

Aristotle on Trusting the Teacher

In *Sophistical Refutations* (*SE*) 2, Aristotle lists types of conversational, erotetic reasoning. Among them Aristotle includes didascalical or didactic reasoning (διδασκαλική), which he describes as “arguments that reason from the principles (ἀρχῶν) appropriate to each discipline and not from the opinions (δόξων) of the answerer.” In an explanatory aside Aristotle then states, somewhat elliptically, that “the one learning must trust (πιστεύειν).” It is difficult to understand what Aristotle means by this aside, as evidenced by a range of standard translations: “he who is learning must take things on trust” (Forster 1955); “the learner must be convinced” (Barnes 1984); “celui qui apprend doit en effet accorder sa confiance” (Dorion 1995).

The correct understanding of this aside touches on a range of issues related to didactic argumentation: who or what the one learning must trust, whether it is the teacher or the “principles appropriate to each discipline”; what the appropriate expression of that trust is, in the context of an erotetic exchange, i.e. to approve of each step in an argument or to challenge some of them; and how one understands the relationship that Aristotle acknowledges between didactic reasoning and the kind of demonstrative or apodeictic reasoning (ἀποδεικτικοί) that he outlines in the *Analytics*. So, for example, it has been suggested that a model didactic exchange may begin with question-and-answer in order to develop the subject, before proceeding with a demonstration from discipline-specific first principles (Wolf 2010).

This paper aims to give a rich description of the erotetic contexts whose arguments qualify as didactic. A rich description must take into account other passages in *Topics* and *SE* that bear on didactic reasoning, which paradoxically suggest that question-and-answer has no place in didactic reasoning (*SE* 10-11.171b1-4), or that the one learning should affirm whatever

appears true (τὰ δοκοῦντα) (*Top.* 8.5.159a28-29), or that in certain difficult cases the one learning should not give assent (*Top.* 8.3.159a11-12). It should also take stock of Aristotle's sensitivity to the fact that not all learners are in an epistemic state that would permit them to follow, or to be convinced by, a demonstration from first principles (e.g. *Top.* 6.4.142a2-4).

This broader context makes it clear that didactic reasoning cannot be strictly identified with apodeictic reasoning. Therefore, fundamentally, it cannot be the premises by which didactic reasoning proceeds that demarcate it from other kinds of erotetic reasoning. Rather, it is the trust to which Aristotle alludes in his cryptic aside. More precisely, it is the trust that the student places in the teacher's purpose, which is to enable the student to appreciate the argumentative necessity that operates through the reasoning process (cf. Smith 1997). This understanding of the trust involved in didactic exchanges emerges through a brief comparison with other types of erotetic reasoning described by Aristotle in *Topics* and *SE* (dialectical, peirastic, eristic, sophistic, etc.), where, for various reasons, trust on the part of the answerer is absent.

Bibliography

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