

Scott G. Schreiber, *Aristotle on False Reasoning, Language and the World in the Sophistical Refutations*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 248+xi, paper, \$22.95.

Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* (SR), the last book of the *Topics*, is a formidable work. Since even the best of minds may be deceived on occasion by an argument that appears sound but is in fact unsound, Aristotle proposed to explain just how sophistical reasoning works and how it may trick us. Valid deduction such as we do with syllogistic in demonstrative science sets the standard, and reasoning in dialectic and rhetoric must be measured against that ideal. However, sophistical argumentation involves much more than a violation of formal rules. In fact such an argument may be formally valid but still fool us because it trades on false beliefs about language or the world. "And so there are three sources of sophistical appearance in argumentation: premises that appear to be what they are not, arguments that appear to be valid when they are not, and valid arguments that appear to be relevant to the matter at hand when they are not." (p. 2)

Unlike modern approaches that treat fallacies as mistakes of form (formal inconsistency) or content (a false premise) Aristotle requires not only that we find the exact premise that causes the error but also that we explain why the reasoning appears to be correct. Aristotle bases his twelve-fold taxonomy of fallacious arguments on the twelve ways that are available to resolve such arguments. This approach differs markedly from 19th and 20th century theories that trace fallacies to an indefinite number of sources (De Morgan, Joseph, Cohen and Nagel) or to a finite number of alternative schemes (Mill and Whately). (pp.85-87) Schreiber defends Aristotle's claim that there are only twelve ways (six linguistic and six non-linguistic) that a sophistical argument can deceive. Aristotle's view that some

fallacies result from linguistic error is, of course, the dominant view today. Among errors of language are: Beliefs that linguistic signifiers are always univocal, that they are differentiated by their written transcriptions, regardless of vocal pronunciation, that units having similar morphology or obeying similar syntactical rules always signify similar kinds of entities. Aristotle's bolder thesis that fallacies may result as well from erroneous views about the world, i.e. a faulty ontology, is more controversial. Among mistakes outside of language are: Failures to recognize differences among Categories of being, between essential and accidental predications, and between the self-explanatory and what calls for explanation. On these matters, Professor Schreiber shows how Aristotle not only anticipated modern objections but, more importantly, answered them in advance.

The study has three parts: I. Fallacies due to language (Homonymy, Amphiboly, Forms of Expression, Accent, Composition, Division); II. Resolution of Fallacious Arguments (to which I will return); III. Fallacies outside of Language (Begging the Question, Non-cause as Cause, Antecedent and Consequent, *Secundum quid*, Many Questions [into One]). The reader will do well to compare the schema on p. 4 (repeated at p. 171) with the amended schema at p. 167 and surrounding texts. The latter "more accurately reflects Aristotle's practice of analyzing fallacies." (p. 167) Aristotle's methods of resolution provide a foundation for his taxonomy of fallacies. That is: they explain why they are mistaken AND what causes them to appear to be sound. Part II gives the general principles of Aristotle's method, and might well be studied first. Aristotle's analyses rest on a Principle of Parsimony: 'If one resolution schema S determines two classes of fallacy where another resolution schema T determines one class, the T is better than S.' (p. 85) After analyzing all of the twelve kinds of fallacy, Schreiber shows how they are reducible to a single error: namely, ignorance of what counts as a refutation (*ignorantio elenchi*).

This study shows how some of Aristotle's claims turn on peculiarities of the Greek language including relations between oral

and written expression. Where appropriate Schreiber cites Aristotle's views in other works and proposes ways to resolve discrepancies between them. The author admits that Aristotle is at times inconsistent, and he clarifies the relevant details. Finally, he is well-informed about the treatment of fallacies in later thinkers, including William of Sherwood and William Ockham. The useful appendices that include Aristotle's ideas on paralogisms (Appendix 1) might have added an entry on the medieval exercises *De sophismatibus* that were an important part of scholastic dialectic from the 13th to the 17th centuries. In short, Scott Schreiber's study is an indispensable guide for anyone who wants to understand the *Sophistical Refutations*.

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