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John Buridan on the Predicables

2.1 Chapter 1. On the Predicables

2.1.1 Several senses of the term 'predicable'

[The term] 'predicable' is sometimes taken strictly, sometimes broadly. A predicable, strictly speaking, is what is predicated of many [things]; a predicable, taken broadly, is what is predicated whether of only one or of many things; of only one thing, as 'Socrates' is predicated only of him [i.e., Socrates], when we say: 'Socrates is Socrates', of many things, as when 'animal' is predicated of man and horse, and 'man' of Socrates and Plato, and so forth.

The second treatise deals with predicables. It contains seven chapters: the first is about a distinction concerning the name 'predicable', the second is about genus, the third is about species, the fourth is about difference, the fifth is about property, the sixth is about accident, and the seventh is about the proper and common characteristics of predicables. The first chapter contains three parts: the first is the distinction concerning the name 'predicable', the second is about the accord between the names 'predicable' and 'universal', and the third is the division of predicables. Concerning the first part, and the whole treatise, we should note that the terms 'predicate' and 'predicable' do not differ in their significations, except with respect to actuality and potentiality. And although we may say that Porphyry discussed predicables and Aristotle, in the *Topics*, discussed predicates, we should not think that Aristotle and Porphyry wanted to draw a distinction in their discussions between these with respect to actuality and potentiality; indeed, both of them call that which is predicated . . . etc., that is, what can be predicated . . . etc., a genus. Second, we should note that although every conventionally significative utterance when taken materially can be the subject or the predicate in a proposition, not all such utterances when taken significatively can thus be the subject or the predicate. But here we intend to consider only terms that can be predicated when taken significatively. Third, we should note that the things that exist without any operation of the soul, such as stones or plants, are neither predicates nor subjects in propositions, but the concepts in the mind, insofar as they occur in mental propositions, can be [subjects or predicates], as can vocal or written terms, which are rendered significative by the mediation of

these concepts, as has been said elsewhere. And these are called predicables insofar as they are apt to be predicated of certain subjects in certain propositions; and they could likewise be called subjectible, insofar as they can also be subjected to certain predicates in certain propositions.

Therefore, we should note with reference to the author's distinction that some terms are predicated, or are apt to be predicated, of many things, and some only of one thing, as he himself illustrates; and broadly speaking both [kinds] are called 'predicable'. But strictly speaking, the name 'predicable' is restricted to supposit only for terms predicable of many things, and it is in this strict sense that Porphyry intends to discuss the predicables. But then a serious doubt arises as to whether any term is predicable only of one thing. And it appears not. For such would be the term 'Socrates' or some other term that we call 'singular', or 'discrete'; but this is not the case, for the term 'Socrates' is predicable of many things. Proof: for a thing is not predicated of a thing, speaking about things that exist without the operation of the soul, such as stones or trees; but it is [only] a significative term that is predicated of another significative term, as was said above. Now it is obvious, however, that the term 'Socrates' is predicated of a great number of terms, as for example, of 'Socrates', 'man', 'animal', 'risible' [animal], 'white [thing]', 'educated [person]', etc.; for a man is Socrates, an animal is Socrates, a risible [animal] is Socrates, a white [thing] is Socrates, and so forth for many others.

Now, without any doubt I believe that the objection is valid in its own way, and that every term truly predicable or subjectible in a true affirmative proposition is truly predicable not only of one, but of many, i.e., of each and every one of many different terms. Therefore, [the distinction] should be expounded in such a manner that a singular term, such as 'Socrates', is not apt to be predicated of many things, meaning that it cannot supposit for many things dividedly, i.e., for each and every one, in the sense that if we mark one thing for which it supposits, it cannot supposit for another. Indeed, even if we mark several things for which it supposits conjunctively [*supponit coniunctim*], as does the term 'this people', it cannot supposit for any others, unless this happens by equivocation, or it happens because it denominates the whole on account of a principal part, or on account of the unity resulting from the continuity of several parts succeeding each other in something, as in a river, or in some such manner (which is not to be discussed here, but elsewhere, namely, where the question will be raised about the identity of parts [taken together] with their whole); as, e.g., how the term 'Seine' is a singular term, although it is not the same water that is now the Seine and that was the Seine last year.² Therefore, a 'predicable', strictly speaking, in the sense intended here, is described as a term apt to be predicated of many things, i.e., apt to supposit for many things, and not for only one thing in the way we just described concerning singular terms.

1 Obviously, 'risible' here and throughout should not be taken in the modern vernacular sense of 'ridiculous', but in the somewhat outmoded, but still quite commonly recognized sense of 'capable of laughter'. In any case, in this sense, the term *risibilis* (risible) was taken to be the stock example of a *proprium* (property) of man, in the technical sense of 'property' to be explained by Buridan in more detail below.

2 See J. Buridan, *Quaestiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis: Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Physik* (Paris, 1509; reprint, Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1964), bk. 1, q. 10.

2.1.2 The difference and agreement between 'predicable' and 'universal'

Therefore, a predicable, strictly speaking, is the same [thing] as a universal, but they differ because a predicable is defined as something that is apt to be predicated of many things, and a universal as something that is apt to be in many things.

The second part is in accordance with [the formulation of] our author,³ but is not true, properly speaking [*de proprietate sermonis*]; for if A is the same [thing] as B, then the one does not differ from the other. Therefore, I abandon his text, and I say that the terms 'predicable' and 'universal' are not the same, but they are convertibly said to be [the] same [thing] [*dicuntur idem convertibiliter*], so that every predicable is a universal and conversely, and thus the predicate '[the] same [thing]' is truly affirmed of them taken significatively. For every predicable and universal are [the] same [thing], and, conversely, every universal and predicable are [the] same [thing].⁴ But the terms 'predicable' and 'universal' are said to be diverse in their concepts, for they were imposed according to different concepts to signify the same things. For the terms 'predicate' and 'subject' are predicated correlatively, and thus also are the terms 'predicable' and 'subjectible'; for a term is said to be predicable, because it can be predicated of a subject, and subjectible, because it can be subjected to a predicate in a proposition. But the same term is called a universal because it indifferently signifies many things, and is apt to supposit for many things, as has been said, whether as a subject or as a predicate. Nor should we think that a universal term is *in* the terms contained under it, except taking 'being in' [*inesse*] for being truly predicated affirmatively, so that 'being predicated' and 'being in' would not differ, except verbally [*secundum vocem*]. And we should note that although sometimes something is said to be a universal with respect to causation, because it is a cause of many things, as is God, or a universal on account of distribution, as when a proposition is said to be universal, or in some other ways, nevertheless, 'universal' is here taken only for a common term because it signifies many things, or rather, to put it better, because it supposits for many, as was said earlier.

2.1.3 The division of predicables

Predicables, taken strictly, are divided into genus, species, difference, property and accident.

The third part divides the term 'predicable' into its species. For, since something is called a predicable because it is apt to be predicated of many things, it is reasonable to distinguish the species or modes contained under the term 'predicable' according to the different modes of predication. Therefore, everything that is predicated of something is either predicated essentially, so that neither term adds some extraneous connotation to the signification of the other, or it is predicated denominatively, so that one term does add some extrinsic connotation to the signification of the other. This division is clearly exhaustive, for it is given in terms of opposites. If, therefore, something is predicated essentially, in the above-described manner, then it is either predicated in [reply to the question] 'What [is it]' [*in quid*] or in [reply to the question] 'What [is it like?]' [*in quale*]; and if *in quale*, then it is a difference, and if *in quid*,

3 See Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, ed. L. M. de Rijk (Assen: van Gorcum, 1972), p. 17.

4 This is in fact the explication of the phrase *dicuntur idem convertibiliter* (are convertibly said to be the same thing).

then, if it is predicated of many things differing in species, then it is called 'genus', but if it is predicated of many things differing only numerically, then it is called 'species', or even if it is predicated of many things differing in species and has a superior genus, it is still called a 'species', as will be explained later. If, however, it is predicated denominatively, then it is either predicated convertibly with that of which it is predicated, or it is not; if so, then with respect to that it is called 'property'; if not, then with respect to that it is called 'accident'. Thus it is obvious that every predicable, with respect to that of which it is predicable, has to be called either a genus, or a species, or a difference, or a property, or an accident.

[Some] doubts concerning this division will be considered, when its individual members will have been discussed in particular. But some people want to draw the distinctions in another way, saying that every predicable is predicable either *in quid* or *in quale*; if *in quid*, then it is either a genus or a species, and if *in quale*, then either essentially or accidentally; and then, if accidentally, then either convertibly or not. But this whole [division] is wrongly stated, for there are many predicables that are neither predicated in reply to the question 'What is it?' [*in quid*] nor in reply to the question 'What is it like?' [*in quale*], but in reply to the question 'How much?' [*in quantum*], [i.e., 'How big?', 'How long?', etc.] as 'two-cubits-long' or 'three-cubits-long', or in reply to the question 'How many?' [*in quot*], as 'three', 'four', or in reply to the question 'When?' [*in quando*], as 'yesterday', 'tomorrow', or in reply to the question 'Where?' [*in ubi*], as 'in the house', 'outside the house', etc.