



THE BIG NEST

# Aristotle

# Topics



ARISTOTLE

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# BOOK I

## Part 1

Our treatise proposes to find a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted about every problem propounded to us, and also shall ourselves, when standing up to an argument, avoid saying anything that will obstruct us. First, then, we must say what reasoning is, and what its varieties are, in order to grasp dialectical reasoning: for this is the object of our search in the treatise before us.

Now reasoning is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes about through them. (a) It is a 'demonstration', when the premisses from which the reasoning starts are true and primary, or are such that our knowledge of them has originally come through premisses which are primary and true: (b) reasoning, on the other hand, is 'dialectical', if it reasons from opinions that are generally accepted. Things are 'true' and 'primary' which are believed on the strength not of anything else but of themselves: for in regard to the first principles of science it is improper to ask any further for the why and wherefore of them; each of the first principles should command belief in and by itself. On the other hand, those opinions are 'generally accepted' which are accepted by every one or by the majority or by the philosophers-i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them. Again (c), reasoning is 'contentious' if it starts from opinions that seem to be generally accepted, but are not really such, or again if it merely seems to reason from opinions that are or seem to be generally accepted. For not every opinion that seems to be generally accepted actually is generally accepted. For in none of the opinions which we call generally accepted is the illusion entirely on the surface, as happens in the case of the principles of contentious arguments; for the nature of the fallacy

in these is obvious immediately, and as a rule even to persons with little power of comprehension. So then, of the contentious reasonings mentioned, the former really deserves to be called 'reasoning' as well, but the other should be called 'contentious reasoning', but not 'reasoning', since it appears to reason, but does not really do so. Further (d), besides all the reasonings we have mentioned there are the mis-reasonings that start from the premisses peculiar to the special sciences, as happens (for example) in the case of geometry and her sister sciences. For this form of reasoning appears to differ from the reasonings mentioned above; the man who draws a false figure reasons from things that are neither true and primary, nor yet generally accepted. For he does not fall within the definition; he does not assume opinions that are received either by every one or by the majority or by philosophers-that is to say, by all, or by most, or by the most illustrious of them-but he conducts his reasoning upon assumptions which, though appropriate to the science in question, are not true; for he effects his mis-reasoning either by describing the semicircles wrongly or by drawing certain lines in a way in which they could not be drawn.

The foregoing must stand for an outline survey of the species of reasoning. In general, in regard both to all that we have already discussed and to those which we shall discuss later, we may remark that that amount of distinction between them may serve, because it is not our purpose to give the exact definition of any of them; we merely want to describe them in outline; we consider it quite enough from the point of view of the line of inquiry before us to be able to recognize each of them in some sort of way.

## Part 2

Next in order after the foregoing, we must say for how many and for what purposes the treatise is useful. They are three-intellectual training, casual encounters, and the philosophical sciences. That it is useful as a training is obvious on the face of it. The possession of a plan of inquiry will enable us more easily to argue about the subject proposed. For purposes of casual encounters, it is useful because when we have counted up

the opinions held by most people, we shall meet them on the ground not of other people's convictions but of their own, while we shift the ground of any argument that they appear to us to state unsoundly. For the study of the philosophical sciences it is useful, because the ability to raise searching difficulties on both sides of a subject will make us detect more easily the truth and error about the several points that arise. It has a further use in relation to the ultimate bases of the principles used in the several sciences. For it is impossible to discuss them at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are the prius of everything else: it is through the opinions generally held on the particular points that these have to be discussed, and this task belongs properly, or most appropriately, to dialectic: for dialectic is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries.

### Part 3

We shall be in perfect possession of the way to proceed when we are in a position like that which we occupy in regard to rhetoric and medicine and faculties of that kind: this means the doing of that which we choose with the materials that are available. For it is not every method that the rhetorician will employ to persuade, or the doctor to heal; still, if he omits none of the available means, we shall say that his grasp of the science is adequate.

### Part 4

First, then, we must see of what parts our inquiry consists. Now if we were to grasp (a) with reference to how many, and what kind of, things arguments take place, and with what materials they start, and (h) how we are to become well supplied with these, we should have sufficiently won our goal. Now the materials with which arguments start are equal in number, and are identical, with the subjects on which reasonings take place. For arguments start with 'propositions', while the subjects on which reasonings take place are 'problems'. Now every proposition and every problem indicates either a genus or a peculiarity or an accident-for the differentia too, applying as it does to a class (or

genus), should be ranked together with the genus. Since, however, of what is peculiar to anything part signifies its essence, while part does not, let us divide the ‘peculiar’ into both the aforesaid parts, and call that part which indicates the essence a ‘definition’, while of the remainder let us adopt the terminology which is generally current about these things, and speak of it as a ‘property’. What we have said, then, makes it clear that according to our present division, the elements turn out to be four, all told, namely either property or definition or genus or accident. Do not let any one suppose us to mean that each of these enunciated by itself constitutes a proposition or problem, but only that it is from these that both problems and propositions are formed. The difference between a problem and a proposition is a difference in the turn of the phrase. For if it be put in this way, “‘An animal that walks on two feet’ is the definition of man, is it not?’ or “‘Animal’ is the genus of man, is it not?’ the result is a proposition: but if thus, ‘Is “an animal that walks on two feet” a definition of man or no?’ [or ‘Is “animal” his genus or no?’] the result is a problem. Similarly too in other cases. Naturally, then, problems and propositions are equal in number: for out of every proposition you will make a problem if you change the turn of the phrase.

## Part 5

We must now say what are ‘definition’, ‘property’, ‘genus’, and ‘accident’. A ‘definition’ is a phrase signifying a thing’s essence. It is rendered in the form either of a phrase in lieu of a term, or of a phrase in lieu of another phrase; for it is sometimes possible to define the meaning of a phrase as well. People whose rendering consists of a term only, try it as they may, clearly do not render the definition of the thing in question, because a definition is always a phrase of a certain kind. One may, however, use the word ‘definitory’ also of such a remark as “The “becoming” is “beautiful””, and likewise also of the question, ‘Are sensation and knowledge the same or different?’, for argument about definitions is mostly concerned with questions of sameness and difference. In a word we may call ‘definitory’ everything that falls under the same branch of inquiry as definitions; and that all the above-mentioned examples are of this character is clear on the

face of them. For if we are able to argue that two things are the same or are different, we shall be well supplied by the same turn of argument with lines of attack upon their definitions as well: for when we have shown that they are not the same we shall have demolished the definition. Observe, please, that the converse of this last statement does not hold: for to show that they are the same is not enough to establish a definition. To show, however, that they are not the same is enough of itself to overthrow it.

A 'property' is a predicate which does not indicate the essence of a thing, but yet belongs to that thing alone, and is predicated convertibly of it. Thus it is a property of man to-be-capable of learning grammar: for if A be a man, then he is capable of learning grammar, and if he be capable of learning grammar, he is a man. For no one calls anything a 'property' which may possibly belong to something else, e.g. 'sleep' in the case of man, even though at a certain time it may happen to belong to him alone. That is to say, if any such thing were actually to be called a property, it will be called not a 'property' absolutely, but a 'temporary' or a 'relative' property: for 'being on the right hand side' is a temporary property, while 'two-footed' is in point of fact ascribed as a property in certain relations; e.g. it is a property of man relatively to a horse and a dog. That nothing which may belong to anything else than A is a convertible predicate of A is clear: for it does not necessarily follow that if something is asleep it is a man.

A 'genus' is what is predicated in the category of essence of a number of things exhibiting differences in kind. We should treat as predicates in the category of essence all such things as it would be appropriate to mention in reply to the question, 'What is the object before you?'; as, for example, in the case of man, if asked that question, it is appropriate to say 'He is an animal'. The question, 'Is one thing in the same genus as another or in a different one?' is also a 'generic' question; for a question of that kind as well falls under the same branch of inquiry as the genus: for having argued that 'animal' is the genus of man, and likewise also of ox, we shall have argued that they are in the same genus; whereas if we show that it is the genus of the one but not of the other, we shall have argued that these things are not in the same

genus.

An 'accident' is (i) something which, though it is none of the foregoing-i.e. neither a definition nor a property nor a genus yet belongs to the thing: (something which may possibly either belong or not belong to any one and the self-same thing, as (e.g.) the 'sitting posture' may belong or not belong to some self-same thing. Likewise also 'whiteness', for there is nothing to prevent the same thing being at one time white, and at another not white. Of the definitions of accident the second is the better: for if he adopts the first, any one is bound, if he is to understand it, to know already what 'definition' and 'genus' and 'property' are, whereas the second is sufficient of itself to tell us the essential meaning of the term in question. To Accident are to be attached also all comparisons of things together, when expressed in language that is drawn in any kind of way from what happens (accidit) to be true of them; such as, for example, the question, 'Is the honourable or the expedient preferable?' and 'Is the life of virtue or the life of self-indulgence the pleasanter?'; and any other problem which may happen to be phrased in terms like these. For in all such cases the question is 'to which of the two does the predicate in question happen (accidit) to belong more closely?' It is clear on the face of it that there is nothing to prevent an accident from becoming a temporary or relative property. Thus the sitting posture is an accident, but will be a temporary property, whenever a man is the only person sitting, while if he be not the only one sitting, it is still a property relatively to those who are not sitting. So then, there is nothing to prevent an accident from becoming both a relative and a temporary property; but a property absolutely it will never be.

## Part 6

We must not fail to observe that all remarks made in criticism of a 'property' and 'genus' and 'accident' will be applicable to 'definitions' as well. For when we have shown that the attribute in question fails to belong only to the term defined, as we do also in the case of a property, or that the genus rendered in the definition is not the true genus, or that any of the things mentioned in the phrase used does not belong, as would be remarked also in

the case of an accident, we shall have demolished the definition; so that, to use the phrase previously employed,' all the points we have enumerated might in a certain sense be called 'definitory'. But we must not on this account expect to find a single line of inquiry which will apply universally to them all: for this is not an easy thing to find, and, even were one found, it would be very obscure indeed, and of little service for the treatise before us. Rather, a special plan of inquiry must be laid down for each of the classes we have distinguished, and then, starting from the rules that are appropriate in each case, it will probably be easier to make our way right through the task before us. So then, as was said before,' we must outline a division of our subject, and other questions we must relegate each to the particular branch to which it most naturally belongs, speaking of them as 'definitory' and 'generic' questions. The questions I mean have practically been already assigned to their several branches.

#### Part 7

First of all we must define the number of senses borne by the term 'Sameness'. Sameness would be generally regarded as falling, roughly speaking, into three divisions. We generally apply the term numerically or specifically or generically-numerically in cases where there is more than one name but only one thing, e.g. 'doublet' and 'cloak'; specifically, where there is more than one thing, but they present no differences in respect of their species, as one man and another, or one horse and another: for things like this that fall under the same species are said to be 'specifically the same'. Similarly, too, those things are called generically the same which fall under the same genus, such as a horse and a man. It might appear that the sense in which water from the same spring is called 'the same water' is somehow different and unlike the senses mentioned above: but really such a case as this ought to be ranked in the same class with the things that in one way or another are called 'the same' in view of unity of species. For all such things seem to be of one family and to resemble one another. For the reason why all water is said to be specifically the same as all other water is because of a certain likeness it bears to it, and the only difference in the case of water drawn from the same spring is this, that the likeness is more

emphatic: that is why we do not distinguish it from the things that in one way or another are called 'the same' in view of unity of species. It is generally supposed that the term 'the same' is most used in a sense agreed on by every one when applied to what is numerically one. But even so, it is apt to be rendered in more than one sense; its most literal and primary use is found whenever the sameness is rendered in reference to an alternative name or definition, as when a cloak is said to be the same as a doublet, or an animal that walks on two feet is said to be the same as a man: a second sense is when it is rendered in reference to a property, as when what can acquire knowledge is called the same as a man, and what naturally travels upward the same as fire: while a third use is found when it is rendered in reference to some term drawn from Accident, as when the creature who is sitting, or who is musical, is called the same as Socrates. For all these uses mean to signify numerical unity. That what I have just said is true may be best seen where one form of appellation is substituted for another. For often when we give the order to call one of the people who are sitting down, indicating him by name, we change our description, whenever the person to whom we give the order happens not to understand us; he will, we think, understand better from some accidental feature; so we bid him call to us 'the man who is sitting' or 'who is conversing over there'-clearly supposing ourselves to be indicating the same object by its name and by its accident.

## Part 8

Of 'sameness' then, as has been said, three senses are to be distinguished. Now one way to confirm that the elements mentioned above are those out of which and through which and to which arguments proceed, is by induction: for if any one were to survey propositions and problems one by one, it would be seen that each was formed either from the definition of something or from its property or from its genus or from its accident. Another way to confirm it is through reasoning. For every predicate of a subject must of necessity be either convertible with its subject or not: and if it is convertible, it would be its definition or property, for if it signifies the essence, it is the definition; if not, it is a property: for this was what a property is, viz. what is predicated

convertibly, but does not signify the essence. If, on the other hand, it is not predicated convertibly of the thing, it either is or is not one of the terms contained in the definition of the subject: and if it be one of those terms, then it will be the genus or the differentia, inasmuch as the definition consists of genus and differentiae; whereas, if it be not one of those terms, clearly it would be an accident, for accident was said to be what belongs as an attribute to a subject without being either its definition or its genus or a property.

## Part 9

Next, then, we must distinguish between the classes of predicates in which the four orders in question are found. These are ten in number: Essence, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Position, State, Activity, Passivity. For the accident and genus and property and definition of anything will always be in one of these categories: for all the propositions found through these signify either something's essence or its quality or quantity or some one of the other types of predicate. It is clear, too, on the face of it that the man who signifies something's essence signifies sometimes a substance, sometimes a quality, sometimes some one of the other types of predicate. For when man is set before him and he says that what is set there is 'a man' or 'an animal', he states its essence and signifies a substance; but when a white colour is set before him and he says that what is set there is 'white' or is 'a colour', he states its essence and signifies a quality. Likewise, also, if a magnitude of a cubit be set before him and he says that what is set there is a magnitude of a cubit, he will be describing its essence and signifying a quantity. Likewise, also, in the other cases: for each of these kinds of predicate, if either it be asserted of itself, or its genus be asserted of it, signifies an essence: if, on the other hand, one kind of predicate is asserted of another kind, it does not signify an essence, but a quantity or a quality or one of the other kinds of predicate. Such, then, and so many, are the subjects on which arguments take place, and the materials with which they start. How we are to acquire them, and by what means we are to become well supplied with them, falls next to be told.

## Part 10

First, then, a definition must be given of a 'dialectical proposition' and a 'dialectical problem'. For it is not every proposition nor yet every problem that is to be set down as dialectical: for no one in his senses would make a proposition of what no one holds, nor yet make a problem of what is obvious to everybody or to most people: for the latter admits of no doubt, while to the former no one would assent. Now a dialectical proposition consists in asking something that is held by all men or by most men or by the philosophers, i.e. either by all, or by most, or by the most notable of these, provided it be not contrary to the general opinion; for a man would probably assent to the view of the philosophers, if it be not contrary to the opinions of most men. Dialectical propositions also include views which are like those generally accepted; also propositions which contradict the contraries of opinions that are taken to be generally accepted, and also all opinions that are in accordance with the recognized arts. Thus, supposing it to be a general opinion that the knowledge of contraries is the same, it might probably pass for a general opinion also that the perception of contraries is the same: also, supposing it to be a general opinion that there is but one single science of grammar, it might pass for a general opinion that there is but one science of flute-playing as well, whereas, if it be a general opinion that there is more than one science of grammar, it might pass for a general opinion that there is more than one science of flute-playing as well: for all these seem to be alike and akin. Likewise, also, propositions contradicting the contraries of general opinions will pass as general opinions: for if it be a general opinion that one ought to do good to one's friends, it will also be a general opinion that one ought not to do them harm. Here, that one ought to do harm to one's friends is contrary to the general view, and that one ought not to do them harm is the contradictory of that contrary. Likewise also, if one ought to do good to one's friends, one ought not to do good to one's enemies: this too is the contradictory of the view contrary to the general view; the contrary being that one ought to do good to one's enemies. Likewise, also, in other cases. Also, on comparison, it will look like a general opinion that the contrary predicate belongs to the contrary subject: e.g. if one ought to do good to one's friends,

one ought also to do evil to one's enemies. it might appear also as if doing good to one's friends were a contrary to doing evil to one's enemies: but whether this is or is not so in reality as well will be stated in the course of the discussion upon contraries. Clearly also, all opinions that are in accordance with the arts are dialectical propositions; for people are likely to assent to the views held by those who have made a study of these things, e.g. on a question of medicine they will agree with the doctor, and on a question of geometry with the geometrician; and likewise also in other cases.

### Part 11

A dialectical problem is a subject of inquiry that contributes either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge, and that either by itself, or as a help to the solution of some other such problem. It must, moreover, be something on which either people hold no opinion either way, or the masses hold a contrary opinion to the philosophers, or the philosophers to the masses, or each of them among themselves. For some problems it is useful to know with a view to choice or avoidance, e.g. whether pleasure is to be chosen or not, while some it is useful to know merely with a view to knowledge, e.g. whether the universe is eternal or not: others, again, are not useful in and by themselves for either of these purposes, but yet help us in regard to some such problems; for there are many things which we do not wish to know in and by themselves, but for the sake of other things, in order that through them we may come to know something else. Problems also include questions in regard to which reasonings conflict (the difficulty then being whether so-and so is so or not, there being convincing arguments for both views); others also in regard to which we have no argument because they are so vast, and we find it difficult to give our reasons, e.g. the question whether the universe is eternal or no: for into questions of that kind too it is possible to inquire.

Problems, then, and propositions are to be defined as aforesaid. A 'thesis' is a supposition of some eminent philosopher that conflicts with the general opinion; e.g. the view that contradiction is impossible, as Antisthenes said; or the view of Heraclitus

that all things are in motion; or that Being is one, as Melissus says: for to take notice when any ordinary person expresses views contrary to men's usual opinions would be silly. Or it may be a view about which we have a reasoned theory contrary to men's usual opinions, e.g. the view maintained by the sophists that what is need not in every case either have come to be or be eternal: for a musician who is a grammarian 'is' so without ever having 'come to be' so, or being so eternally. For even if a man does not accept this view, he might do so on the ground that it is reasonable.

Now a 'thesis' also is a problem, though a problem is not always a thesis, inasmuch as some problems are such that we have no opinion about them either way. That a thesis, however, also forms a problem, is clear: for it follows of necessity from what has been said that either the mass of men disagree with the philosophers about the thesis, or that the one or the other class disagree among themselves, seeing that the thesis is a supposition in conflict with general opinion. Practically all dialectical problems indeed are now called 'theses'. But it should make no difference whichever description is used; for our object in thus distinguishing them has not been to create a terminology, but to recognize what differences happen to be found between them.

Not every problem, nor every thesis, should be examined, but only one which might puzzle one of those who need argument, not punishment or perception. For people who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honour the gods and love one's parents or not need punishment, while those who are puzzled to know whether snow is white or not need perception. The subjects should not border too closely upon the sphere of demonstration, nor yet be too far removed from it: for the former cases admit of no doubt, while the latter involve difficulties too great for the art of the trainer.

## Part 12

Having drawn these definitions, we must distinguish how many species there are of dialectical arguments. There is on the one hand Induction, on the other Reasoning. Now what