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# Commentary on: Anne-Maren Andersen's "Pistis – the common ethos?"

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Anne-Maren Andersen starts her contribution developing the term *pistis* into an analytical tool that she summarizes in table 1. She then applies the tool on Danish parliamentary debate. Forced to make a choice I limit myself to some sketchy remarks about the first part, the way Andersen develops the term *pistis*. In my opinion it is useful to elaborate on the history of this term *pistis* to decide whether we should adopt this term to denote the analytical tool presented in table 1. My conclusion will be not to adopt it this way. However, that does not mean that the analytical tool pretended by Andersen is not useful to analyze parliamentary debate. The theoretical foundation however can be found in existing theories about the principle of charity and cooperation principle.

## 2. SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE TERM *PISTIS*

*The meaning of pistis in classical Greek rhetoric makes that we do not want to situate pistis next to ethos, as Andersen proposes.*

A crucial excerpt to trace the dominant meaning of *pistis* in Greek rhetoric is 454d in Plato's *Gorgias*. Here Socrates opposes *pistis* with *episteme*, forcing Gorgias to acknowledge the difference between these two concepts. There is no true and false knowledge (*episteme*) but there is true and false belief (*pistis*). Continuing on this intuitive distinction, Socrates and Gorgias agree that rhetoric as practiced in courtrooms concerns *pistis*, not *episteme*.

Important references are of course to Aristotle who continuous on this fundamental distinction, making clear that practical wisdom, *phronesis*, is not the same as *episteme* (*Rhetoric* 1354a-1357a). In 1354a3 we encounter the term *pisteis* as *proof*, describing *enthymemes* as the *body of proof*. Corbet and Connors (1999) mention *pisteis* in relation to Aristotle as his term for *rhetorical proofs*, a term having its roots in *pistis* = *belief*. So *pistis* refers to proof that is ultimately based on belief, something the audience has to share with or accept from the orator. In this sense *pistis* is used as the term that covers the different kinds of persuasive appeals: ethos, pathos and logos. It should therefore not be conceptualized as something complementary to ethos.

It seems clear that in this specific Platonian–Aristotelian rhetorical realm *pistis* as *proof* is opposed to the *logical demonstration*. It brings about belief, conviction, that can be true or false. There is a relation with the concept of *trust* which is Andersen’s dominant focus. But in these rhetorical contexts this relation is a rather technical one. *Trust* may be used for a lack of skepticism that results from shared beliefs.

*Pistis in the meaning of trust predominantly does not come from the classical rhetorical tradition. It comes from the biblical tradition that seems to take up a meaning of pistis as warranty.*

In Greek mythology there is the spirit (daimona) named *Pistis*, mentioned among others by Theognis of Megara and Ovidius. *Pistis* seems to be the goddess of Faith, or trust. *Pistis* denotes the specific form of *trust* that we find in Abraham when he trusts the instructions of his God and is prepared to act upon these instructions. This is the standard translation of *pistis* in the New Testament. According to bible suite.com there are 243 occurrences of *pistis* and conjugated forms in the New Testament, all referring to *faith* as convictions that result from a divine *warranty*. This source also tells that in antiquity the term *pistis* outside the specific rhetorical texts referred to a *guarantee* (warranty). I have not been able to verify this. It could explain the use of *pistis* for the means that may produce a conviction (proof) in pre-democratic societies dominated by authority.

We should distinguish this biblical concept of *trust in God* from the more general concept of *trust* in the sense of *sharing beliefs* which is the general principle underlying *phronesis*. In this respect we should be careful with the references to Fafner quoted by Andersen because specifically in Danish philosophical and theological realms the biblical reception may be merged with contemporary philosophical ideas, due to the fact that the term *pistis* plays an important role in the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard formulates a complex, maybe predominantly contemporary relation between the biblical development and the classical rhetorical development. According to Furtak (2013) Kierkegaard relates his fundamental concept of *skeptical doubt* to the Socratic concept of *pistis* to explore how humans in uncertainty maintain strong convictions.

*Andersen observes that pistis as a term “[...] holds a duality, in that it encompasses both the effect and the reason (cause): both the state of having faith or trusting, and the very things that create said trust”. This observation is right, but it does not explain the dual translation that Andersen proposes as trust and argumentum.*

The situation seems more complicated than that. We seem to have religious Faith and the divine warranty that may create such Faith. Then we have *trust* and the very things that create trust. And we have conviction in the realm of *phronesis* and the very means that create conviction. These last means we may call *argumentum*, but we better use the term *proof*.

### 3. PISTIS AS A PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY OR A COOPERATION PRINCIPLE?

When we come closer to table 1 and when we look at its application on parliamentary debate, the concept that underlies Andersen's interpretation of *pistis* seems to develop into Quine's principle of charity or into a kind of cooperation principle, similar to the suggestion that underlies her opening quote of 18th century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. Reid formulates the "the principle of veracity" and "the principle of credulity". Anderson's quote of K.E. Løgstrup even more clearly concerns a general conversational principle.

The interpretation of *pistis* as a cooperation principle is one that I cannot trace back to antiquity. In contemporary scholarship however this presupposition underlying all forms of communication has been explored in pragma linguistics in general and in argument theory more specifically. Such explorations usually depart from Grice's conversational maxims.

As we know the work of Reid was familiar to Paul Grice, be it first of all on the philosophical issue of personal identity. His cooperation principle may very well be inspired on Reid's work. I have not been able to find out whether Reid refers explicitly to *pistis*. If so we would indeed have a historical connection between *pistis* and the cooperation principle..

But still, the concept of presupposed cooperation underlying even adversarial forms of communication is very different from Aristotle's concept of rhetorical proof. More important is that this cooperation principle has been elaborated yet using different terms. Habermas has founded an elaborated system on the insight that all forms of strategic acting presuppose a basic consensus and cooperation. In pragma-dialectical argument theory the insight has been developed in the notion of second and third order rules.

### 4. CONCLUSION

It seems that the interpretation of *pistis* as developed by Andersen is not as clearly and straightforward as her essay may suggest. Developing the term as a cooperation principle seems somewhat confusing. Such a development should better relate to specific proposals made in pragmatics.

### REFERENCES

- Corbett, E. P. J., & Connors, R. (1999). *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Furtak, R.A. (2013). Kierkegaard and Greek philosophy. In J. Lippitt & G. Pattison (eds.), *The Oxford handbook on Kierkegaard* (pp. 129-149). Oxford: Oxford University Press.