A Rationale for Aristotle's Notion
of Perfect Syllogisms

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1 Introduction   The intention of this essay is to defend the distinction between perfect and imperfect syllogisms found in the first book of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. This will involve close attention to arguments of Gunther Patzig, surely one of the major modern interpreters of Aristotle's syllogistic. The essay will conclude with a few comments about Aristotle's reluctance to employ term complements.

2 History of the distinction   According to Aristotle, there are three syllogistic "figures" — or, we might say, "configurations."[1] What distinguishes the three is the arrangement of terms in the two premises:

(1) if, in the premises, the subject term of the conclusion applies to[2] the one term which does not appear in the conclusion (i.e., the middle term) and the middle term applies to the term which appears as predicate in the conclusion (this relationship 'applies to' being asymmetric), then the syllogism belongs to the first figure (APR 25b32-7; 26a17-23).[3]

(2) if one and the same term (i.e., the middle term) applies, in different premises, to the two terms which appear in the conclusion, the syllogism is of the second figure (APR 26b34-8; 27a26-32).

(3) if, in the premises, both terms which appear in the conclusion apply, in turn, to the one that doesn't, the syllogism is of the third figure (APR 28a10-14; 28b5-7).

Because he defines the three figures in this fashion, ignoring, for the most part, the order of the terms in the conclusions (or, more precisely, simply assuming a particular order), Aristotle has only three figures — since (prescinding from the