

# Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*

## A Translation<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Appearance and reality in argument and refutation

Now we must discuss sophistical refutations, that is, arguments that appear to be refutations, but are in fact fallacies rather than refutations. In accordance with the nature of things, however, we must start from the primary things. 164a20

That some arguments do constitute deductions, while others seem to, but in fact do not, is clear. For just as in other cases this comes about because of a certain similarity, so too with arguments. For also with regard to their condition some people are really in good shape, whereas others only appear to be because they have decked themselves out as tribesmen and have equipped themselves; and some people are beautiful because of their beauty, while others appear to be so because they have dressed up. It is like this also with lifeless things, for some of them are really made of gold or silver, whereas others are not, but appear so to the senses: things made of litharge or of tin, for example, appear to be made of silver, and yellow-coloured things of gold. In the same way, one argument constitutes a 164b20 b25

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<sup>1</sup> It would have been impossible for me to translate the *Sophistici Elenchi* into English if I had not already translated the work into Dutch together with Erik Krabbe, and if I had not been able to go through my first draft with Andreas Anagnostopoulos, who not only improved its English, but whose queries also forced me to reconsider some of the interpretations underlying any translation. His contribution to this translation is so significant, that it can be truly said that I did it together with him. All mistakes, however, remain my responsibility. Thanks are due to Chris Noble for checking the translation with an innocent eye.

The Greek text translated is that edited by W. D. Ross, *Aristotelis Topica et Sophistici Elenchi*. Oxford: Clarendon 1958. However, there are many passages where I have deviated from Ross' text, very often siding with all or most manuscripts; there are, however, also a few places where I think a reading with less support in the manuscripts is to be preferred. (There are still further places where Ross' preference for a minority reading can be called into question, but they require a fuller consideration than I have had time for. A new edition of the *Sophistici Elenchi* is really called for.) A list of deviations is added at the end of the translation.

Aristotle gives many examples of arguments there is something wrong with, and not all of them are easily translated into English. In such cases, I have supplied an alternative in English that at least fits the main point of the example, while describing the actual example in a footnote. In a few instances even the main point cannot be captured in an English alternative; in those cases there is some Greek in the translation, which is explained in a footnote.

Also in translation the point of most of the many examples will be clear, but there remain cases that seem rather impenetrable. It will not be possible to explain them in footnotes, but as far as the examples for the fallacies of combination and division are concerned, they are discussed in my "Logic and Linguistics. Aristotle's Account of the Fallacies of Combination and Division in the *Sophistical Refutations*", *Apeiron* 42 (2009), 105–152.

real deduction or a real refutation, while another does not, even though it appears to due to our lack of experience. For those without experience are like people remaining at a distance and judging from far away.

165a1 For a deduction is an argument based on certain granted points, such that it states, by way of necessity, something different from the points laid down, while a refutation is a deduction together with the contradictory of its conclusion. But some arguments do not achieve this, even though they seem to on various grounds  
 a5 – of which one type of argumentation is very fertile and popular, the one based on words. For since it is impossible to have a discussion while adducing the things themselves, and we use words as symbols instead of the things, we assume that  
 a10 what follows for words, also follows for the things (just as with stones for those who do calculations). It is not the same, however, since the words are limited, just like the number of sentences, whereas the things themselves are unlimited in number. It is then inevitable that the same sentence or a single word signify several things. Just as in calculation, those who are not versed in moving stones around  
 a15 are tricked by the experts, so too those without experience of the possibilities of words are deceived by means of fallacies, both when themselves participating in a discussion and when listening to others.

On this particular ground, then, and on grounds to be mentioned later, there are arguments that seem to be deductions or refutations but are not. Now there  
 a20 are people who value the appearance of being knowledgeable more than the reality without the appearance (for sophistry is an apparent, not a real way of being knowledgeable; and the sophist tries to make money from appearing knowledgeable). Hence, they clearly must make themselves seem to do what a knowledgeable  
 a25 person would do, rather than do it without appearing to. To put it point by point, it is the task of someone with knowledge to avoid making false statements himself on any topic he knows about, and to be able to unmask anyone else who makes false statements. The former consists in being able to concede an argument and the latter in securing concession of an argument. Those who want to be sophists  
 a30 must then sort out the domain of arguments just mentioned, since it is worth the effort; such an ability will make one appear knowledgeable and that is after all their preference.

It is thus clear that there is such a domain of arguments and that those whom we call sophists aspire to such an ability. How many kinds of sophistical arguments  
 a35 there are, how many elements make up this ability, and how many parts this inquiry has – we must now discuss these and other things that contribute to this expertise.

## 2. Four kinds of argument

In discussions there are four domains of argument: didactic, dialectical, critically  
 165b1 examinative and eristic. Those arguments are didactic that deduce on the basis of the principles appropriate to the discipline in question and not on the basis of the views of the answerer (for the student should rely on them). Those arguments are dialectical that, on the basis of acceptable views, constitute a deduction of