

Aristotle on Definition: Some Texts

Top. I.5, 101^b38: “A definition is an account (*logos*) that signifies the essence.”

Top. VI.4, 141^a26: “... we should see whether he has constructed the definition out of things that are prior and better known, <without qualification>.”

Top. VI.4, 141^b26: “... a correct definition must be given through the genus and the differentiae, and these are better known without qualification and prior to the species ...”

APo. II.3, 90^b25-28: “The principles of demonstrations are definitions, and it has been proved earlier that there will not be demonstrations of these—either the principles will be demonstrable and <there will be> principles of the principles, and this will go on indefinitely, or the primitives will be non-demonstrable definitions.”

APo. II.7, 92^b4-8: “Anyone who knows what a man or anything else is must know too *that* it is (for of that which is not, no one knows what it is—you may know what the account or the name signifies when I say goatstag, but it is impossible to know what a goatstag is).”

APo. II.7, 92^b26-32: “. . . if a definition has nothing at all to do with what a thing is, it will be an account signifying the same as a name. But that is absurd. For, first, there would be definitions even of non-substances, and of things that are not—for one can signify even things that are not. Again, all accounts would be definitions; for one could posit a name for any account whatever, so that we would all talk definitions and the *Iliad* would be a definition.”

APo. II.7, 92^b35-37: “. . . it is evident that definition and deduction are not the same, and that deduction and definition are not of the same thing; and in addition that definition neither demonstrates nor proves anything, and that you can become aware of the what-it-is (sc., essence) neither by definition nor by demonstration.”