Commentary on Allen

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Professor Allen entitles his paper "The Development of Aristotle's Logic." This title prejudges a number of important issues. What he in fact discusses is the relation of Aristotle's Topics to his Prior Analytics. It is generally assumed that the latter developed somehow from the former and that also that what we find in APr. is logic in our sense of the word. I could not agree more with Allen and with the majority of scholars that Aristotle's views in the Analytics in fact developed from the ideas expounded in the Top. and in the SE (SE). I myself agree with Allen that Aristotle's proud claim of being the first theorist of syllogisms refers to his work in the Top. and in the SE. But if so and if what APr. teaches us is logic, then the Top. ought to be a logical treatise, too. But the sense, if any, in which this might be the case is far from obvious. Allen points out that in the Top. we do find neither the terminology nor the substantive content of the logical doctrines of the APr. Insofar as we can speak of, a treatment of arguments in the Top., is "hard if not impossible to reconcile with" Aristotle's theory of categorical syllogisms.

Yet Allen finds in the Top. syllogisms, at least dialectical ones. Indeed, as he notes the definition of syllogism occurs in almost precisely in the same form in the Top. and in the APr. But Allen does not note that this famous definition applies more widely than to the syllogisms dealt with in so many words in the APr. (cf. below).

It seems to me that scholars have looked at the problem from a wrong vantage point. Instead of trying to find similarities in the Top. to the main ideas of the APr., they should have realized that the theory of the two Analytics presupposes in certain fundamental respects a dialectical framework not unlike that of the Top. In particular, I am prepared to suggest that Aristotle's overall perspective on the role of logical inference in argumentation in the APr. is still fundamentally different from twentieth-century philosophers' perspective.

But if so, what is the Top. all about? Allen writes, correctly, that the Top. "is a handbook of dialectical argumentation." However, neither Allen nor any other recent commentator has in my judgement faced squarely the question as to what the format of that dialectical argumen-
tation is. Once the question is asked, the answer nevertheless is virtually obvious, even if scholars like Ryle or Richard Robinson had not emphasized it. Those dialectical "arguments" were not arguments in our sense, but question-answer sequences, modeled on the Socratic *elenchus*. Ryle and Robinson speak of "questioning games." As in Platonic dialogues like the *Meno*, even steps that for us would be logical inferences from earlier answers are presented as answers to questions.

I do not expect most scholars to quarrel with this historical point. Where the shoe begins to pinch are its consequences for the meanings of Aristotle's key terms and a fortiori for the interpretation of what Aristotle says. In my view, Aristotle's key terms such as proposition, premise, syllogism, and *topos* were originally devised so as to apply to question-answer games, not to sequences of inferences in the twentieth-century sense of the word. It is not hard to see how Aristotle's terms in fact do apply to questioning games. For instance, Aristotle's own distinction in *Top.* I, IV, 101b 11-38 between propositions and problems shows that both of them are for him yes-or-no questions.

The revealing question here is why Aristotle's distinction should make any difference. The same two answers are available to the question "X is Y, isn't it?" and "Is X perhaps Y or not?" So why is there any real difference between the two? The answer lies beyond what Aristotle says in so many words. When I say, "X is Y, isn't it?" I know that X is Y, and try to get my interlocutor to admit it. Hence I need to be prepared for only one answer. In contrast, when I ask the nonleading question "Is X Y or not?" I must be prepared to deal with either answer. Hence Aristotle's distinction comes very close to a distinction between questions whose answer is predictable (necessary) and questions where the answer is unpredictable, typically because it depends on the particular answerer. This is confirmed by Aristotle's fuller discussion of the same distinction in *Top.* I, 10-11. Not only are both propositions and problems still questions. The difference between the two turns out to lie in the basis of answers to them. In the case of propositions, the question and obviously also its answer "accords with the opinion held by everyone or by the majority or by the wise." In contrast, problems dealing with subject matters "is something about which either men have no opinion either way, or most people hold an opinion contrary to that of the wise, or the wise contrary to that of most people, or about which members of each of these classes disagree among themselves." Clearly, in the case of propositions an inquirer can