ARISTOTLE ON PREDICATION: AN ANALYSIS OF
ANAL. POST. 83a

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In his *Anal. Post.* 83a 1-23, Aristotle draws a distinction between what he calls proper (or, genuine) predication (ἁπλῶς κατηγορεῖν) and what he calls improper (or, accidental) predication (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς κατηγορεῖν). He gives as an instance of the former the statement: (A) "The timber (or log) is large" (τὸ ξύλον μέγα ἐστιν) and as an instance of the latter kind of predication the statement: (B) "That large thing is timber" (τὸ μέγα ἐκεινο ξύλον ἐστιν). Aristotle says that statement (B) could also called not predication at all (μηδαμῶς κατηγορεῖν). Thus, either he thinks he is making a concession by regarding (B) as a predicate statement even if it is an accidental one, or he is not sure whether indeed it is a predicate statement at all. It is my aim in this paper to show that (B), like (A), is a proper (or, genuine) predicate statement.

One might be tempted to suppose, *prima facie*, that, as regards (B), the referent of the expression "that large thing" is "the" timber, and hence the statement reduces to "the timber is the timber", which is an identity, not a predicate, statement. If this were so, Aristotle would be right in calling (B) not predication at all (μηδαμῶς κατηγορεῖν). But this is not so, for Aristotle does not say that "that large thing is *the* timber", nor does the form of expression of (B) admit of such an analysis. The reason is this: in a Greek sentence like "Wisdom is a virtue", or "Wisdom is virtue" (ἡ σοφια ἀρετη ἐστιν), the definite article is not attached to the predicate, viz. ἀρετη (virtue). Consequently, when Aristotle writes that "*x ξύλον ἐστιν*, he can only be taken to mean that "*x* is timber" or "*x* is a timber"—which is a predicate statement.

Let us see how each of the following three statements can be analysed:

The timber is large (S_1)
That large thing is (a) timber (S_2)
That large thing is the timber (S_3)

There is no difficulty with S_1, for it is an obvious instance of a predicate statement, with "the timber" as its subject and "is large" as its predicate.