

PORPHYRY'S INTERPRETATION OF CATEGORIES – THE NEOPLATONIC APPROACH TO NOMINALISM?*

By

ANNA ZHYRKOVA

ABSTRACT: According to some opinions, because of Porphyry's account of categories as *lexeis*, his teaching has been regarded as a type of nominalism. In my opinion, however, in Porphyry the categories constitute generic concepts of things. Porphyry's doctrine rather is a version of realism that allows him to unite the Aristotelian categorical doctrine with the Plotinian ontology.

Porphyry's interpretation of Aristotle's categories is of special importance for inquiry in the field of history of philosophy, as it influenced not only the Neoplatonic philosophy, but also had impact upon Medieval philosophy. On the one hand, it is commonly believed that Porphyry's interpretation of Aristotle's notion of categories corresponds to the one offered by Middle Platonists, in subsuming the Peripatetic categories under the second Academic genus, i.e. the Sensible Realm. However, according to another opinion, Porphyry's treatment has been influenced by Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's doctrine of categories. Yet, what is more interesting is that despite the above viewpoints, his teaching has often been regarded as a kind of nominalism. This opinion is usually supported by Porphyry's view of categories *qua* *lexis*. In the light of such different and in some way opposite standpoints, I propose discussion on Porphyry's conception of categories as significant expressions relating to the genera of the realities signified by those expressions. Before discussing Porphyry's view, I find it useful to outline briefly the accounts of the above relation in the doctrines of Middle Platonists and Plotinus.

ARISTOTLE'S CATEGORIES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF PORPHYRY'S PREDECESSORS

The Peripatetic as well as Stoic categories were already adopted in the 5th Academy by precursors of the Middle Platonism. The ten Aristotelian categories

* I am particularly grateful to Steven K. Strange for a very helpful discussion of an earlier version of the paper.