Aristotle, in Chapter VII of his *Categories*, classifies habits and dispositions, as well as knowledge, among relatives. However, in Chapter VIII of the *Categories*, he affirms that habits, including knowledge, and dispositions, including unstable knowledge, are qualities. Thus, habits and dispositions in general, and knowledge in particular, seem to be subject to a “dual categorization”. At the end of Chapter VIII of the treatise, the issue of the dual categorization is explicitly raised. How can one and the same thing be a quality and a relative? Aristotle gives two distinct solutions to this problem. Both have been criticized by some modern commentators: these solutions would amount to a rejection of the basic principles of the categorial system and, as such, to a sort of philosophical suicide. However, Aristotle’s early commentators, notably the Greek Neoplatonists and Boethius, made attempts to render both solutions plausible and compatible with the rest of the doctrine. Their attempts are not only of exegetical interest, they also contain some significant philosophical analyses concerning the categories. In what follows, I will present the abovementioned problem of dual categorization in Aristotle and the two solutions offered to it in *Categories* VIII, 11a20-38. I will then turn to
the early reception of this text, and focus on the way the Greek Neoplatonists and Boethius tried to make Aristotle’s solutions more plausible. Throughout, I will try to establish in what sense habits and dispositions in general, and knowledge in particular, are relative. I will conclude with some remarks on the later reception of Categories VIII, 11a20-38 and on the problem of the ontological status of mental acts and states.

I. Aristotle’s Categories VIII, 11a20-38

In the beginning of Chapter VII of his Categories, Aristotle affirms that habit (ἐξίς), disposition (διάθεσις), sensation (αἰσθησίς), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and position (θέσις) are relatives (πρὸς τό)². Later in the chapter, he holds that every piece of knowledge is the knowledge “of a knowable” (ἐπιστήμην), just as every sensation is the sensation “of a sensible” (αἰσθητόν)³. In other words, knowledge, like sensation, is always of an “object”⁴. Yet, knowledge being a habit, unstable knowledge being a disposition⁵, and all habits and dispositions being relative, knowledge and unstable knowledge, besides being relative like sensation, are seemingly also relative like habits and dispositions in general. Following J. Ackrill and K. Oehler⁶, there are two ways to explain why habits and dispositions in general, as well as positions, are included among relatives. The first is to say that habits, dispositions and positions are relative in the sense that they are always of a “subject” (Zugrundeliegendes)⁷. The other is to affirm that habits,


³ See Cat. VII, 6b34-35 and more broadly 7b22-8a12.

⁴ See also Met. Δ, 15, 1021a26-1021b3, where Aristotle admits three classes of relations – relations “according to number” (κατὰ ἀριθμὸν), relations “according to potency” (κατὰ δύναμαν), and relations between the “measure” (μέτρον) and the “measurable” (μετρητόν) – and includes knowledge, sensation and “thought” (διάνοια) in the third class. The term “object”, which I use for the sake of commodity, is not found explicitly in Aristotle, but has medieval origins. On these questions, see O. BOULNOIS, Être, luire et concevoir. Note sur la genèse et la structure de la conception scotiste de l’esse objective, «Collectanee Franciscana» 60, 1990, pp. 117-135, and, more generally, A. DE LIBERA, Archéologie du sujet I. Naissance du sujet, Vrin, Paris 2007 (Histoire de la philosophie), pp. 133-154.

⁵ For unstable knowledge, see Cat. VIII, 9a4-8.


⁷ A similar point is made by A. Trendelenburg, who thinks that Aristotle admits among relatives things linked by a “subjective genitive”, more precisely by the genitive of the “possessor” (Genitiv des Subjektes, z. B. des Besitzers) (F. A. TRENDELENBURG, Geschichte der Kategorienlehre, vol. 1, G. Bethge, Berlin 1846, pp. 119-121). Moreover, Sten Ebbesen holds that Aristotle, in Chapters VII and VIII of the Categories, is confused by the fact that: “Knowledge, ἐπιστήμη in Greek, is a deverbal noun. The verb ‘to know’ is divalent, i.e. it requires two arguments, a subject and an object. Basically the same applies to the derived noun, knowledge
dispositions and positions are relative in the sense that they must be “specified”: for example, there are habits of virtue, there are, in turn, virtues of justice, of temperance, etc⁸. However, as J. Ackrill and K. Oehler also underscore, both solutions entail problems. According to the first solution, every accident would be a relative, since every accident is of a “subject”. According to the second solution, every genus would be a relative, since every genus has species. In both cases, relatives would not be limited to one category, but would play a transcategorial role. Thus, it seems like a problematic idea to admit habits, dispositions and positions among relatives for such reasons. Aristotle, in Physics VII, 3, again mentions the relativity of habits, both bodily and psychic⁹. He holds that bodily virtuous habits, such as “health” (ὑγιεία), are “a blending of hot and cold elements in due proportion, in relation either to one another within the body or to the surrounding”¹⁰. Following Simplicius, psychic virtuous habits, for example temperance, could be understood similarly, in that they are “due proportions” of “emotions” (θυμοί) and “appetites” (ἐπιθυμίαι)¹¹. As for vicious habits, like disease and intemperance, these would not be “due proportions” (συμμετρίαι), but “disproportions” (ἀσυμμετρίαι) of the same elements¹². Mutatis mutandis, these considerations could also apply to dispositions¹³. Thus, even if Physics VII cannot explain the relativity of positions, since there is seemingly neither “due proportion” nor “disproportion” in them, it could at least solve the difficulties raised by J. Ackrill and K. Oehler concerning the relativity of habits and dispositions¹⁴. At any rate, knowledge is probably relative like all other habits and dispositions, i.e. for the same reason

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⁸ For the examples, see Cat. VIII, 8b33 and 11a27-28, transl. J. Ackrill. See also ARISTOTLE, Categories and De Interpretatione, comm. J. L. Ackrill, op. cit., ad 6a36.
¹³ Note that “health”, given as an example of bodily virtuous “habit” by Aristotle in Phys. VII, 3, is a disposition according to Cat. VIII, 8b35-37.
that they are relative, no matter what this reason may be, but knowledge as such has also another relativity, namely its being of a knowable, i.e. of an “object”\(^\text{15}\).

Now, independently of how they are relative, a major problem, if habits and dispositions in general and the habit or disposition of knowledge in particular are relative, is that they would be submitted to a “dual categorization”\(^\text{16}\). Indeed, habits and dispositions, and thus the habit or disposition of knowledge, are not only relative, they are also included among qualities\(^\text{17}\). According to a famous distinction made by D. Sedley, such relatives, i.e. relatives affected by dual categorization, are “soft relatives”, in contrast to “hard” ones: they are “relative” according to the first definition given by Aristotle in Chapter VII of the Categories (“we call relatives all such things as are said to be just what they are, of or than other things, or in some other way in relation to something else”), but not according to the second definition (“those things are relatives for which being is the same as being somehow related to something”), which is, for D. Sedley, “stronger and narrower, singling out those properties which consist in a relation and nothing more”\(^\text{18}\). However, such an interpretation seems difficult to defend, since knowledge is mentioned as a relative falling under the second definition in Topics VI, 8\(^\text{19}\). Independently of D. Sedley’s distinction between “soft” and “hard relatives”, it appears that habits and dispositions, including knowledge, are not only relatives, but also qualities. The issue of the dual categorization of habits and dispositions in general, and of knowledge in particular, is explicitly tackled by Aristotle in Chapter VIII of the Categories. The text runs as follows:

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\(^{15}\) See also the developments in Aristotle, Categories and De Interpretatione, comm. J. L. Ackrill, op. cit., ad 6a36 and Aristotelis, Kategorien, comm. K. Oehler, op. cit., ad 6a36 sq. Certainly, if knowledge is relative by being of an “object” whereas habits and dispositions are relative for another reason, knowledge as such and knowledge according to its genus would be differently relative (I thank Charles Girard for this observation). Yet such a consequence is considered by Aristotle himself in Top. IV, 4, 124b32-34, quoted above: knowledge as such is relative to the knowable, but as a habit or disposition it is relative to the soul.

\(^{16}\) This problem does not concern positions, which, according to Aristotle’s explicit statement, are not included in another category, nor form another category, even if there is a category called “being-in-a-position” (κείσθαι). On this difficult point, see Cat. IX, 11b10-11, transl. J. Ackrill.

\(^{17}\) See Cat. VIII, 8b26-9a13.


\(^{19}\) See Top. VI, 8, 146b3-4. D. Sedley’s defence against this argument is to say that Aristotle’s theory was not yet fully established in the Topics (see D. Sedley, Aristotelian Relativities, op. cit., p. 345 n. 34). Another, more general argument against D. Sedley’s distinction between “soft” and “hard relatives” would be that the second definition is merely a different formulation of the first, as stated in F. Caoujolle-Zaslavsky, Les relatifs dans les Catégories, in Concepts et catégories dans la pensée antique, P. Aubenque (ed.), Vrin, Paris 1980 (Bibliothèque d’histoire de la philosophie), pp. 167-195. See also, more recently, M. Duncome, Aristotle’s Two Accounts of Relatives in Categories 7, «Phronesis», 60, 2015, pp. 436-461, who denies that there are two definitions of relatives, one with a “narrower extension” than the other.
We should not be disturbed lest someone may say that though we proposed to discuss quality
we are counting in many relatives (since habits and dispositions are relatives). For in pretty
well all such cases the genera are spoken of in relation to something, but none of the
particular cases is. For knowledge, a genus, is called just what it is, of something else (it is
called knowledge of something); but none of the particular cases is called just what it is, of
something else. For example, grammar is not called grammar of something nor music music
of something. If at all it is in virtue of the genus that these too are spoken of in relation to
something: grammar is called knowledge of something (not grammar of something) and
music knowledge of something (not music of something). Thus the particular cases are not
relatives. But it is with the particular cases that we are said to be qualified, for it is these
which we possess (it is because we have some particular knowledge that we are called
knowledgeable). Hence these – the particular cases, in virtue of which we are on occasion
said to be qualified – would indeed be qualities; and these are not relatives. Moreover, if the
same thing really is a qualified and a relative there is nothing absurd in its being counted in
both the genera.20

Aristotle gives two explanations meant to solve the problem of dual categorization. Both have
been considered unsatisfactorily by some modern commentators. According to the first
explanation, whereas knowledge as a genus would be relative, its “individuals” (καθ’ ἐκαστὰ)
would not21. Ackrill seems to think that the individuals of knowledge are not “individuals”
stricto sensu, but species of knowledge, for example “grammar” or “music”22. On this basis, he
says: “the claim that a genus that is relative may have species that are not relative seems to
conflict with Aristotle’s whole idea of a genus-species classification and categorial ladders”23.
Indeed, how could grammar be a species of knowledge, knowledge be classified among

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20 ὃ δὲ ἐδέ ταράττεσθα μὴ τὶς ἡμᾶς φήσῃ ὑπὲρ ποιότητος τὴν πρόθεσιν πουπασμένους πολλὰ τῶν πρὸς τι
συγκαταρμῆμεθαί: τὰς γὰρ ἔξεις καὶ τὰς διαθέσεις τῶν πρὸς τι εἶναι, σχεδὸν γὰρ ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν τοιούτων
τὰ γένη πρὸς τι λέγεται, τῶν δὲ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ οὐδὲν· ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἐπίστημη, γένος οὐσία, αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἑστὶν ἐτέρου
λέγεται, – τινὸς γὰρ ἐπίστημη λέγεται. – τῶν δὲ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ οὐδὲν αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἑστὶν ἐτέρου λέγεται, οἶκον ἢ
γραμματικὴ ὡς λέγεται τινὸς γραμματικὴ οὐδ’ ἢ μουσικὴ τῖνος μουσικῆ, ἀλλ’ εἰ ἄρα κατὰ τὸ γένος καὶ αὐτὰ
πρὸς τι λέγεται· οἶκον ἢ γραμματικὴ λέγεται τῖνος ἐπίστημη, ὦ τινός γραμματικῆ, καὶ ἢ μουσικῆ τινὸς
ἐπίστημη, ὡς τίνος μουσικῆ· ὡς τίνος καθ’ ἐκαστὰ οὐκ εἰσὶ τῶν πρὸς τι. λεγόμεθα δὲ ποιοὶ ταῖς καθ’ ἐκαστα-
τάσεις γὰρ καὶ ἔχομεν, – ἐπιστήμονες γὰρ λεγόμεθα τῷ ἔχειν τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ ἐπιστήμων τινά· ὡς τίνα
αὐτές ἄν καὶ ποιότητες εἶχαν αἰ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ, καθ’ ἃς ποτὲ καὶ ποιοὶ λεγόμεθα· αὐτὰ δὲ οὐκ εἰσὶ τῶν πρὸς τι. –
ἐτε εἰ τυγχάνει τὸ αὐτὸ ποιὸν καὶ πρὸς τὶ ὑπὸ, οὐδὲν ἔχομεν ἐν ἁμορφέρους τοὺς γένεσιν αὐτὸ καταρμῆμεθαί
ta (Cat. VIII, 11a20-38, transl. J. Ackrill, slightly modified, notably for “ἐξεῖς” and “διάθεσις”).

21 See also Topics IV, 4, 124b15-22 and Met. Δ, 15, 1021a4-6.
22 Ackrill’s interpretation echoes a statement by Aristotle himself in Topics IV, 4, 124b18-19.
23 ARISTOTLE, Categories and De Interpretatione, comm. J. L. Ackrill, op. cit., ad 11a20.
relatives, and grammar not be classified among relatives\textsuperscript{24}\textsuperscript{24}? Similar problems would arise if “individuals” was taken \textit{stricto sensu}\textsuperscript{25}. According to Ackrill, a “conflict” with the rest of Aristotle’s theory also arises in the second solution. Indeed, the second solution simply consists in admitting that one and the same thing could belong to two categories. This affirmation has been criticized by M. Frede, and led him to suspect the authenticity of the passage, since “there is no other place in the corpus where the possibility is considered that the highest genera are not mutually exclusive”\textsuperscript{26}. Indeed, isn’t, for example, ‘being’ said “in many ways” (\textit{πολλαχοῖς}), i.e. in many “mutually exclusive” ways\textsuperscript{27}? Now, not only did some modern commentators find Aristotle’s solutions to the problem of dual categorization “perplexing”, as Ackrill says\textsuperscript{28}, early readers of the \textit{Categories}, i.e. the Greek commentators and Boethius, did too. Being more reverent to Aristotle’s authority, they were not much inclined to criticize the two solutions present in the abovementioned text, and the rejection of the authenticity of the passage was apparently not an option. On the contrary, they more or less tried to justify Aristotle’s affirmations, and to accommodate the passage with the rest of the theory. In the following pages, I will present the discussions of Aristotle’s \textit{Categories} VIII, 11a20-38 by the Greek commentators, above all by Neoplatonists, and also by Boethius, whose commentary on the \textit{Categories} can be included in the same tradition\textsuperscript{29}. Due to the proximities between these discussions, they can easily be compared and are mutually enlightening. As a whole, they form a quasi-systematic attempt – and the oldest we know of – to solve the problems emerging from the dual categorization of habits and dispositions in Aristotle\textsuperscript{30}. Before reading these authors

\textsuperscript{24} Although Aristotle does not explicitly say that knowledge is relative by definition, one would maybe think here of \textit{Cat. V}, 3b2-5, where it is affirmed that the definition of a genus of essence (οὐσία) applies to its species.

\textsuperscript{25} See again \textit{Cat. V}, 3b2-5, where Aristotle affirms that the definition of a genus of essence (οὐσία) applies to its individuals; moreover, see \textit{Cat. V}, 3a17-20.


\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Met. Γ}, 2, 1003a33.


on Categories VIII, 11a20-38, I will discuss in what sense they count habits and dispositions, as well as knowledge, among relatives.

II. Aristotle’s early commentators on the relativity of habits and dispositions, and of knowledge in particular

Porphyry, in his commentary on the Categories, says, quite astonishingly, that a habit is relative because it is a quality: every quality is “of something qualified” (ποιότ), i.e. of the bearer of the quality as bearing the quality. In another passage of his commentary, he affirms that just as a position is of a “θετόν”, “a habit is the habit of a ἑκτόν”. The same idea is to be found in Ammonius and Philoponus: just as a disposition is relative to a “διαθετόν”, “a habit is said of a ἑκτόν”.

Elias too mentions the habit as relative to the ἑκτόν, like a disposition is relative to a “διακείμενον”. When Elias gives an example of a ἑκτόν, he mentions “the grammarian” (γραμματικός). S. Strange translates “ἑκτόν” in Porphyry as “thing capable of having a state”, and S. Cohen and G. Matthews translate “ἑκτόν” in Ammonius as “possessor”. J. Groisard suggests translating it in Porphyry as “ce qui est dans cet état”, “that which is in this state”, and similarly in Ammonius. Now, as B. Fleet underscores, the normal voice of the kind of verbal adjective in question (τόν) is passive, and the literal translation of “ἑκτόν” would be “havable”. But in Porphyry, the “ἑκτόν” is a case of “qualified thing” (ποιόν), as well as in Elias, since the example he gives of a “ἑκτόν” is “the grammarian” (γραμματικός). The idea seems to be that the habit is relative to its bearer as potentially or actually bearing the habit. Thus, although “ἑκτόν”’s literal translation would be “havable”, its translation as “thing capable

31 PORPHYRY, In Cat., CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 114.9-12.
33 AMMONIUS, In Cat., CAG IV.4, ed. A. Busse, 68.14-19, and PHILOPONUS, In Cat., CAG XIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 106.21-23.
34 ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 207.34-208.1. I assume that the commentary attributed by A. Busse to Elias is from Elias (on this question, see A. BUSSE, Praefatio and Supplementum praefationis, in Elias, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, pp. v-xxxi, and R. GOULET, Élías, in Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques, III, d’Éccélos à Juvenal, R. Goulet (ed.), CNRS Éditions, Paris 2000 [Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques], pp. 57-66).
35 ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 229.26-27.
37 PORPHYRY, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote par questions et réponses, CAG IV.1, 111.6-126.32, working translation by J. Groisard, and AMMONIUS, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote, CAG IV.4, 66.4-80.13, working translation by J. Groisard.
of having a state” and cognates is not unfaithful to its contextual meaning. At any rate, one should keep in mind that in Porphyry and Elias, and maybe also in Ammonius and Philoponus, the “ἔκτόν” is the bearer of the habit as potentially or actually bearing it. In the same manner, the “διαθετόν” or “διακείμενον”, literally the “dispositionable” or “disposed thing”, is the potential or actual bearer of the disposition, and the “θετόν”, literally the “positionable thing”, is the potential bearer of the position, its actual bearer, i.e. the “positioned thing”, being the “κείμενον”. In sum, habits, dispositions and positions are relative to their bearers as potentially or actually bearing them.

Yet it is not certain that among Neoplatonic philosophers, “ἔκτόν” always refers to the bearer of the habit. Indeed, Simplicius seems to have another understanding of what a “ἔκτόν” is. He opposes the “ἔκτόν” to “the haver” (τὸ ἔχων) of the habit. He asks whether a habit is relative to the “ἔκτόν” or “ἔχόμενον” (i.e. the actualised ἔκτον) or to the “haver” (ἔχων). In such a context, it seems, following B. Fleet, that the best translation of “ἔκτον” or “ἔχόμενον” is indeed “havable” or “had thing”. Now, the idea that the habit is relative to the haver is explicitly rejected by Simplicius. According to Simplicius, the habit is in fact the “relation” (σχέσις) of having itself, holding “between” (μεταξὺ) the haver and the “havable” or “had thing”, and cannot itself be had, i.e. cannot be related to the haver, otherwise one would need a second relation of having relating the haver to the first having, etc. Simplicius seems to base his claim on Metaphysics Δ, 20, where Aristotle says that the “habit”, or the “having”, cannot itself be “had”:

We call a having (1) a kind of activity of the haver and the had – something like an action or movement. When one thing makes and one is made, between them there is a having. This sort of

39 See SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 163.30-164.27, transl. B. Fleet.
41 SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 164.19-20 and 177.20-22, transl. B. Fleet. On the notion of ‘relation’ (σχέσις), see SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 201.34-203.13, as well as C. LUNA, La relation chez Simplicius, in Simplicius. Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie. Actes du colloque international de Paris (28 sept. – 1er oct. 1985), I. Hadot (ed.), Walter De Gruyter, Berlin 1987 (Peripatoi. Philologisch-historische Studien zum Aristotelismus, 15), pp. 113-147, and O. HARARI, Simplicius on the Reality of Relations and Relational Change, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy» 37, 2009, pp. 245-274. This notion, which is often presented as Neoplatonic, is indeed discussed in PORPHYRE, In Cat., CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 125.16-19, but it is already mentioned by Alexander of Aphrodisias: “relatives have their being in their relation to one another” (τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι ἐν τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλα σχέσις τὸ εἶναι ἐχεῖν) (ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, In Met., CAG I, ed. I. Bruns, 83.25-26).
42 See also B. Fleet’s explanations in SIMPLICIUS, On Aristotle’s “Categories 7-8”, comm. B. Fleet, op. cit., p. 161 n. 58.
According to Simplicius, something similar would hold for dispositions and positions. The idea seems to be that dispositions and positions are in fact the “relations” (σχέσεις) themselves of being-in-a-disposition and of being-in-a-position holding between, on the one hand, the thing that is in a disposition and the διαθετόν and, on the other hand, between the thing that is in a position and the “positional equivalent” of the ἐκτόν or διαθετόν. As concerns the διαθετόν, the problem is inverted in comparison to the case of the “ἐκτόν” in Porphyry et alii: the literal translation of “διαθετόν” would be “dispositionable”, but the contextual meaning, in Simplicius, prevents us from saying that “διαθετόν” refers to the bearer of the disposition. J. Groisard suggests translating “διαθετόν” as “la manière d’être diposée”, “the way of being disposed”. On the same basis, one could say that the position is the relation (σχέσις) of being-in-a-position that holds between the bearer of the position and “the way of being positioned”. However, it is not easy to know to what exactly the “ἐκτόν”, the “διαθετόν” and their “positional equivalent” refer in Simplicius. One solution would be to say that they are “specifying items”, i.e. that they serve to express the fact that habits, dispositions and positions must be “specified”, as Aristotle may do, according to J. Ackrill and K. Oehler. Simplicius, in his commentary on Physics VII, holds, following Aristotle, that bodily habits are relative in that they are “due proportions” (συμμετρία) or “disproportions” (ἀσυμμετρία) of elements like “cold” and “heat”, and psychic “ethical habits” (ἡθικα ἔξεις) relative in that they are “due proportions” (συμμετρία) or “disproportions” (ἀσυμμετρία) of “emotions” and “appetites”. Like in


44 See SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 164.22.

45 The διαθετόν is mentioned as parallel to the ἐκτόν in SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 163.32. As for the “positional equivalent” of the ἐκτόν and the διαθετόν, the natural candidate would be the “θετόν”. Now, the “θετόν” do appear in SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 165.3, but it seems to refer to the bearer of the disposition. The translation suggested by J. Groisard is “le positionnable”, in SIMPLICIUS, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote, CAG VIII, 155.30-205.35, working translation.

46 In SIMPLICIUS, On Aristotle’s “Categories 7-8”, transl. B. Fleet, op. cit., “διαθετόν” is translated as “conditionable”.

47 See SIMPLICIUS, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote, CAG VIII, 155.30-205.35, working translation by J. Groisard.

48 See ARISTOTELE, Categories and De Interpretatione, comm. J. L. Ackrill, op. cit., ad 6a36 and ARISTOTELE, Kategorien, comm. K. Oehler, op. cit., ad 6a36 sq., discussed above.

Aristotle, such an explanation could apply to dispositions, but not to positions, which have seemingly nothing to do with “due proportion” nor “disproportion”. Thus, the account of the relativity of habits and dispositions that Simplicius gives in his commentary of Categories VII is different from the one that emerges in Physics VII, as he himself suggests. In other words, the sense in which habits, dispositions and positions are relative in the commentary of the Categories can hardly be elucidated with the help of the information present in the commentary of the Physics. It seems that habits and dispositions are (i) relative in a way that is common to them and positions, i.e. by being “relations” (σχέσεις) holding between their bearer and, maybe, a specifying item, and (ii) relative in a way proper to them, i.e. bodily habits and psychic ethical habits are “due proportions” or “disproportions”.

It is also difficult to know in what sense the “habit” (habitus) is relative in Boethius. According to him, the habit is of a “habilis res”, which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek “ἐκτόν”. Now, it seems that the “habilis res” is not the bearer of the habit, but probably some sort of specifying item. Indeed, Boethius says that “the habit is of the thing that can be had” and “it is by the habit that we have the things that can be had”. However, when discussing “disposition” (dispositio), Boethius affirms that the case of the disposition being of the disposed thing and the disposed thing being disposed by disposition belongs to the more general case of “every affection being the affection of the affected thing and every affected thing being affected by the affection”. Thus, it seems that a disposition is relative to the thing that it affects, namely the bearer of the disposition, but this creates a kind of discrepancy: habit is relative to the “havable” or “had thing” probably understood as a specifying item, whereas disposition is relative to the bearer of the disposition. The discrepancy increases when Boethius adds that habit, disposition, and position are all relative in the same manner:

Position is also relative. Indeed, the position is the position of the positioned thing, and the positioned thing is positioned by the position, and this should be understood according to the preceding mode of the habit and the disposition.

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50 See SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 177.22-27.
52 illius enim rei habitus est quae haberi potest (...) ipso enim habitu res quae haberipossunt habemus (BOETHIUS, In Cat., PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 219A).
One solution would be to admit that disposition and position are relative to their bearer, whereas
habit is relative to a “specifying item”, and to say that the common element between them is
merely grammatical: the habit/disposition/position is of the had/disposed/positioned thing, and
the had/disposed/positioned thing is had/disposed/positioned by the habit/disposition/position.
In other words, the correlation is made, on the one hand, with a genitive and, on the other hand,
with what Boethius calls a “seventh case”, i.e. apparently an ablative without preposition.

Now, although it is difficult to establish in what sense exactly in Boethius, like in other
early readers of Aristotle, habits and dispositions are relative, there is no doubt that for him,
knowledge, like sensation, is relative in the sense that it is of an “object”: whereas sensation is
relative to the “sensible” (sensible), knowledge is relative to the “knowable” (scibile). In the
Greek commentators too, even if it is hard to see in what sense habits and dispositions are
relative, there is no doubt that knowledge, taken as a cognition, is relative to an “object”. At
very least, the fact that cognition, by being relative to a “cognizable” (γνωστόν), is more
obviously relative than “ethical habits” understood as “due proportions” is explicitly stated in
Simplicius’s Physics commentary. Thus, in all these authors, knowledge seems to have a
proper relativity, which is of another nature than the relativity of habits and dispositions in
general. Now, the question arises as to whether the habit and the disposition of knowledge are
relative to an “object” and relative in the same manner as other habits or dispositions, or
whether they are just relative to an “object”. According to Simplicius, the relativity of habits
and dispositions understood as “due proportion” or “disproportion” does not apply to cognitive
habits and dispositions: cognition is not relative in that sense, but in the sense that it is of an
“object”, i.e. “of the cognizable” (τοῦ γνωστοῦ)58. However, in Simplicius, as well as in the
other early commentators of Aristotle, there is also a sense in which habits and dispositions are

55 On this grammatical structure, which also applies to knowledge and sensation, see BOETHIUS, In Cat., PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217D-218A. On the “seventh case”, see G. SERBAT, Le septimus casus en latin : un cas-fantôme ?, in Florilegium historiographiae linguisticae. Études d’historiographie de la linguistique et de grammaire comparée à la mémoire de Maurice Leroy, J. de Clercq – P. Desmet (eds.), Peeters, Louvain-la-
for the precious conversation we had on habits in Boethius.

56 See notably the commentary on Cat. VII, 7b22-8a12 in BOETHIUS, In Cat., PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 229A-233D.

See also the Neoplatonic commentaries of Cat. VII, 7b22-8a12, above all PORPHYRY, In Cat., ed. A. Busse,
CAG IV.1, 118.5-121.19 and SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 190.31-196.33. Note that
the relativity of knowledge is ontologically weakened in ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 203.20-
29 and 238.28-33. I will come back to this point below.

relative in the same way as positions. Maybe in this sense, knowledge is relative like all other habits and dispositions and relative to an “object”\(^{59}\). At any rate, Aristotle’s early commentators count habits and dispositions in general, and knowledge in particular, among relatives, and seem to think that knowledge is not – or not only – relative like other habits or dispositions, but – or but also – in the sense that it is relative to an “object”. Yet, according to Aristotle, habits and dispositions, including the habit and disposition of knowledge, are qualities. Thus, following Aristotle, his commentators had to tackle the problem of the dual categorization of habits and dispositions, and of knowledge in particular.

**III. Saving Aristotle**

According to Porphyry and Simplicius, the dual categorization of habits and dispositions is problematic. Indeed, since for Aristotle, “the differentiae of genera which are different and not subordinate one to the other are themselves different in kind”\(^{60}\), the dual categorization of an item would entail that one and the same thing has different specific differences\(^{61}\). It is not wholly obvious what the problem is. Maybe Porphyry and Simplicius’ point is that things falling under different specific differences form non-overlapping extensions, so that in the case of a dual categorization, one and the same thing would become a member of such extensions.

Be that as it may, in Porphyry’s reading of *Categories* VIII, 11a20-36, there is apparently no problem with saying that the habit of knowledge is only relative at the level of the genus, whereas its individuals, as well as its most specific species, e.g. grammar or music, are qualities\(^{62}\). Porphyry’s idea is to follow Aristotle’s statement: “by a quality I mean that in virtue of which things are said to be qualified somehow”\(^{63}\), then to defend the idea that Aristarchus or Aristoxenus are said to be grammarians or musicians from the individual grammar or music that they possess, whereas they are not qualified “from the generic knowledge” (ἀπὸ τῆς γενικῆς ἐπιστήμης), and finally to conclude that their individual grammar and music are qualities, whereas knowledge as a genus is not. On the contrary, the individual grammars and musics of Aristarchus or Aristoxenus are not themselves relative since, following Aristotle, “grammar is called knowledge of something (not grammar of something) and music knowledge of...”

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\(^{59}\) As said above, the fact that something can be differently relative in itself and according to its genus is considered by Aristotle himself in *Top. IV*, 4, 124b32-34.

\(^{60}\) Τῶν ἐπιρρογεῖνον καὶ μὴ ὅπ' ἄλληλα τετευγμένων ἐτεραὶ τῷ εἴδει καὶ αἱ διαφοραί (*Cat. III*, 1b16-17).


\(^{62}\) See PORPHYRY, *In Cat.*, CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 140.2-23.

\(^{63}\) Ποιότητα δὲ λέγω καθ’ ἣν ποιοὶ τινες λέγονται (*Cat. VIII*, 8b25, transl. J. Ackrill).
something (not music of something)"64; but knowledge as such, i.e. as a genus, is indeed relative, namely to the knowable. And any attempt to relate grammar to Aristarchus would be in vain, since the converse, namely “Aristarchus is of grammar”, is false. What about this argument? The last mentioned point seems unjustified: this grammar could be the grammar of this grammarian, and this grammarian could be a grammarian thanks to this grammar. Porphyry knows that correlates must be rightly picked out, otherwise the converse relation would be never given, for any relative65. And does not Porphyry himself say that every quality is relative by being “of something qualified” (ποιοῦ)66? The rest of Porphyry’s argument is no less problematic: the most specific species of knowledge, for Porphyry, are meant to be included in the category of quality; yet it is seemingly not in virtue of them that Aristarchus or Aristoxenus are said to be grammarians or musicians, but in virtue of individual knowledges. This problem would not have occurred if Porphyry had said, like other commentators, that the things that “qualify” are not just the individuals of the most specific species, but the species themselves67. Besides, in Porphyry, the thesis according to which one is not qualified “from the generic knowledge” is not thoroughly justified. Olympiodorus defends this by holding that “it is impossible for one and the same man to know everything”68, i.e. to have all knowledges: grammar, music, etc., or to have “first philosophy” (πρώτη φιλοσοφία). But the argument is problematic. Indeed, is it not enough to fall under one species of ‘being knowledgeable’ in order to fall under the genus ‘being knowledgeable’? It seems that falling under a genus is independent of falling under the whole set of species of a genus. Elias holds that one man cannot have all knowledge, because, as Plato says, every particular man is only a “fragment” (κέρμα) of man, i.e. no one can have any universal whatsoever69. But this was probably not Aristotle’s point. More broadly, the “conflict with Aristotle’s whole idea of a genus-species classification and categorial ladders”70 is still not solved with such considerations: specific and individual knowledges are not relative, but their genus is. As a matter of fact, Elias, when discussing

64 οἴον ἡ γραμματική οὐ λέγεται τινὸς γραμματικῆς οὐδ’ ἡ μουσική τινὸς μουσικῆς, ἄλλ’ εἰ ἄρα κατὰ τὸ γένος καὶ οὕτω πρὸς τι λέγεται (Cat. VIII, 11a29-31, transl. J. Ackrill).
65 See Cat. VII, 6a28-7b14 and its commentary in PORPHYRY, In Cat., CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 115.17-117.31.
66 PORPHYRY, In Cat., CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 114.9-12.
67 On this question, see AMMONIUS, In Cat., CAG IV.4, ed. A. Busse, 91.10-28, PHILOPONUS, In Cat., CAG XIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 162.7-11, OLYMPIODORUS, In Cat., CAG XII.1, ed. A. Busse, 129.24-25, ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.22-25, and BOETHIUS, In Cat., PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 259C-260C.
68 πάντα γὰρ άδύνατον ἐνικ ὁ τῶν αὐτῶν άνθρώπων ἐπίστασθαι (OLYMPIODORUS, In Cat., CAG XII.1, ed. A. Busse, 129.28).
69 ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.15-21. As A. Busse indicates (see ad 167.9-10), the word “fragment” (κέρμα) is not to be found in Plato.
70 ARISTOTLE, Categories and De Interpretatione, comm. J. L. Ackrill, op. cit., ad 11a20.
In Categories VIII, 11a20-36, wonders how a genus could be relative without its species also being relative. Many of Porphyry’s arguments are taken over by Simplicius. However, Simplicius adds an important point:

I think we should say that Aristotle did not mean that the genera were not qualities, nor that the generic habit or disposition is not a quality; what he did mean was that even if habit and disposition are said to be relative, this is not true of all habit and disposition, but only generic. But all habit and disposition, generic and individual, is quality. It is nothing absurd for generic habit to be relative as well, and individual habits to be only qualities, because individual habits were not presented as belonging to the genus Relation, but as belonging to the genus Quality. For knowledge as being relative is not cut up into species, but as quality it is divided into particular branches of knowledge, which are not relative, as has been shown, but are qualities.

In sum, for Simplicius, Aristotle does not say that the genus ‘knowledge’ is “just” relative. Otherwise, not only would non-relative species and individuals belong to a relative genus, but a non-qualitative genus would have qualitative species and individuals. In such a situation, there would be a still stronger “conflict with Aristotle’s whole idea of a genus-species classification and categorial ladders”, and despite Simplicius’ affirmations, it is not impossible that Aristotle is committed to this stronger conflict. At least, Elias explicitly reads Categories VIII, 11a20-36 as holding that the genus ‘knowledge’ is not a quality. On the contrary, for Simplicius, there is, in Aristotle, a double-faced genus, ‘knowledge’, both relative and a quality, of which only one “side” is specified and individuated: knowledge as relative is not divided into species and individuals, whereas knowledge as a quality is. Despite its exegetical charity, Simplicius’ reading has also some disadvantages: indeed, admitting a non-instantiated genus is not very Aristotelian. But the most obvious problem with Simplicius’ interpretation is that it re-integrates

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71 ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.22-28, which, as A. Busse indicates, refers to 153.11-15 and, through it, to Cat. III, 1b10-15; see also 203.21-24.
73 ῥητέον δὴ οἷμαι πρὸς τοῦτα, ὅτι οὐκ ἔπεισεν τὰ γένη μὴ εἶναι ποιότητας οὐδὲ ὅτι η γενικὴ ἔξες καὶ διάθεσις οὐκ ἔστεν ποιότης, ἀλλ’ ὅτι, εἰ καὶ εἰρήσται πρὸς τι ἢ ἔξες καὶ ἢ διάθεσις, οὐ πάσα ἔχει τούτο, ἀλλ’ ἡ γενικὴ μόνον, ποιότης μόνον πᾶσα, καὶ ἡ γενικὴ καὶ ἡ καθ’ ἐκαστα, καὶ οὐδὲν ἔτοπον τὴν μὲν γενικὴν ἔξειν καὶ πρὸς τι εἶναι, τὰς δὲ καθ’ ἐκαστα Ποιότητας μόνον, ὅπως οὐχ τοῦ ὅς πρὸς τι γένους ἐδόθησαν αἱ καθ’ ἐκαστα ἔξεις, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ὅς ποιότης. καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἐπιστήμη ὡς μὲν πρὸς τι οὐ τέμεναι εἰς ἑδή, ὡς δὲ ποιότης διαιρεῖται εἰς τίς κατὰ μέρος ἐπιστήμως, ἀκίνητος πρὸς τὶ μὲν οὐκ εἰσίν, ὡς ἀποδέδωκαν, ποιότητας δὲ εἰσίν (SIMPLICIUS, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 293.22-31, transl. B. Fleet – who reads τοῦ instead of τῆς at 293.28 –, modified for “ἔξες” and “διάθεσις”).
74 See ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.8-10.
the dual categorization in a theory created to get ride of it. Elias, apparently more for his own sake than for Aristotle’s, says that the genus ‘knowledge’ can be thought of both as a quality and as a relative, but that it is a quality “by nature” (κατὰ φύσιν), whereas it is a relative only “according to a secondary way of talking” (κατὰ δεύτερον λόγον), and this explains why its species are said to be qualities but not relatives: only what is predicated “by nature” of knowledge is transmitted to its species. In contrast to Simplicius, Elias does not strictly admit a dual categorization of knowledge, but the consequence is that he ontologically weakens the relative aspect of knowledge.

At any rate, Simplicius’ and Elias’ positions invite us to consider the second solution given by Aristotle, namely the admission of the dual categorization, which is a “sharper” (ἀκριβέστερον) solution than the first for Philoponus. Porphyry presents the second solution as follows:

I claim that if one does not wish to accept this solution, one should adopt the other one, namely that nothing prevents the same thing from falling into two categories. This is in no way absurd: it would be absurd if the same thing in one and the same respect were to be put into two different genera of predication that were not subordinate to one another, but there is no absurdity if it is considered in respect of different significations. Socrates, for instance, can be pointed out in many ways corresponding to his affections: insofar as he is a man, he is a substance; insofar as he is three cubits tall, let us suppose, he is qualified; insofar as he is a father or a son, he belongs to the relatives; insofar as he is temperate, he is qualified; and in this way he is brought under the different categories in virtue of various differentiae. If, then, Socrates, who is a single thing, is found to fall under different categories when he is considered in different respects, what is absurd about a habit being in one respect a relative, and in another a quality?

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75 Compare ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.8-10 and 238.28-33; see also 203.12-29.
76 ELIAS, In Cat., CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.28-33; see also 203.12-29.
77 See PHILOPONUS, In Cat., CAG XIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 161.31-162.3 and 162.19-22.
78 Φημὶ τοῖνοι ὡς εἰ μὴ τις ταύτῃ προσιότατα, ἀλλ’ ἑκείνην γε λαμβανόμενον, ὧν οὐδὲν κωλύει ἐν δυσι κατηγορίαις τὸ αὐτὸ τετάχθη. οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο ἄτοπον, ἀλλ’ εἰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἰ αὐτὸ τι εἰς δύο γένη κατηγορίων διάφορα ἀναφέροντο καὶ μὴ ὑπάλληλα, ἐπειδὴ κατὰ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο σημασιόων οὐδεμία ἑστὶν ἄτοπα. ἐπει δὲ καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης πολλὰ πεπονθῶς ἐπιδειχθῆται: καθὼς μὴ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος οὕτως ἑστὶ, καθό δὲ τρίτης, εἰ τύχως, ποσόν, καθό δὲ πατήρ ἢ γὰρ τῶν πρὸς τι, καθό δὲ σώφρον ποιῶς, καὶ οὕτως εἰς τὰς ἄλλας κατηγορίας κατὰ τινὰς διάφορας ἀνάγεται. εἰ σοῦ ἐν ὧν εὑρίσκεται ὁ Σωκράτης κατ’ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο εἰς ἄλλην καὶ ἄλλην κατηγορίαν ἀναγόμενος, τί ἄτοπον, εἰ καὶ ἢ ἔξες κατ’ ἄλλο μὲν ἄν ῥηθήτω πρὸς τι, κατ’ ἄλλο δὲ ποιότης; (PORPHYRY, In Cat., CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 140.26-141.5, transl. S. Strange – who does not follow Busse’s proposition of correction at 140.28, but adds εἰς ἄλλην καὶ ἄλλην κατηγορίαν ἀναγόμενος at 141.3, as proposed by Busse –, slightly modified, notably for πολλὰ ἐπιδειχθῆται πεπονθῶς, following PORPHYRY, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote, ed., transl. and comm. R. Bodéüs, Vrin, Paris 2008 [Textes philosophiques], who reads πολλὰ πεπονθῶς ἐπιδειχθῆται, and for “ἔξες”).
According to R. Bodéüs, there is a fallacy here. Indeed, at first sight, Porphyry’s explanations are dubious: Socrates by himself is an individual man, i.e. a primary essence, and does not belong as such to different categories; when, for example, Socrates as temperate is said to be a “qualified thing”, it is only to the extent that he forms an “accidental compound” with the quality of temperance, and when Socrates as a father is said to be a “relative”, it is only to the extent that he forms an “accidental compound” with the relational property of fatherhood. In sum, Porphyry is not talking about one and the same thing, nor about one and the same thing “considered in different respects” (κατ’ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο), but about different “things”, i.e., in the examples given above, a primary essence and two different accidental compounds. Such considerations were maybe part of the reasons leading Olympiodorus to reject the idea that one and the same thing “considered in different respects” (πρὸς ἄλλο μὲντοι καὶ ἄλλο) could belong to two categories. However, Porphyry’s point can be clarified and becomes more plausible when we look at the parallel passage in Simplicius. According to Simplicius, the things meant to belong to different categories are “complex things” (σύνθετον), for example Socrates taken with all or several of his accidental properties. He is complex, but made up of “uncomplex” (ἄνευ συμπλοκῆς) or “simple” (ὑπλᾶ) elements, which, in turn, belong only to one category.

Such “complex things” are not just to be found among primary essences taken with their accidental properties. For example, “in the case of an affection there is the aspect of completion – the result of the affection – and the aspect of cause – that which produces the affection”. In other words, an “affection” (πάθος) has in fact two distinct, simple constituents, namely its static being as the result or outcome of a given causal influence (e.g. the heat of a stone that is, or was, in the sun), and its dynamic being as the passive process itself that corresponds to the causal influence in question (e.g. the being-heated, or having-been-heated, of the stone by the

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79 Porphyre, Commentaire aux Catégories d’Aristote, comm. R. Bodéüs, op. cit., ad 140.30-141.4.
81 See Olympiodorus, In Cat., CAG XII.1, ed. A. Busse, 129.15-30.
83 I change B. Fleet’s translation of “σύνθετον” from “compound” to “complex”, and correlatively the “uncompounded” of “ἄνευ συμπλοκῆς” in “uncomplex”, in order to avoid a confusion with F. Lewis’ notion of “accidental compound”.
84 I recall, following B. Fleet (Simplicius, On Aristotle’s “Categories 7-8”, comm. B. Fleet, op. cit., p. 184 n. 549), that for the Neoplatonic philosophers, the categories, as Ph. Hoffmann says, “sont, dans le langage qui procède de l’âme humaine, les mots simples qui signifient les réalités simples (ou genres suprêmes) par la médiation des notions simples qui sont dans l’âme. C’est ce système à trois termes (mots, notions, réalités) qui constitue la nature de la catégorie” (Ph. Hoffmann, Catégories et langage selon Simplicius – La question du "skopos" du traité aristotélicien des “Catégories”, in Simplicius. Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie. Actes du colloque international de Paris [28 sept. – 1er oct. 1985], I. Hadot [ed.], op. cit., pp. 61-90, p. 67).
85 πάθος ὁντός τοῦ μὲν ἐν ἀποτελεσματι, ὀπερ ἐκ πάθως γέγονεν, τοῦ δὲ ὡς αἰτίων, ὀπερ ἐμποιεῖ πάθος (Simplicius, In Cat., CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 294.6-8, transl. B. Fleet).
sun). Applying this to habits and dispositions, more precisely to knowledge, the result is the following: knowledge is a “complex thing” (σύνθετον), made up of two “simple” elements (ὑπλά), a quality and a relational property. Maybe this is also what Boethius means when he says, less clearly:

In the same manner, habits, to the extent that they are habits of a certain thing, are included among relations and, to the extent that things are said to be qualified according to them, are counted among qualities.

Since the “dual categorization” concerns a complex thing, it becomes harmless. Such a solution is not implausible, but it entails that the “τὸ αὐτὸ” in “εἰ τυγχάνει τὸ αὐτὸ ποιόν καὶ πρὸς τι ὄν” of Categories VIII, 11a37-38 refers to a σύνθετον.

Another solution is offered by Ammonius, who thinks that the statement in Categories VIII, 11a37-38 concerns only relatives:

But above all, there is no paradox when some things classified under another category are also classified under relatives. Rather it is altogether necessary that what is subsumed under relatives be classified under some other category as well; for it has been pointed out that relatives do not contain proper things; rather, they are observed in other categories.

Indeed, according to Ammonius, “relatives seem to be offshoots and not distinct things, but rather are found in other categories.” Even if Ammonius rejects the idea that relatives are “proper things” (ἰδια πράγματα), this probably does not mean that they have no being. Indeed, at the beginning of his commentary on Chapter VII of the Categories, he clearly holds that relatives have an “existence” (ὑπόστασις), and this “by nature” (φύσει).

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86 Ita quoque et habitudines in eo quod alicuius rei habitudines sunt, in relatione ponuntur, in eo quod secundum eas quales aliqui dicuntur, in qualitate numerantur (BOETHIUS, In Cat., PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 261C, with “aliqui” instead of “aliquid”, on the basis of “quidam quales” at 240A and “aliqui quales” at 260D).


89 AMNONIUS, In Cat., CAG IV.4, ed. A. Busse, 66.21-67.11.
founded on something of another category\textsuperscript{90}. Such a move could be based on the statement of Aristotle in \textit{Metaphysics}, N, 1 saying: “the relative is a certain affection of the quantified”\textsuperscript{91}. According to such an interpretation, \textit{Categories} VIII, 11a37-38 would simply be a reminder that relational properties come together with a member of another category. The same interpretation is maybe made by Philoponus. Indeed, even if he says, like Porphyry and Simplicius, that it is not a problem for one thing to belong to different categories “considered in different respects” (κατ’ ὀλλο μὲντοι καὶ ὀλλο), the examples he gives are father and son\textsuperscript{92}. Olympiodorus and Elias suggest the same solution as Ammonius, and this solution is even briefly evoked in Porphyry\textsuperscript{93}. In fact, the idea that \textit{Categories} VIII, 11a37-38 is limited to relatives had earlier been defended by Alexander of Aphrodisias:

But Alexander of Aphrodisias thinks that this – the fact of some relatives being classed under another category – happens only in the case of relatives, because what is relative does not even have its own substrate in the first place, but has its being in various different categories. (…) Alexander observed that it was a particular feature of relatives always to exist along with another category; for example a father with Substance, the larger with the Quantified, the friend with the Qualified, the striker with Activity, etc.\textsuperscript{94}

Holding that the “father” exists with “substance”, or “essence” (οὐσία), does not seem to make the point, since every accident needs an essence. But the idea probably is that being a father is

\textsuperscript{90} Compare to Simplicius, who also says that “relatives do not exist in their own right but have [their] being in other things” (τὰ πρὸς τί μὴ ἄστι καθ’ αὐτά, ἄλλ’ ἐν ἄλλοις τὸ εἶναι ἔχει; SIMPLICIUS, \textit{In Phys.}, CAG X, ed. H. Diels, 1071.2-3, transl. Ch. Hagen; see also SIMPLICIUS, \textit{In Phys.}, CAG X, ed. H. Diels, 835.21-23 and 837.7-9), and who nevertheless defends at length the existence of relatives (see SIMPLICIUS, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 169.1-171.22, specially 170.4-5). Here too, the idea seems to be that relational properties are founded on other categories, not that they have no existence.

\textsuperscript{91} πάθος τι τοῦ ποσοῦ τὸ πρὸς τί (Met. N. 1, 1088a24-25).

\textsuperscript{92} PHILOPONUS, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG XIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 162.25-28. It is likely that Philoponus’ position resemble the one of Ammonius, due to the dependence of his commentary on Ammonius’ one (on these questions, see A. BUSSE, \textit{Praefatio} and \textit{Supplementa praefashionis}, in Ammonius, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG IV.4, pp. v-lvi, and \textit{Praefatio} and \textit{Supplementum praefationis}, in Philoponus, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG XIII.1, pp. v-xvi). Certainly, Boethius too, in the parallel passage, only gives the examples of father, but he also says that one thing considered in different respects can belong to more than two categories (BOETHIUS, \textit{In Cat.}, PL 64, ed. J.-P. Migne, 261C).

\textsuperscript{93} See OLYMPIODORUS, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG XIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 129.30-34 and ELIAS, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.33-239.2, as well as PORPHYRY, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG IV.1, ed. A. Busse, 114.12-13.

\textsuperscript{94} ὁ μὲντοι Αφροδισιεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος ἐπὶ μόνον τῶν πρὸς τί συμβαίνειν οὔτε τοῦτο τὸ τινὰ τῶν πρὸς τί καὶ ὑπ’ ἄλλης κατηγορίας ἀνάγεσθαι, διὸ τὴν ἄρχην τὸ πρὸς τί οὐδὲ εἶχεν οὐκείην ὑποκείμενον, ἄλλ’ ἐπ’ ἄλλης καὶ ἄλλης κατηγορίας τὸ εἶναι εἶχεν. (…) ιδῶν δὲ τι τί πρὸς τί ἐνείθεν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος τὸ πάντως σὸν ἄλλη κατηγορίᾳ ὑφεστάναι, ὡς ὁ μὲν πατὴρ μετὰ οὐσίας, τὸ δὲ μείζον μετὰ ποσοῦ, ὁ δὲ φίλος μετὰ ποιοῦ καὶ ὁ τύπτων μετὰ τοῦ ποιοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁσιάτος (SIMPLICIUS, \textit{In Cat.}, CAG VIII, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, 292.30-34 and 293.5-9, transl. B. Fleet, slightly modified, and, for the first sentence, following the suggestions made by an anonymous referee of this journal).
founded on a peculiar activity of man as a living being, namely its generative activity\textsuperscript{95}. At any rate, Alexander’s idea is that relatives always depend on another category, and that this is the only point that Aristotle wants to make in *Categories* VIII, 11a37-38.

Olympiodorus and Elias count three solutions to the problem of the dual categorization: (i) the acceptance of the dual categorization of one and the same thing “considered in different respects” (κατ’ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο); (ii) the sharing out of the dual categorization among species and genus; (iii) the assimilation of the supposed “dual categorization” to the dependence of relational properties on other categories\textsuperscript{96}. But in fact, the plausible version of (i) is: (i’) the acceptance of the dual categorization to the extent that it holds of a “complex thing” (σύνθετον). And in the final analysis, as regards the very problem of the dual categorization of habits and dispositions in general, and of knowledge in particular, (i’) and (iii) are not that different: “habit”, “disposition” or “knowledge” refer to a complex thing made up of a quality and a relational property.

**IV. The fortune of *Categories* VIII, 11a20-38**

Considering the solutions that emerge from the early reception of Aristotle’s *Categories* VIII, 11a20-38, the one holding that the dual categorization of habits and dispositions could be shared out among species and genus is hard to defend: the Aristotelian “categorial ladder” would lose its rungs. As for the mere dual categorization of one and the same thing, this should be rejected if Aristotle’s categories are meant to stay “mutually exclusive”\textsuperscript{97}. The less problematic thesis seems to be that “the same thing” (τὸ οὐσία) can belong to two distinct categories if it is admitted that this “same thing” is not a simple, but a “complex thing” (σύνθετον) – whether this statement is limited to relatives or not. Thus, habits and dispositions are complex “relative-qualities”. Whereas it is difficult to establish in what sense habits and dispositions in general are relative – are they of a “subject”, must they be “specified”, are they “due proportions” or “disproportions”? – for the habit of knowledge, and for the disposition of unstable knowledge, there is less doubt about their relative character: like sensation, which is of an “object”, namely “of a sensible” (αἰσθητοῦ), knowledge too is of an “object”, namely “of a knowable”

\textsuperscript{95} Note that Aristotle’s classification of father among *Met.* Δ, 15, 1021a14-26’s relatives “according to potency” (κατὰ δύναμιν), i.e. “causal” relatives, is surely due to the fact that fatherhood is founded on the activity of generation.

\textsuperscript{96} OLYMPIODORUS, *In Cat.*, CAG XII.1, ed. A. Busse, 129.10-39 and ELIAS, *In Cat.*, CAG XVIII.1, ed. A. Busse, 238.1-239.11. Olympiodorus holds that Aristotle mentions and defends only the second and the third solutions.

\textsuperscript{97} See M. FREDE, “The Title, Unity and Authenticity of the Aristotelian *Categories*”, *op. cit.*, p. 13, quoted above.
Thus, at any rate, the habit and the disposition of knowledge are complex things in the sense that they are “qualities-relative-to-an-‘object’”.

In fact, the dual categorization of the habit and disposition of knowledge in Aristotle is one of the first historical occurrences of a broader philosophical problem, still alive nowadays, concerning the ontological status of mental acts and states in general: are they “absolute” or “relative”? In other words, the dual categorization of the habit and disposition of knowledge echoes the problem of the absolute or relative nature of “intentionality”. Whereas today, Aristotle’s text is not explicitly mentioned in such discussions, this was indeed the case in the Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic traditions. For example, both Scotus and Suárez, in asking whether mental acts and states are absolute or relative, turned to Categories VIII, 11a20-38 and to Aristotle’s worries about this point. In view of this, a historian will say that the Scholastics and Neo-Scholastics inherited the hesitations of Aristotle, and that these hesitations could have indirectly determined our contemporary discussions. A philosopher, without denying the historical influences, will add that there could be something in the nature of mental acts and states that invites both an absolute and a relative comprehension of these phenomena. Now, the discussions of Aristotle’s early commentators might inspire the philosopher in his inquiries: “mental act” or “mental state” are ambiguous expressions, which, at least sometimes, refer to a complex entity (a “σύνθετον”), both absolute and relative. In the contemporary context, one application of this idea could be the following: mental acts and states whose object exists are complex entities, in which one has to distinguish the aspect of mere “aboutness”, or “intentionality” stricto sensu, which could be understood as an ontologically absolute feature – i.e. nothing is required except thinking-of-a-centaur when thinking of a centaur –, from the aspect of “reference”, which is necessarily relational – i.e. referring to the world means having some sort of relation to the object of which the act or state is about. However, this would only be a first step toward the elucidation of the exact nature of mental acts and states. Indeed, the question is largely open as to what exactly the relation of reference is: is it a causal relation, or

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99 For reference as distinct from intentionality, in that reference is a relation between the mental act or state and an existent object, whereas intentionality is independent of the existence of the object, see T. HORGAN – J. TIENSON, The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality, in Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, D. J. Chalmers (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 520-533. For a theory were intentionality is something absolute to which a relation is added if the object of the act or state exists, see U. KRIELEG, The Sources of Intentionality, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011 (Philosophy of Mind).
is it another sort of relation, for example some sort of similarity? Again, going back to Aristotle, his reader will have some difficulties in establishing the status of the relation holding between knowledge and sensation and their objects, the knowable (ἐπιστητόν) and the sensible (αἰσθητόν): whereas in the *De anima*, this relation seems to be a peculiar kind of causal relation\(^\text{100}\), the *De interpretatione* says that the “affections of the soul” (παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς) are “similarities” (ὁμοώματα) of the “things” (πράγματα)\(^\text{101}\). Here too, following Aristotle, there are important Scholastic debates on these points\(^\text{102}\). And again, hearing this, a historian and a philosopher will ask different questions.

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\(^\text{101}\) *De int.* I, 16a3-9.