not in any way a restriction of the scope of the Categories, and was

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1 A shimmer of doubt on T.’s part might be gleaned from 237–8.
not first designed by Porphyry for purposes of harmonization of Plato with Aristotle. Thus, it is precisely Plotinus’ groundwork on which Porphyry (and the later commentators who all heavily depend on Porphyry) builds his interpretation.¹

What is *katêgoria* in Plotinus? T. supplements Horn’s explanation of the term as denoting a hierarchy of homonymous predications, e.g. as ‘substance’ is predicated of intelligible substance, sensible composite, matter and form.² He stresses that the additional achievement of a *katêgoria* consists in unifying such a hierarchy under a single *concept* (sc. ‘substance’) which can be put to use in predications.³ The fact that ‘substance’ functions thus in *our predications* is itself a sign of the fact that intelligible being is the unitary principle of everything denoted by the term in our predications.

Despite my hesitations in the face of Thiel’s more daring assumptions, his book has to be acknowledged as a one of the first pioneering attempts to deal at book length with the intricacies of the ancient commentary tradition on Aristotle’s *Categories*, conceived well before a larger part of the scholarly community turned its attention to late ancient thought. Thiel succeeds in showing how sophisticated ancient comments can still dislodge well-entrenched modern interpretations of the *Categories* and *Metaphysics*.

Leiden

Frans A. J. de Haas

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¹ This point has now been argued independently, and in different ways, by Lloyd Gerson and myself, see note 2.
³ For a different opinion see De Haas, o.c. note 2, 507–514.

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