Nicholas Caudill

Professor Watson

ENG 216

11/23/2021

Preface

After reading Aristotle's *Organon* in four days and nights in an attempt at realizing the essence of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle fictional series *Sherlock Holmes* whose main character, Sherlock, is described as "The most perfect reasoning and observing machine the world has seen," I began to contemplate an idea for my final paper where I would reword some sentences in *The Organon* in a way to make the logic appear more fluid and modernized. This is my translation of Aristotle's *Organon* which is covered in *The Great Books Of The Western World* by Robert Maynard Hutchins and the respective team. The purpose is to make Aristotle's *Organon* more accessible to those to which the 100 year old English translations might appear too imtimidating. *The Translated Organon*, as a whole, is a collection of a diverse translations from different historians/rhetoricians, e.g. as *Categories* is translated by E.M. Edghill and is followed later on by *Prior Analytics* by A.J. Jenkinson, and so on, and is then packaged in this set published by William Benton. Since I am submitting this as a creative product for my Sherlock Holmes college course final paper, I am only going to translate *Topics* (translated from Greek to

Latin to early 20th century English by W.A. Pickard-Cambridge) which is where Aristotle begins to dig into the definition of reasoning, which was the primary reason I read the whole work in the first place - in an effort to understand Sherlock Holmes who is by definition a machine that reasons and observes perfectly. These works are assumed to be transcribed lectures that Aristotle gave at the Lycaeum, which was, at the time, was an institution established by Xenocrates which possessed extensive equipment and was the largest library in Europe (later destroyed by Roman general Sulla in 86 B.C. [1]). I invite you to visit the Funderburg Library and rent this book to follow along with this paper (808.8 G79 V.8,c.2). Special thanks to Manchester University's philosophy department faculty member, Katy Brown, for the suggestion to read *The Organon*.

Organon *Topics (Topica)* - Aristotle, 384-322 B.C.

BOOK I

I

The goal of our treatise is to find a method whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted about every problem we are trying to solve, and when standing up to an argument, we can easily and obviously avoid saying anything that will contradict our reasoning that is derived from these generally accepted opinions. First, then, we must define what reasoning is and what its varieties are so we can grasp dialectical reasoning.

Reasoning is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes about through them. By an argument we mean: two or more propositions followed by a deduction. A proposition is a statement that something is equal or not equal to something else, e.g. “The sky is cloudy.” An argument could be “It is cloudy and it is the middle of July, therefore it might rain.” A reason might be thought of as the sentence: “It is cloudy, it is the middle of July, since it might rain given these two propositions, I should bring my umbrella to school.”

“A deduction is speech in which certain things have been supposed, something different from those supposed results of necessity because of their being so. Each of the “things supposed” is a **premise** of the argument, and what “results of necessity” is the **conclusion** [2]. “

So our premise could be “Assuming this argument to be true and I take my umbrella to school, I should not get hypothermia from raw exposure to rainfall.”

(a) It is a ‘demonstration’, when the premises from which the reasoning starts are true and primary, or are such that our knowledge of them has originally come through premises which are primary and true. Things are ‘true’ and ‘primary’ which are believed on the strength not of anything but of themselves: for in regard to the first principles of science it is impossible to ask any further questions for the why and how; each of the first principles should command belief in and by itself.

(b) Reasoning, on the other hand, is ‘dialectical’, if it reasons from opinions that are generally accepted. ‘Generally accepted opinions’ are those which are accepted by every one or by the majority or by philosophers - i.e. by all, the majority, or the most notable and illustrious of them.

(c) Reasoning is ‘contentious’, if it starts from opinions that appear to be generally accepted, but in reality are not accepted at all; or appears to start from opinions that appear to be generally accepted. Because not every opinion that seems to be generally accepted is actually generally accepted, e.g. “Nobody thinks it is likely to rain on cloudy days.”

(d) Mis-reasonings start from premises peculiar to the special sciences, like geometry and related disciplines. This might be a person who draws a false figure and, as a result; his

or her reasoning about such things related to the figure are neither true and primary nor generally accepted.

Thus Far is an outline surveying the species of reasoning. In general, in regard to both all that we have already discussed and to those which we shall discuss later, we may remark that the amount of distinction between them may prove useful, because it is not our purpose to give the exact definition of any of them; we merely want describe them in an abstract outline; we consider it quite enough from the point of view before us that we are able to recognize each of them in some sort of way.

2

Now that we have a more precise idea of what reasoning is, we can now look at how many and for what purposes this treatise is useful. There are three - intellectual training, casual encounters, and the philosophical sciences.

(a) Intellectual training will enable us to more easily argue about the subject proposed.

(b) Reasoning in casual encounters 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 weak.

(c) The study of philosophical sciences is useful, because the ability to raise certain difficulties on both sides of a subject will allow us to more easily detect the truth and error about several points that arise. The study of philosophical sciences 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 origin[4] of everything else: for it is through the opinions generally held on 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 which leads the path of discovering the principles of all studies.

3

We are now 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 that we can choose from materials that are available. For a rhetorician will not use every method 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.

4

To begin, let us see what parts our study consists of. If we were to grasp:

(a) The number of arguments related to a study, what types of arguments were used, and what material are that to which the foundations of the claim rest upon.

(b) How we are able to collect these arguments

Then, we should have sufficiently won our goal. Now the materials with which arguments start are equal in number, and identical to, the subjects on which reasonings take place. For arguments start with ‘propositions’, whereas the subjects on which reasonings take place are ‘problems’ (‘I

should bring my umbrella to school', where the subjects of this particular reasoning might be weather pattern recognition). 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 parts 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 a terminology which is generally current about these things, and speak of it as a 'property.'

To elaborate on this previous paragraph; our proposition, "The sky is cloudy," and our problem "weather pattern recognition," both fall into the genus 'Climate Science'. Climate science is defined as the investigation of the structure and dynamics of earth's climate system [5]. 'A *climate* is a property of a climate system, and is in one sense defined by actual conditions in the climate system [5].' This all breaks down into four elements: a property, a definition, a genus, and an accident. Climate is a property of the genus 'systems,' and is related to the definition of Climate Science, and has the accident "The sky is cloudy."

5

Now that we have established four elements of reasoning as well as a definition of reasoning, we should define exactly what 'definition,' 'property', ''genus', and 'accident' are.

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’ as a remark similar to “The becoming is beautiful.” Likewise, the question “Is sensation and knowledge the same or different,” explores definition as two polarities. In a word we may call ‘definatory’ everything that falls under the same branch of study as definitions; and that all the previous examples are clearly laid out. If we are able to argue that two things are the same or not the same, then we are well equipped to defend against the attacks on the definitions that are used in our reasoning. To show that something is not the same as something else is to demolish the definition of that thing.

A **‘property’** is an affirmation or denial of something which does not indicate the essence of a thing, but yet belongs to that thing alone, and is convertible. E.g. Animals are not immortal and Immortals are not animals, for animals degrade over time until death. Another example is, it is a property of homosapiens to be capable of learning grammar: for if A be a homosapien, then he is capable of learning grammar, and if they are capable of learning grammar, they must be homosapiens. For no one calls anything a “property” which may possibly belong to something else, e.g. ‘sleep’ is a case of homosapiens, even though at a certain time it may happen to belong to him/her 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 ‘relative’ property: for ‘being on the right hand side’ is a temporary property, while ‘two-footed’ is a point of fact ascribed as a property in certain relations; e.g. it is a property homosapiens relatively to a horse and a dog.

A **‘genus’** is what is affirmed or denied in the categorization for the essence of a number of things exhibiting different features. We should treat all such things as predicates in the category

of essence as things that would be appropriate to mention in reply to the question, “What is the object before you?’; as, for example, in the case of homosapiens, if asked that question, it is appropriate to say “He/she is an animal."

The question, “Is one thing of the same genus as another or not?” is a ‘generic’ question for a question of that kind falls under the same branch of inquiry as the genus: for having argued that ‘animal’ is the genus of homosapiens, 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 the other, we can then argue that these things are not of the same genus.

An **‘accident’** is

(a) Something which is not a definition, property, or genus - yet belongs to the thing.

(b) Something which it is possible to belong or not belong to any one or the self-same thing, as (e.g.) the ‘sitting posture’ may belong or not belong to some self-same thing. This is similar to ‘whiteness’ in which nothing prevents the same thing from being at one time white and at another time not white.

(c) Accidents are used to compare things together, when expressed in language that is drawn in any kind of way from what happens to be true. For example, take the questions, ‘Is the honorable or the expedient preferable?’ and ‘Is the life of virtue more pleasurable than the life of self-indulgence?’ into consideration. For in all such cases the question is ‘to

> which of the two does the predicate in question happen to belong more closely?" Since an accident can change from being a temporary or relative property, then there is nothing to prevent an accident from becoming both a relative and temporary property; but a property absolutely it will never be.

Conclusion

I was able to translate, to modern English, three pages of Aristotle's *Organon 'Topics'* in about six hours. There are another hundred pages to go, so in a call for science I hope those who read this translate the next three pages, and so on and so forth. Sherlock is described as "The most perfect reasoning and observing machine the world has seen." We see now that reasoning is based on a subject such as 'reasoning on weather patterns' relates to Climate Science. This all breaks down into four elements: a property, a definition, a genus, and an accident.

Say humans are machines, albeit biological instead of some silicon structure. Sherlock is a fictional human and humans are biological machines. Sherlock reasons in a perfect manner. To reason in a perfect manner is to structure one's reasoning using syllogisms with 2-or-more propositions and a deduction which forms an argument. What results from the necessity of this argument is a conclusion. This argument and conclusion together form the premise and the premise is in Aristotle's point of view - the most perfect reasoning machine. We demonstrate those premises that originate from which is true and primary. To make a strong premise, we make it dialectical by using reasonings that are commonly accepted. To make a strong premise, we make sure our reasoning is not 'contentious' and truly does reason from generally accepted

opinions instead of the mere appearance of so. To make a premise strong, we form it in a way that experts in the field are likely to agree with, such as drawing a right angle using Thales Theorem. To reason well is to do so convincingly and obviously so.

References

[1] Morison, William (2006). "The Lyceum". Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved 30 October 2009.

[2] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/#PreStrAss

[3] Aristote. *Great Books of the Western World*. W. Benton, 1952. Pages 143-145

[4] https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/prior#Latin

[5] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/climate-science/