

MR3364556 03-02 01A20 03-03 03A05 03B99

Woods, John [Woods, John Hayden] (3-BC-NDM; Vancouver, BC)

★Aristotle's earlier logic.

Second revised edition.

Studies in Logic (London), 53.

College Publications, London, 2014. xviii+274 pp. ISBN 978-1-84890-164-3

This is a second (very deeply) revised edition of a book that was first published in 2001 by another publisher. The briefest way to describe its purpose is by saying that it is a critical enquiry about the foundation of Aristotle's syllogistic. It is mainly devoted to discussing what Aristotle says about syllogism in *Topics* [see *Topics*, translated from the Greek and with an introduction and a commentary by Robin Smith, Clarendon Aristotle Ser., Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1997; MR1469492], *On sophistical refutations*, and, more marginally, *On interpretation*.

The author seems to admit (without strongly arguing for it) that these works chronologically precede the better known and more reputed *Prior analytics* [see *Prior analytics*, translated from the Greek and with an introduction, notes and commentary by Robin Smith, Hackett, Indianapolis, IN, 1989; MR1021688], where syllogistic is extensively expounded. However, his arguments for devoting his book to dealing with an earlier part of Aristotle's logic are grounded more on conceptual than on chronological bases. The idea is this: "the syllogistic has two principal parts"; the former "tells us what it takes to be a syllogism", the latter "tells us how to recognize them"; "*Topics* and *On sophistical refutations* perform the first of these tasks, but not the second" [,] "*Prior analytics* also performs the first and it (almost) performs the second"; hence, "*Topics* and *On sophistical refutations* is half the logic that the logic of *Prior analytics* almost is" (p. 5). The author rejects the idea that syllogistic is foundational for (first-order) predicate logic, but argues that its former part "is *internally* foundational", that is foundational for its latter part (p. 241).

The foundation mainly consists in fixing some basic (technical) notions that *Prior analytics* will use and develop, first of all that of syllogism, but also, crucially, that of proposition, since a syllogism is made up of propositions. Fixing the latter notion is, then, essential for fixing the former, but this also requires making clear the particular nature of the propositions which are licensed to enter a syllogism, and the way such propositions have to be combined to form one. The book discusses Aristotle's views on these questions. It also explains why dealing with them is an essential task to be performed in *Topics* and *On sophistical refutations*. The point is this: when speaking of syllogisms an essential distinction is to be made, that between "syllogisms-*as-such*" and "syllogisms-*in-use*". According to Aristotle, dialectical arguments, or, at least, those discussed in these treatises, involve syllogisms. On the one side, syllogisms are then used in these arguments; showing how they are requires studying syllogisms-*in-use*. On the other side, critically assessing these arguments requires having a clear idea of what syllogisms are and how they work; this requires studying syllogisms-*as-such*. The book has two parts (together with prefaces for both the second and first edition, an appendix, a large bibliography, and an extensive index): part one (chapters 1–6; pp. 1–152) deals with syllogisms-*as-such*; part two (chapters 7–10; pp. 153–242) with syllogisms-*in-use*.

Many theses, both by Aristotle and on his own views, are discussed. Among those on Aristotle's views, some are rejected, others endorsed. Those that are endorsed are often endorsed only very cautiously, and with a lot of disclaimers and precisifications. This, together with the style of exposition and the language used, makes it quite difficult to give a short summary of these theses. Even the last chapter of the book (pp. 228–242), whose title ("Wrapping up") suggests it is devoted to this task, realizes it only partially.

One important thesis, which is pervasively and clearly expounded and argued for

is this: A syllogism is a valid argument, but not every valid argument is a syllogism for Aristotle; hence syllogistic is a proper part of a more general logic of validity. Still Aristotle does not develop this last logic as such, but confines himself to an almost precise and complete treatment of a particular mode of validity. Fixing this mode, that is, introducing the technical notion of syllogism, and showing some of its applications is Aristotle's essential contribution to logic. Though particular, this mode tells us important things about the way Aristotle was conceiving of validity. In particular, it shows that Aristotle's validity cannot be construed as classical validity in our sense, since the restrictions Aristotle requires of syllogisms are incompatible with this sense, in particular (but not only) with monotonicity. This raises an important question about which logic of validity is to be ascribed to Aristotle (or, at least, is to be considered as compatible with his views). Some interpreters are inclined to make the distance between this logic and the classical one quite large. The attitude of the author is the opposite: he looks for a plausible reading of Aristotle's texts which keeps this distance minimal.

This is an important element of what makes the book quite rich and important as a contribution not only to the history of logic and to Aristotelian scholarship, but also to many aspects of the contemporary discussion in philosophical logic and philosophy of logic. If a reader were inclined to look for some reasons for not being completely satisfied with it, two could be the following: No systematic and ordered exposition of the content of Aristotle's relevant texts is found here; quotations from these texts are rare, and separated by their contexts; this makes the book much more useful for scholars already completely familiar with these texts than for beginners; what is worse, this often leaves the unfamiliar reader unaware of where and how Aristotle presents the views ascribed to him. Often the discussion of these views is so intimately dependent on considerations and arguments pertaining to modern scholarship that it becomes difficult for such a reader to see what Aristotle was really arguing for, and to acquire, then, a personal view on it. This does not make the book less important for the more informed and competent reader, who will find there, to be sure, a large number of ideas, arguments, criticisms and explanations to agree or disagree with, but that should, in any case, be considered as valuable contributions to the relevant topic.

Marco Panza