

Did Aristotle Intentionally Write Bad Arguments?

The current paradigm of understanding Aristotle's corpus since Jaeger in the early 20th century has Aristotle writing dialogues when he was young, and a Platonist, and his terse non-literary tracts known to us today when he was mature and properly Aristotelian. I wish to cast doubt on this assumption via a case study provided by a later commentator who had access both to Aristotle's extant writings and his now fragmentary dialogues. Based on the ways Aristotle references his dialogues in the surviving writings as well as his own manuals on the need to adjust one's speech to convince different audiences there is an alternative and perhaps more convincing way to understand how Aristotle's writings relate to one another. Throughout his career simultaneously composing and endorsing works in separate genres with inherently different modes of presentation and argumentation Aristotle thought a 'bad' argument adjusted for the public could enlist a partner in searching for objective philosophical demonstrations.

For modern developmentalist interpretations the fragments and testimonies of the dialogue *Eudemus* have in particular been taken as key evidence for the supposed young Platonist phase of Aristotle's intellectual development. The criteria for this identification can be debatable in cases as the 'religiosity' of tone apparently more proper to Platonism but also more convincing in finding ideas recognisable from Plato's works and for *Eudemus* in particular the immortality of the soul. Developmentalists would take this 'religious' Aristotle who believed in the immortality of the soul in *Eudemus* as the extreme temporal marker set against the technical treatises dealing with hylomorphism and actuality/potentiality. Ancient readers however seem to have understood the relationship between the dialogues and treatises differently using not the categories of 'early' and 'late' but Aristotle's own terminology to separate two genres of writing,

the ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’. Believing Aristotle’s writings fundamentally proposed a unified mutually dependent set of ideas the perceived differences between the esoteric and exoteric was explained by their functional positions in an overarching philosophical curriculum and the audiences in mind at different stages of practising philosophy. Such unitarian readings merit due caution just as modern developmentalism. However, I think, reintroducing ancient understandings of Aristotle’s works as separated by genre and not necessarily chronology might perhaps inform a less dogmatic developmentalism and even offer insight into the historical functioning of the Lyceum that may have pragmatically separated its popular outreach and internal philosophical research.

In Elias’s commentary on *De Anima* considered one of Aristotle’s last works Elias interprets an argument there (*In Cat.* 114, 25-115, 12) apparently for the immortality of the soul and then summarises another argument from the now lost *Eudemus*. Elias understands these two ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’ works to ultimately share the same philosophical conclusion about the immortality of the soul but explains one was provided by ‘necessitative’ arguments (δι’ἀναγκαστικῶν λόγων) where the *Eudemus* was by what was ‘persuasive’ (διὰ πιθανῶν εἰκότων). Instead of a contrast of ‘Aristotle’ and ‘Plato’ Elias would seem familiar with two different ways Aristotle expresses and argues for his thought.

Developing on what is suggested in Elias’ testimony I first argue that even in Aristotle’s ‘late’ *De Anima* he argued that the human soul was in fact immortal in a way supported by a distinctly Aristotelian framework. In *De Anima* too there is a flexibility of terminology that could out of context misleadingly suggest a Platonist view of the soul’s immortality. I next analyse Elias’ summary of the argument from *Eudemus* and claim there is little to suppose it any more Platonic than Aristotelian. Further, I detail how the argument’s composition is most likely

derived from *Rhetoric* being a manual of how to compose arguments which are not by Aristotle's standards philosophical *per se* but rather intended to persuade an audience of the correctness of one's conclusion even without the premises which might properly support it. Contra developmentalists, the 'religious' tone and immortality of the soul of 'Platonism' can be found in his last works. Moreover, Elias' record of *Eudemus'* argument might be considered a revealing example of Aristotle following his own rule-book in the exoteric works to expediently argue for the same philosophical position via different argumentative means. Perhaps there was a Platonist phase of Aristotle's youth, but it would seem there was also a publicist role in his career.

Aristotle seems to have intentionally written arguments that did not meet his own standards of φιλοσοφία. These arguments were 'bad' in not explaining the world scientifically through the exacting methods of the *Analytics*. The arguments of the exoteric works would seem to have followed instead the enthymeme as described in *Rhetoric* which was unquestionably the best for convincing a lay audience what the Lyceum taught was perhaps true. Via 'bad' arguments Aristotle could hope to recruit a student dedicated to finding good answers.