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Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Berkeley Undergraduate Journal of Classics, 1(1)

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Publication Date

2012

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The Interface between Christian and Classical Tradition: An Examination of Logic in the Writings of Cyril of Alexandria

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Abstract: *Perhaps one of the most significant features of Late Antiquity is the diverse interaction between different ethno-religious groups. Alexandria, quite a cosmopolitan city during this time, was no exception, and a home for Jews, Christians and pagans alike. In Alexandria, interactions between these groups ranged from peaceful, scholastic exchange at academies to outbreaks of public violence, most notably the destruction of the Serapeum in 391. Further evidence of the tense interaction between these groups can be found in an examination of the city's intellectual history: namely, Christians' fraught relationship with the classical tradition. On one hand, Homer and other classical authors for over a century had formed the educational canon; on the other, these pagan works contained what Christians believed to be questionable morals. In this paper I examine the use of the logic tradition in the polemical writings of Cyril of Alexandria. Logic was developed primarily by Aristotle in the Organon and further expanded by his followers and later philosophers. I argue that Cyril does not use logic out of any great admiration of its efficacy, but merely because it is the tool that his opponents use in their own polemical writings: he essentially attempts to beat his enemies with their own weapons. Understood this way, Cyril's use of logic demonstrates a rather ambivalent attitude toward the classical tradition – indeed, the direct quotation of Aristotle and the creative use of his tools, but seemingly without any great admiration for Aristotle or the logic tradition.*

In 2009, Cyril of Alexandria, bishop from 412 until his death in 444, took the spotlight in Alejandro Amenábar's latest film *Agora* as the ruthless leader of the Alexandria church and the murderer of Hypatia. This negative portrayal of Cyril is a reversal of the latest trends in scholarship, which has begun to absolve (or at least question) much of the condemnation placed on Cyril of Alexandria, both as somewhat of a political bully and also as a rather inept writer on a theological and philosophical level. In this paper, I will explore the latter topic — Cyril's use of Greek philosophy. Specifically, I will examine his use of the logical tradition, the extent to which he knew, used, and appreciated the works of Aristotle and the later Neo-Platonist interpreters of Aristotle, such as Porphyry and Plotinus.

Cyril's life, from around 376 to 444, was situated in a significant period of Alexandrian history: Christians were slowly but surely emerging as the victors in the struggle for power in the city. A consideration of the writings of a prominent leader of the Church, as Cyril was, provides a glimpse at the extent to which a Christian writer, during this period of Christian ascendancy to majority and power in Alexandria, incorporated classical and Late Antique pagan texts into various genres, including polemic theological discourse and exegesis.

Scholars who first examined Cyril's use of the logical tradition noted that he used some technical terms of logic, such as those used by Aristotle in his logic treatises, but they claimed his use was rather elementary, believing that Cyril simply and in an uninformed manner used the phrases without really understanding what they meant. This scholarship was of the opinion that Cyril lacked an appreciation for Classical and Neo-Platonist philosophy.¹ Some recent scholarship, perhaps reactionary to these prior claims of Cyril's ineptitude, has argued that Cyril's writings actually demonstrate a fascination and intimacy with principles of logic pervasive throughout all his writings — present not only in his polemical writings in which he responds to the contemporary Christological controversies, but is also present in his exegetical

¹ Ruth M. Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies* 38, 1987. 341.

writings where he develops his own theology during his extensive commentaries on books of the Old and New Testament.²

I suggest that, as with many things, the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these claims. Contrary to recent scholarship, I do not see much evidence that Cyril used the logical tradition in his exegetical writing. On the other hand, Cyril's use of the logical principles in his polemical writings is much more informed than earlier scholars give him credit for. I will argue that Cyril indeed makes use of the logical tradition in his polemical writings, especially when he engages in debates against Arianism, but his use of the logical tradition is limited to this genre. The logical tradition is not a significant aspect of his exegetical commentaries or his theology in general.

Furthermore, I will argue that the discrepancy between Cyril's extensive use of logic in polemic and lack of use in exegesis can be understood by examining his opponents' strategies of argumentation, Cyril's description of his own use of ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη, as well as his strategies of refuting his enemies' claim in a variety of his polemical writings. Based on these considerations, I will argue that Cyril uses the logical tradition especially in his polemical writings against the Arians because this was the mode in which the Arians themselves wrote. Some degree of familiarity with logic thus would allow Cyril to effectively respond to his opponents, communicate his claims to others using terminology they would understand, and also provide him with the method to refute his opponents on the grounds of an established tradition that they themselves used — so to speak beating them at their own game. However, Cyril's use of the principles of logic does not point to any personal interest he developed in the discipline or theological importance he attached to the tradition.

I will first examine Cyril's use of the logic tradition in his engagement of the Christological controversies, specifically Arianism, and show the extent to which he uses (as well as misuses) the logical tradition. Turning to his exegetical works, I will examine passages scholars have claimed demonstrate Cyril's incorporation of the logic tradition into his exegesis, and show that Cyril's extensive use of logic in his writings on the Christological controversies is not paralleled in his exegetical writings. Finally, I will provide evidence that Cyril used the logical tradition in his polemical works as an effort to beat his opponents with their own argumentative tools.

Before turning to Cyril's writing, it is worth briefly digressing to discuss what is meant by the "logical tradition," because philosophical schools in Antiquity each developed their own forms of logic. The classical logical tradition began with Plato's discussion of the dialectical method, consisting mostly in the method of placing things in a proper genus according to their substance. Aristotle significantly developed the discipline of logic with his work *Organon*, consisting of six books each addressing a different topic of logic. For the Peripatetics, logic was a method of argumentation disposable to any discipline. The Neo-Platonist Porphyry did much to reconcile the logical tradition of Plato and Aristotle in his treatise *On the [Dis]agreement of Plato and Aristotle* (only extant in a tenth century Arabic translation from the Greek).³ In addition, later Christian authors, such as Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria included passages from these pagan works in their own writing. It is these Christian writings, consisting of

² See: Ruth M. Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," J. M. Labelle, "S. Cyrille d'Alexandrie: témoin de la langue et de la pensée philosophiques au Ve siècle." *Revue de Sciences Religieuses* 52, 1978, 135-158, and Roy Kearsley, "The Impact of Greek Concepts of God on the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria." *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, 1992. 307-329.

³ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2009). 65-66.

paraphrasing logical principles or citation of some of earlier texts, which were often the sole source, or at least starting point, for later Christian writers who used the logical tradition in their writings.

According to our ancient sources, Cyril was born in 378 at Theodosiou in Lower Egypt. His uncle Theophilus became Bishop of Alexandria when Cyril was around 7. Theophilus supervised his nephew's education, which continued until he was about 17, when Theophilus sent Cyril to live for five years with a monastic community in the desert Nitrea.⁴ Although geographically isolated, the ascetic desert community was an integral part of the Alexandrian Church. After the death of Theophilus in 412, Cyril became Bishop of Alexandria and responsible for one of the largest of the earliest churches, the Church of Alexandria.⁵ Before and during his incumbency, Cyril wrote extensively. Most of his surviving work is exegetical, demonstrating an intimacy with both the New and Old Testament. Two of his most important non-exegetical works, *Dialogues on the Trinity* and *Thesaurus*, both extended refutations of Arian theology, will be considered later in this paper.

G.M. de Durand, editor of several texts of Cyril, was the first to examine the Alexandrian bishop's writings for use of logic, which he discussed in his translation of *Dialogues on the Trinity* in 1976. He acknowledged the Alexandrian bishop's use of Aristotelian terms but thought that they had been mindlessly borrowed from introductory logic books and that they did not display any sort of expertise in logical discipline.⁶ Wickham expressed a similar judgment a decade later, saying:

Cyril's Christology, at the level of philosophical explanation, will always seem thin. It lacks the barrage of technical jargon to be developed over the next century... Cyril's innocence of jargon, his simplicity over against the sophistications of his opponents and even his interpreters is his strength.⁷

A closer examination of some of Cyril's writing shows that this is not the case, and that his use of the logical tradition is more sophisticated than simple, mindless mentioning of technical phrases. This can be especially seen in his polemical writings *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* refuting Arian theology. Arius was a mid-third and early fourth century presbyter and theologian who believed that Christ was created by God (in other words, had not always existed), and also opposed Trinitarian doctrine.⁸ *Thesaurus* specifically responds to the writings of the Arian theologian Eunomius and Aetius while *Dialogues* is more a generalized critique of Arian theology.⁹ In my examination of Cyril's use of the logical tradition in these writings, I will consider his explicit citations of logic writing, as well as Cyril's more general correct, incorrect, and incomplete use of the logical tradition.

⁴ E.R. Hardy suggests in "The Further Education of Cyril of Alexandria" that we reject this tradition, presented in Severus's *Lives of the Patriarchs*, as "merely based on on sense of what would be fitting." In *Studia Patristica*. Vol XVII, Part 1. Ed. By Elizabeth A. Livingstone. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982. 116-121.

⁵ Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*. (London: Routledge. 2000), chapter one, "The Making of a Bishop."

⁶ G.M. de Durand, *Cyrille D'Alexandrie: Dialogues sur la Trinité*. As cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 62.

⁷ Lionel R. Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria, Selected Letters*. As cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 62.

⁸ Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*. 7.

⁹ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 93.

In her dissertation “Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria,” Ruth Siddals turns to Cyril’s *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* for evidence of Cyril’s use of Aristotelian principles of logic and integration of Aristotelian concepts into his argument. Siddals examines Cyril’s critique and focuses on the arguments of Eunomius and how he uses logic to refute the theological claims of Eunomius. Eunomius defines God as ἀγέννητον,¹⁰ a definition that Cyril believes is inadequate on the grounds of logic. He begins his refutation by defining the purpose of a definition: πᾶς μὲν γὰρ ὅρος λόγος ἐστὶ, τὸ τί ἐστὶν κατ’ οὐσίαν τὸ σημαίνον ἀποδίδους. This definition seems to be a restating of the definition that Aristotle puts forward in *Topics*, even containing some of the same vocabulary: Ἔστι δ’ ὅρος μὲν λόγος ὁ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνων. Cyril clearly has read Aristotle, or was indirectly familiar with his work via later authors such as another Christian author, Porphyry, or an introductory textbook.¹¹

In his discussion of definition Aristotle claims there must be two components of every definition:

Καὶ εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν τῷ ὀρίσμῳ λεγομένων, γένος ἢ διαφορὰ ἂν εἴη,
ἐπειδὴ ὁ ὀρίσμος ἐκ γένους καὶ διαφορῶν ἐστίν.

In his critique of Eunomius, Cyril insists that a definition cannot be one word, and like Aristotle claims that a proper definition will have these two components, γένος and διαφορὰ: a genus, a general class of things to which the object defined belongs, and a differentia, a discriminating characteristic:

Οὐκοῦν ἀμφίμαχον μὲν οὐδαμῶς, εἴη δ’ ἂν μᾶλλον οὐκ
ἀσυμφανές, ὅτι τοῖς τῶν οὐσιῶν ὅροις διὰ γένους μὲν πρότερον,
ἔπειτα δὲ διὰ τῆς ἐκάστω πρεπούσης εἰδοποιοῦ διαφορᾶς ἰτέον.

Furthermore, Cyril argues that his definition fails on several more accounts according to the logical tradition: “it is ambiguous and negative in character, it includes an opposite... and is not exactly convertible with the subject.”¹² As Cyril continues the argument, he continues to draw on Aristotelian logic to refute Eunomius, often citing Aristotle or claiming that Eunomius has incorrectly used ἡ Ἀριστοτελους τέχνη.¹³

Siddals’ discussion of Cyril’s work points to his sophisticated and developed use of the logical tradition: in addition to explicit citation of both Aristotle and his work, Cyril works Aristotelian logic into the framework of his refutation. Cyril rejects Eunomius’ definition of God, ἀγέννητον, on logical, not theological grounds. This centralized use of logic in Cyril’s arguments against Arianism quite clearly shows that Durand and Wickham’s claims of Cyril’s ignorance does not do justice to the extent to which Cyril incorporates the logical tradition into the central argument in his polemical writings: these are not instances of simply using phrases

¹⁰ Ruth M. Siddals, “Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria,” 341-343.

¹¹ See Robert Grant, “Greek Literature in the Treatise *De Trinitate* and Cyril *Contra Julianum*. *Journal of Theological Studies*, 15, 1964. 265 — 299. Grant proposes a possible path of research Cyril undertook in *Contra Julianum*, but this study has implications for Cyril’s general approach to learning about pagan writings. Grant proposes that “Graeco-Roman environment [that was]... carefully defined and delimited, since so much of his acquaintance with it depends on what his predecessors mentioned.” Despite these restrictions, Cyril seems to have only used the citations of his predecessors as a starting point for his research.

¹² Ruth M. Siddals, “Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria,” 343.

¹³ *Thesaurus* 145B, as cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, 108.

that he does not understand. He demonstrates a clear familiarity and a comfort with explicitly using logical principles to refute his opponent's arguments.

Although Cyril clearly has more mastery of logic than earlier scholars would have, I fear that some recent scholarship, perhaps reactionary to previous scholarship dismissing Cyril's use of the logical tradition, has been too generous in its claims both of Cyril's competence with and enthusiasm for the logical tradition. Robert Grant¹⁴ and Jean-Marie Labelle¹⁵ have posited a more positive view of Cyril's familiarity with Aristotelian logic, as well as with the works of other pagan writers such as Porphyry and Plotinus. Labelle goes as far as to claim that Cyril "possesses a real philosophical skill and a perfect mastery of Aristotelian analytics."¹⁶

This seems unlikely, however, because there are moments when Cyril's use of logic falters. Cyril incorrectly uses concepts from *Categories* to respond to Eunomius' argument on consubstantiality. Eunomius argues that if the Father is greater than the Son, then the Son is unlike the Father, and the two are not consubstantial, (ὁμοούσιος). Cyril's response refutes the legitimacy of Eunomius' conditional statement, claiming that Eunomius has confused two of Aristotle's categories. Cyril writes that "greater" and "unlike" are not in the same category — Cyril claims that "greater" and "smaller" belong to things that have a relation, while "like" and "unlike" belong to a different category (he doesn't say which). Because this pair of dichotomies, "greater" and "smaller," as well as "like" and "unlike" belong to different categories, Cyril concludes that it cannot logically follow from something being greater than another that the former is unlike the latter. Therefore, no conclusion of consubstantiality can be reached.

Van Loon¹⁷ notes here that Cyril's refutation does not actually correctly utilize Aristotelian logic. The mistake that Cyril makes here is that Aristotle does indeed classify "like" and "unlike" under the category of relative, therefore the conditional statement of Eunomius is completely valid.¹⁸ This mistake evidences that Cyril did not in fact have the "perfect mastery of Aristotelian analytics" that Labelle claims he had. If Cyril indeed achieved such a perfect mastery of the discipline of logic, would his work really contain such inaccuracies?

In addition to these arguments that perhaps too-generously claim Cyril's competence with logic, Siddals' dissertation, while compellingly demonstrating Cyril's reliance on the logical tradition in his polemical writings, overstates Cyril's relationship to the logical tradition. She argues that Cyril's writings demonstrate an intimate familiarity with philosophical principles, a "mind [that] has been educated to think in a particular way, and shares with the Neo-Platonists of Late Antiquity a genuine fascination for Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*."¹⁹

While Siddals' examination and discussion of Cyril's use of logical argument in his writings on the Christological controversy is quite convincing, her argument becomes more dubious, when she claims that Cyril not only uses Aristotelian logic for his argument against Arian theology, but also in the development of his own Christological model, his scriptural exegesis, and his soteriology — in other words, in exegetical, not only polemical writings. During her arguments for Cyril's use of the logical tradition in this way, her focus remains on

¹⁴ Robert Grant, "Greek Literature in the Treatise *De Trinitate* and Cyril *Contra Julianum*." As cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 64.

¹⁵ J. M. Labelle, "S. Cyrille d'Alexandrie: témoin de la langue et de la pensée philosophiques au Ve siècle." As cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 64.

¹⁶ Ibid, 27.

¹⁷ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, 108.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Categories* 6b¹⁹⁻²⁷. As cited by Van Loon: *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 108.

¹⁹ Ruth M. Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," 341-342.

Cyril's writings on the Arian controversy, still focusing on Cyril's use of logic in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity*. She claims that while refuting Arianism, Cyril is developing his own style of exegesis, Christological model, and soteriology. The difficulty here, however, is Cyril's dominant objective in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* is polemical, not exegetical. Thus these works by nature belong to the genre of polemic, not exegesis. Therefore they cannot be considered a truly informative source on the nature of Cyril's exegesis. Van Loon admits that "the underlying questions are often exegetical"²⁰ in works such as *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* where Cyril is responding to theological opponents, but his main objective is to, "warn the faithful against the error of Arius and Eunomius in multiple forms."²¹ Cyril wrote extensive commentaries on almost every book of the New Testament; these works can be considered strictly exegetical. Siddals, however, does not consider these commentaries at all. She principally draws on *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* for evidence of Cyril's supposed use of logic in his exegesis, even though exegesis is only an accompanying objective in these works, second to his main goal of refuting Arian theology.

Siddals' analysis of the supposed logical exegesis present in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* is tenuous in and of itself. Siddals even admits during her discussion of Cyril's supposed use of Porphyry in his exegesis that, "Cyril does not directly cite... in this context, nor are their obvious parallels in vocabulary."²² It is possible, of course, that Cyril would have been uncomfortable citing Porphyry in an exegetical work, but this is unlikely given his comfort using Aristotelian terms in his theological argumentation against Eunomius.

Cyril's surviving corpus of exegesis is extensive enough that undertaking to prove the absence of logic from his exegetical writings would be a daunting task, but it is significant to note that Kearsley, who argued that Cyril "transposes Neoplatonism rather than replicates it,"²³ also must point to any overlap in vocabulary between Neo-Platonist texts and Cyril's exegetical writings. Of course, a lack of common vocabulary does not necessarily entail a lack of use of the logical tradition. But given the credence that Cyril places on principles of logic, and its central role in Cyril's Trinitarian writings, it seems unlikely that he would have consciously avoided explicit usage of these Aristotelian technical words in his exegetical writings if he indeed was incorporating the logical tradition into his work.

Furthermore, an examination of what Cyril explicitly says about Greek philosophy demonstrates that he betrays no such attitude of fascination that Siddals claims. Such a passage is present in Cyril's Commentary on the Gospel of John, where he speaks of Greek culture and philosophy. His opinion of Greek culture is unmistakably negative:

Ἑλλήνων μὲν γὰρ οἱ δοκωοῦντες εἶναι συνετοὶ, καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς
καὶ δαιμονιώδους σοφίας ἀναπεπλησμένοι, μακροῦς καὶ πικροῦς
ἀναλίσκοντες λόγους, καὶ κύκλους θεωρημάτων εἰκαίων
ἐλίττοντες, ἰστόν τε ἀραχνης κατὰ τό γεγραμμένον ὑφαίνοντες τὴν
ἀληθειαν, ἥτοι τὸ ἀγαθὸν, ἢ τὸ δίκαιον ὃ τι ποτὲ κατὰ φύσιν ἐστίν,
προσποιοῦνται ζητεῖν, καὶ μόνην ὥσπερ σκιὰν τῆς ἀλητοῦς

²⁰ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 94.

²¹ Noël Charlier, "Le Thesaurus de Trinitate de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Questions de critique littéraire." As cited by Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 94.

²² Ruth M. Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," 360.

²³ Roy Kearsley, "The Impact of Greek Concepts of God on the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria." *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992) 309.

γνώσεως ἑαυτοῖς ἀναπλάττοντες, ἄγεστοι παντελῶς τῆς ἐν ἔργοις
διατελοῦσιν ἀρετῆς, καὶ τῆς ἁνωθέν τε καὶ ὄντως σοφίας ἔρημοι
διαμένοντες, ἐπ’ οὐδενὶ τῶν χρησίμων ἔσθ’ ὅτε τὰ μέχρι λόγων
ποιοῦνται γυμνάσματα.²⁴

Cyril clearly has a decidedly negative view of Greek culture. Farag notes that although this viewpoint should be taken as Cyril’s own opinion, this specific criticism of Greek culture fits into the larger traditional debate between rhetoric and philosophy, still active during Cyril’s day. Specifically, this excerpt reflects a disdain for philosophy that Cyril could have had exposure to beginning in his early years of grammatical instruction in Alexandria.²⁵

Furthermore, it is interesting to note Cyril’s citation of Isaiah 59:9 where he says, ἰστόν τε ἀραχνης. Although we cannot be sure Cyril had the context in mind when citing this phrase, this chapter Isaiah describes sinners who have been separated from God because of their iniquities, and who “rely on empty arguments” (Isaiah 59:4). This clearly resonates with Cyril’s discussion of Greek culture in the present excerpt. Greeks, such as the sinners that Isaiah mentions, could be seen to have been separated by God because they were pagan. The reliance on empty arguments clearly goes along with Cyril’s claim that Greek philosophy speaks in, “κύκλους θεωρημάτων εἰκαίων ἐλίπτοντες.” The tradition of logic, begun by Plato, elaborated upon by Aristotle, and further discussed by Porphyry and Proclus, surely for Cyril would be categorized as Greek philosophy. Given this consideration of Cyril’s attitude toward Greek philosophy it is unlikely that he felt any kind of fascination with Aristotelian, Platonic, or Neo-Platonic logic as Siddals claims.

Thus far, we have seen that logic has only significantly appeared in Cyril’s polemical works, specifically in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogue*. An oft-ignored yet noteworthy observation is that both of these works in which logic is an important part of Cyril’s argument are responding to Arianism. Cyril has other polemical works against other opponents in completely different contexts — and yet logic does not take the central role in these works that it does in his writings against Arianism. This is surprising, considering the Nestorian controversy centered on a definition — was the Virgin Mary θεοτόκος or χριστοτόκος? Yet the word ὅρος is completely absent from Cyril’s Nestorian refutation, and in no other obvious way does logic appear in this polemical work. Instead, Scriptural citation dominates Cyril’s method of argumentation.

In order to understand why exactly Cyril uses logic so centrally in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* I will examine two things: the method of argumentation of Cyril’s opponents and Cyril’s own, brief mentioning in these works that he is working with ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη. These considerations both demonstrate that Cyril is only using logic as a means to beat his opponents with their own argumentative tools.

The method of argumentation for the Arians is indeed an important consideration, because they themselves also made use of the logical tradition in their own theological argumentation. In his article on the use of logic during the Trinitarian conflicts of the fourth century, Ghellinck suggests that the negative views toward Arianism extended to the tools they used to make their arguments — logic — as well as the principal name behind this tool: Aristotle.²⁶ Although the Church Fathers sometimes speak positively about the logical tradition

²⁴ In Jo. 1.594. As cited in Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*, 176.

²⁵ Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*, 176-177.

²⁶ Ghellinck, J. de. “Quelques appréciations de la dialectique et d’Aristote durant les conflits trinitaires du IV^e s.”

and Aristotle, often their attitude is more negative, and they deemed this so-called κακοτεχνία²⁷ the principal cause of impiety. Throughout the fourth century, the Arians were often noted — that is, criticized — for their extensive use of logic.²⁸ Faustinus Luciferanus, a priest who wrote a treatise on the Trinity in 380, even went so far as to refer to Aristotle as “the bishop of the Arians.”²⁹ It was especially the radical Arianism, Anomoeanism, of such writers as Aetius and Eunomius that caused Catholics to have an especially negative view of the logical tradition.

It is to these radical Arians, Eunomius and Aetius, that Cyril responds in his anti-Arian writings. This use of the logical tradition in his opponents sheds light on Cyril’s own use of logic when writing against them. It is in the context of the Arian’s use of the logical tradition, that we can understand Cyril’s use of logic in his polemical writings: not in a sustained personal interest for the logical tradition. Although brief, on examining these instances where Cyril explicitly mentions ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη one can understand not only his attitude toward the logical tradition, but also to his reason for using it. I suggest that Cyril uses logic, as it were, to beat his enemies at their own game: he refutes his opponents’ claims using the rhetorical and argumentative tools they themselves used, in an effort to undermine their arguments.

These moments make it clear that Cyril is only begrudgingly using the logical tradition in his argument. In *Thesaurus*, He assures his readers that it was not him who brought in ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη, but it was his opponents:

Ἐκ μαθημάτων ἡμῶν τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους ὁρμώμενοι, καὶ τῇ
δεινότητι τῆς ἐν κόσμῳ σοφίας ἀποκεκρημένοι, κτύπους ἐγείρουσι
ῥημάτων κενῶν³⁰

This excerpt not only points to Cyril’s insistence that he was not the initiator in the use of logic, but to his decidedly negative view of ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη. He is clearly critical of his opponents’ use of this kind of argument. His use of the phrase κόσμῳ σοφίας resonates with the passage from his commentary on the Gospel of John where he says, καὶ τῆς **κοσμικῆς** καὶ δαιμονιώδους **σοφίας** ἀναπεπλησμένοι. A few sentences later, clearly having in mind Isaiah 36:6³¹, Cyril claims that his opponents “support their own souls with **worldly wisdom** as with a staff of reed.” This is another parallel to the passage in the Commentary on the Gospel of John because, as I mentioned earlier, Cyril also quotes from Isaiah.

There are a few other key places that Cyril mentions ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη. He specifically mentions that he is not an expert of the logical tradition³², but that he will use the logical tradition to refute them.³³ Furthermore, in another instance he mentions that his opponents use Aristotelian logic unlearned manner.³⁴ These claims do not come one after another, but are dispersed in both *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity*. They point to Cyril’s strategic approach to responding to Arians: resentfully stoop to their level of argumentation,

Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, 26, 1930. 6-7.

²⁷ Ibid 7.

²⁸ Ibid 6.

²⁹ Ibid 7.

³⁰ *Thesaurus* 145B, as cited by Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 94

³¹ *Thesaurus* 148AB. As cited by Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 94.

³² *Dial. Trin.* I 408D, II 427BC. As cited by Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*.

³³ *Dial. Trin.* II 451B-D. As cited by Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*.

³⁴ *Thesaurus* 145B, 152B. As cited by Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 94.

using their impious tools, and show that they cannot even use these tools properly, and someone who is not even an expert in Aristotelian logic can see this.

The Arian controversy does not seem to be the only place that Cyril combats his enemies with their own tools. An examination of his other polemical writings demonstrates a similar strategy. In these writings, he maintains the same strategy of “beating the enemy at their own game.” An examination of the other polemical writings of Cyril, besides those of the Arian controversy, is further proof of the likelihood that Cyril’s use of logic is based in strategy, and not in a respect for the discipline.

Contra Julianum is an apt example. Cyril’s strategy is remarkably parallel to that in *Thesaurus* and *Dialogues on the Trinity*. In *Contra Julianum* Cyril responds to the emperor Julian’s earlier work *Contra Galileos*,³⁵ in which Julian, showing intimate familiarity with Christian doctrine, criticizes Christians for “reject[ing] Greek pantheon for a Hebraic religion yet failing to keep the laws of Moses.” He also notes Christianity’s lack of any comparable figure to the Greek sage, “who through philosophical endeavor gains knowledge of the divine essence and becomes like God.”³⁶

In *Contra Julianum*, citations from Greek writers are the enemies’ weapons that Cyril uses in combat. The overwhelming number of citations in the work, as compared to Cyril’s other writings, is evidence that the citations of Greek authors have a special use in this polemical text. Cyril’s commentary on the Gospel of John contains only five references to Greek authors, while *Contra Julianum* has 70.³⁷ It is not just the disparity in amount, but also the difference in usage, that points to the strategic usage of Greek author citation in *Contra Julianum*. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, the references to Greek authors all appear as analogies. For example, when commenting on John 6:5-7 where Christ feeds five thousand, Cyril writes that Jesus takes care of those who depend on him, and that the multitude’s need for Christ is, “as the Greek poets say σιδήρεον ἔλκος ἀνάγκης.”³⁸ References such as this, present in Cyril’s exegeses and letters, do not point to any reverential attitude Cyril had for the Greeks — he was simply, as Farag puts it, “using the references to validate the image in a more common way.”³⁹

On the other hand, in *Contra Julianum* the references are used to demonstrate that Greek views can be seen as parallel with Scripture.⁴⁰ For example, it seems that Julian had noted seemingly polytheistic implications of Genesis 1:26: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image...’” Cyril insists that the first person plural is God addressing the Trinity. He admits it “is not obvious to everybody that even those who are accustomed to think philosophically in the Greek manner [to] admit that God is one”⁴¹ but then notes that

³⁵ Historical information on *Contra Galileos* and *Contra Julian* is from: Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*. 190-191.

³⁶ Ibid. 191.

³⁷ Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*. 180.

³⁸ In Jo. 1.409. As cited by Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*. 178.

³⁹ Lois M. Farag: *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel John*. 180.

⁴⁰ Van Loon *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. 63.

⁴¹ *Contra Julianum* 536D

“Plato says very clearly: ‘First, my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, “What is that which always is and has no beginning, and what is that which is always becoming and never is?” That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state, but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason is always in the process of becoming and perishing and never really is?’”

Cyril uses this excerpt of *Timeaus* to show that Julian’s supposedly Greek writers can be used on his own side, to support his Scripture. In other instances Cyril is particularly cutting in his demonstration to his opponents that he is using their own weapons against them. After calling Hellenic learning “vain and pointless” he says, “Perhaps you will not be convinced by my own words. I shall therefore appeal for help, Sir, to your Plato, who wrote...” Cyril’s strategy aims to show his opponents that their own literary weapons can be used to support their opponent, in an effort to simultaneously legitimize his refutation and undermine their argument.

It does not seem that Cyril had any particular fascination for ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους τέχνη — in fact, it seems to have been included in Cyril’s general disdain for Greek philosophy, evidenced in his condemnation of its “devilish worldly wisdom.” It was, however, a useful tool for him in that it provided him with a method to fight his enemies — namely, their own argumentative tools.

This proposal reconciles the discrepancy between the presence of logical principles in Cyril’s exegetical writings and those about Christological controversies. It also illuminates the complex relationship between Christians and pagans during this time. For the first time, after centuries of a pagan majority, Christians began to emerge as the center of power in the city. Examining Cyril’s writings shows even that in this process of becoming the dominant group over pagans, and even during the violence between the two groups experienced by the city, Christians did not — or could not — completely divorce themselves from things traditionally “pagan” even if they perhaps wanted to.

These conclusions that I have reached are a far cry from rescuing Cyril from the rather dubious reputation that Amenébar’s film has given him, which some perhaps would argue is a more pressing issue. Nevertheless, understanding Christian use of Aristotelian rhetorical tools, during a time when Christians were slowly but surely emerging as the victors in the struggle for power in the city, is a window into the fraught relationship between Christians and pagans as well as the textual interaction between the two groups.

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