



Rhetoric and Sophistical Refutations (With Active Table of Contents)

Aristotle

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The study of rhetoric was contested in classical Greece: on the one side were the Sophists, and on the other side were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The trio saw rhetoric and poetry as tools that were too often used to manipulate others by manipulating emotion and omitting facts. They particularly accused the sophists, including Gorgias and Isocrates, of this manipulation. Plato, particularly, laid the blame for the arrest and the death of Socrates at the feet of sophistical rhetoric. In stark contrast to the emotional rhetoric and poetry of the sophists was a rhetoric grounded in philosophy and the pursuit of enlightenment. One of the most important contributions of Aristotle's approach was that he identified rhetoric as one of the three key elements--along with logic and dialectic--of philosophy. Indeed, the first line of the Rhetoric is "Rhetoric is the counterpoint of dialectic." According to Aristotle, logic is concerned with reasoning to reach scientific certainty while dialectic and rhetoric are concerned with probability and, thus, are the branches of philosophy that are best suited to human affairs. Dialectic is a tool for philosophical debate; it is a means for skilled audiences to test probable knowledge in order to learn. Conversely, rhetoric is a tool for practical debate; it is a means for persuading a general audience using probable knowledge to resolve practical issues. Dialectic and rhetoric create a partnership for a system of persuasion based on knowledge instead of upon manipulation and omission.

Sophistical Refutations (Latin: De sophisticis elenchis) is a text in Aristotle's Organon.

Aristotle identified thirteen fallacies, as follows:

Verbal fallacies:

Accent or emphasis

Amphibology

Equivocation

Composition

Division

Figure of speech

Material fallacies:

Accident

Affirming the consequent

Converse accident

Irrelevant conclusion

Begging the question

False cause

Fallacy of many questions

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