

THE *ENDOXON* MYSTIQUE: WHAT *ENDOXAI* ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE NOT

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1. The mystique

IN this article I hope to demystify the authority of the *endoxa* in Aristotle. This is not to deny that there is any basis for that authority. But just as Betty Friedan's ground-breaking work in the 1960s, *The Feminine Mystique*, did not intend to deny the existence of the feminine but was concerned with debunking the ideology that had accrued to it, so the concern of this essay is only to deflate the importance attributed to the so-called endoxic method in Aristotle. This method nowadays is often hailed as *the* method in many introductions to his work, and most of all in those to his ethics.

A fair witness of that view is Richard Kraut's 2006 article 'How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method'.¹ Kraut calls the endoxic method as presented in *NE* 7. 1–2 '*the* proposed method for testing the truth of ethical propositions' and treats it as if it were Aristotle's ubiquitously employed approach. In opposition to this by now widely accepted view, the present essay aims to show that and why the procedure in *NE* 7, properly understood, represents an exception rather than the rule.

A closer look at Kraut's account provides an adequate starting-point: 'In effect, then, his idea is that the first thing we must do, when we investigate a subject, is to pay careful attention to what seems to be the case to either everyone, or to most people, or to a special and smaller group—those who have studied the subject' (78). And Kraut supports this claim with Aristotle's recommen-

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¹ In R. Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2006), 76–95.

dation in *NE* 6. 11, 1143^b11–14: ‘One should pay attention to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of those who have experience and are old, or to those who have practical wisdom, no less than to demonstrations. For, because they have an eye that derives from their experience, they see rightly.’ Despite this somewhat more restrictive recommendation on Aristotle’s side, Kraut includes among the *endoxa* whatever is based on ‘the ordinary human faculties and truth-gathering process—reason, perception, experience, science’,² except for some theses, stubbornly defended for argument’s sake by certain philosophers, that Aristotle explicitly repudiates at *NE* 1. 5, 1096^a2. Kraut therefore assumes that *endoxa* are commonly accepted views, not just those of specialists or people with particular experience, because he holds that Aristotle thereby means to be ‘casting a wide net’ that catches all sorts of fish (80).

There is, undeniably, a lot of evidence that Aristotle treats what people generally think and say with considerable respect. For he often enough asserts that it is foolish to contradict what all people take to be the case.³ In addition, he frequently makes claims about what ‘we think’ and what ‘we say’, claims that clearly do not just express the royal ‘we’ or the opinions of like-minded philosophers. This ‘we’, instead, represents a collective that holds ‘what is better known to us’ in contradistinction to what is ‘better known as such’, where the former constitutes the natural point of departure of humankind concerning all sciences, including ethics.

But that is not to say that all such commonly accepted views are to be regarded as *endoxa* in the sense of *NE* 7. 1 or elsewhere, as maintained by Kraut and many others. Students without knowledge of Greek are often quite surprised to learn that the word *endoxon* is actually used quite sparingly, except in connection with what Aristotle calls ‘dialectic’, and that the method specified in *NE* 7. 1 is not as widely applied as claimed by ‘the friends of the *endoxa*’. For if these friends were right, every method used to set up the starting-points of a science would be endoxic, including Aristotle’s own injunctions.⁴ To see why this expansion of ‘the endoxic

² p. 79. Kraut’s generous inclusion ignores certain reservations of Aristotle concerning *endoxa*, expressed not only repeatedly in the *Topics* but also in *Rhetoric* 1. 1, 1355^a14–18. He also ignores the opposition between beliefs based on perception and beliefs generally held without such justification (*De caelo* 3. 7, 306^a13–17; *Pr. An.* 1. 30, 46^a17–22; *Post. An.* 1. 13, 78^a34–79^a6; *GA* 3. 10, 760^a27–33).

³ See *NE* 1. 8, 1098^b9–12; 10. 2, 1172^b36–7; *Rhet.* 1. 1, 1355^b15–16.

⁴ Kraut acknowledges that the starting-points in *NE* 7. 1 are not the same as our

method', to the point where it includes virtually every kind of procedure in Aristotle, represents an inflation, it is necessary to take a closer look at his own specifications of that method.

2. The endoxic method as displayed in *NE* 7. 1–2

Though the passage is well known, a brief reminder of *NE* 7. 1, 1145^b2–7, will be useful:

We must, as in the other cases,⁵ set down the phenomena [*phainomena*] and, after first discussing the difficulties, prove, if possible, the truth of all the reputable opinions [*endoxa*] about these conditions or, failing to do this, of the greater number and the most authoritative [*kuriōtata*]; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.

The cases to which Aristotle intends to apply this method are not just limited to *akrasia* but concern all related dispositions:

We must now discuss incontinence and softness, and continence and endurance; for we must not treat each of the two either as identical with virtue or vice, or as a different genus. (1145^a35–^b2)⁶

First of all, a word about the meaning of 'setting down the appearances' (*tithenai ta phainomena*). *Prima facie* it seems most natural to assume, with most interpreters, that the phenomena refer to the *endoxa/legomena* that are first enumerated and then subjected to a test by the difficulties raised against them. But this need not be its meaning, or not its full meaning. Instead, the *kai* at 1145^b3 can be

everyday views, mentioned, for instance, at *NE* 1. 4, 1096^a33–^b2, but he regards the former as starting-points higher up in the hierarchic ladder on the way to the first principles (cf. 88–90). He also notes that the method does not mention tests by the facts of life and by our own experiences, but assumes that the endoxic method includes them as well (90–1): explaining falsehoods, moving towards the principles and back again. He also wants to include new views among the *endoxa*, most of all Aristotle's own insights. Thus the endoxic method is all-encompassing and its invocation is an appeal to open-mindedness (93).

⁵ Because the referent of 'the others' is left unspecified, most translators supply 'all the others', but Aristotle may in fact have a limited range in mind, as will emerge later.

⁶ The translation follows, with some modifications, W. D. Ross, revised by J. Urmsion and J. Barnes in Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, 1985), except that I have reinstated Ross's 'virtue and vice', that had been changed to 'excellence and wickedness'.

read in an explicative sense. ‘Setting down the appearances’ would, then, refer not only to the initial enumeration but also to the intended clarification of the phenomena in question. Such a meaning of *phainomenon* is, for instance, referred to at *De caelo* 3. 7, 306^a16–17, where Aristotle declares that while the end of productive knowledge is the product, in natural science it is ‘that which always appears in an authoritative sense [*to phainomenon aei kuriōs*] in accordance with sense-perception’. So the phenomena to be ‘set down’ need not be confined to the presuppositions, but may also refer to confirmed results of an investigation. While this claim must remain somewhat speculative at this point, it would mean that *phainomena*, *endoxa*, and *legomena* do not all refer to one and the same thing.⁷

But now to the method itself. Aristotle first presents a catalogue of views held about continence and endurance, incontinence and softness, after which he introduces a list of difficulties concerning those views (chapter 2). In the subsequent chapters (3–10) he suggests solutions to those difficulties and thereby clarifies the ‘conditions’ (*pathē*) in question,⁸ as postulated in chapter 1. Although the compressed text makes it hard to separate the different points, the catalogue of *endoxa* in chapter 1 (1145^b8) overall consists of seven items:

- (i) Continence and endurance are good and praiseworthy, incontinence and softness bad and blameworthy.
- (ii) The continent person sticks to his reasoning (*logismos*), while the incontinent abandons it.
- (iii) The incontinent, knowing that the acts are bad, none the less commits them under the influence of affections; the continent, knowing that the affections are bad, does not follow them because of his reasoning.
- (iv) Some say that the temperate person is both continent and resistant.
- (v) Some say that the continent and resistant person is altogether temperate, while the intemperate person is incon-

⁷ Cf. *Pr. An.* 2, 46^a17–25, where ‘taking the phenomena’ (*λαμβάνειν τὰ φαινόμενα*) means establishing the facts.

⁸ The Greek *πάθος* can mean affection, but is often used by Aristotle in a wider and more neutral sense; cf. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus*, s.v. 2 (556^a60–^b43). Although affections are involved in the dispositions in question, the dispositions are not themselves affections.

continent and the incontinent person intemperate, indiscriminately. Others deny that.

- (vi) It is sometimes denied that the prudent person can be incontinent, but sometimes affirmed that certain persons who are prudent and clever are nevertheless incontinent.
- (vii) People are also called incontinent with respect to anger, honour, and gain.

Even a perfunctory look at this list shows that, contrary to Aristotle's promise, it is unlikely that all or even most of the *endoxa* will be approved. Some items contain contradictory positions, namely (v) and (vi), for they refer to opinions that are held by some but denied by others. (iv) will turn out to be inconsistent, and (i) and (vii) are vindicated only with important modifications. Thus only (ii) and (iii) survive the scrutiny intact. We are also not told whether this list should contain 'all' (*panta*) or only 'most and the most authoritative' reputable opinions (1145^b4–6), but given the unlikelihood of completeness and Aristotle's overall critical intentions, he must have the latter in mind.

The heterogeneous status of the items on this list is not the only reason for doubting that the treatment of *endoxa* is carried out in the systematic way that its initial characterization at 1145^b2–7 would lead one to expect. For the six *aporiai* in chapter 2 do not address the catalogue of *endoxa* point by point. Not all *aporiai* even take up the reputable views; instead, some raise additional questions.⁹ Nor does the subsequent discussion deal with the *aporiai* one by one. Instead, Aristotle proceeds quite selectively. He starts out with the *aporia* of how it is even possible to be incontinent, against one's own convictions (*endoxa* (ii) and (iii)), a possibility that is rejected by some, most explicitly and most famously by Socrates. The reason why the Socratic position is not listed among the *endoxa*, despite Socrates' reputation, is clearly that he denies the phenomenon of *akrasia* altogether (1145^b22–7), the existence of which is accepted, albeit in different ways, by all reputable opinions.

The Socratic denial of *akrasia* therefore represents a challenging difficulty that receives the lion's share of attention in Aristotle's discussion and remains the major focus of present-day commentators. In addition, however, there is a solution for the contradictory views in *endoxa* (v) and (vi), a clarification of the inconsistency in

⁹ For a more detailed discussion see pp. 209–11 of this article.

(iv), and specifications regarding (i) and (vii). Thus Aristotle to a considerable extent, though not in an easily discernible order, not only sketches out how to make use of ‘reputable opinions’ as a way of discussing salient problems, but also resolves the problems they contain.

But the question pursued in this essay is not to what extent Aristotle applies the endoxic method in *NE* 7. 2–10 and by what means he reaches his results, but rather how representative that method is for Aristotle’s procedure in general and in his ethics in particular. Therefore the problems and their discussion in book 7, including that of *akrasia*, will not be treated in any detail here. This brief characterization of the elaborateness of Aristotle’s procedure has been intended only to show why it must present a problem for all those commentators who regard it as representative for Aristotle’s procedure *tout court*. For there is no other passage that comes even close to approximating this model.¹⁰

It is often claimed that the treatment of pleasure in 7. 12–14 and in 10. 1–5 is ‘endoxic’,¹¹ but a closer look shows that this is not the case. To be sure, Aristotle starts out in 7. 11 with a list of views on pleasure, and concludes with a remark that recalls the conclusion of 7. 1: ‘These, then, are the things said’ (11, 1152^b23; see also

¹⁰ Clarke points to two passages in the *Eudemian Ethics*, the discussion of courage in *EE* 3. 1 and that of friendship in *EE* 7. 1. I agree with him and Cooper (see below) that the *Eudemian Ethics* is more aporetic in its treatment of central issues than the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but the clarification of courage does not proceed from a list of reputable opinions and their inconsistencies, but merely points out the contradiction that the courageous man should be both fearless and fearful, and then resolves it by explaining the ambiguity in the use of ‘frightening’. The discussion of friendship in *EE* 7. 1 starts with an even more convoluted catalogue of difficulties about friendship than does the corresponding chapter in *NE* 8. 1, but again it is a hotchpotch of *aporiai* and opinions, which is far from the orderly procedure as promised in *NE* 7. 1. The discussion of equity in *NE* 5. 10, to which Clarke also refers, is a different case. Though Aristotle first questions in what way justice and equity differ, while belonging to the same genus, he solves the problem by pointing out that equity is better than justice in so far as the law is somehow deficient. But this solution does not solve inconsistencies in conflicting points of view: it explains the complexity of the relation between the two concepts.

¹¹ See J. M. Cooper, ‘*Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1–2: Introduction, Method, Puzzles’, in C. Natali, C. (ed.), *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics Book VII. Symposium Aristotelicum [Nicomachean Ethics VII]* (Oxford, 2009), 9–39 at 9–10. D. Bostock, *Aristotle’s Ethics* (Oxford, 2000), 218–19, admits, however, that the *legomena* are theories of philosophers only and that instead of puzzles there is refutation, while Aristotle’s own view is not among the *legomena*. In general, Bostock holds that there is ‘very little of the *Ethics* that can be explained as *simply* an application of the method set out in VII 1’ (219, emphasis original).

10. 2, 1174^a11). But 7. 11 does not contain a survey of *endoxa* on pleasure across the board. Instead it concentrates on views of *one* special kind, namely on those inspired by the Platonist contention that pleasure is a *genesis* in the sense of the filling of a lack or the restoration of an equilibrium.¹² Furthermore, these views are not subjected to any aporetic testing. Instead, they are roundly refuted. Their discussion is, then, not a truth-finding procedure, but a fault-finding one. Aristotle's own view that pleasure is, rather, an 'unimpeded activity' is not found among the *legomena*, but it is introduced *en passant* and accepted without scrutiny.¹³ The same is true of the more extensive treatment of his own view of pleasure as a kind of 'supervenient end' in 10. 4–5: that view is neither introduced as part of the survey of views held, nor does it receive a critical scrutiny.

The other case in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that is sometimes presented as an example of the endoxic procedure is the brief survey of the three (or four) types of the good life in 1. 5: the life of pleasure, the political life, the theoretical life (and the life dedicated to wealth). What promises an endoxic treatment is the initial announcement (1. 4, 1095^a28–30). While it would be fruitless to examine all positions on the nature of the good life, it is enough to examine (*exetazein*) those that are most prevalent or widespread (*epipolazousas*), or that seem to have some reason (*tina logon*) in their favour.¹⁴ Again, a closer look shows that what follows is no application of the endoxic method. The views presented on happiness in chapter 5 are neither treated as reputable nor submitted to aporetic scrutiny. Instead, the life of pleasure is immediately dismissed as vulgar and worthy of beasts—that those in power also cultivate it is no recommendation. The life of honour is admitted with some qualifications: properly understood it should be a life dedicated to virtue, a topic that will receive extensive treatment later. The theoretical life is postponed for further discussion and taken up again

¹² On this list, its inspiration by the doctrine expounded in Plato's *Philebus*, and its refutation see D. Frede, 'Nicomachean Ethics VII. 11–12: Pleasure', in Natali (ed.), *Nicomachean Ethics VII*, 183–207 at 188–99.

¹³ 7. 12, 1153^a10–15; 13, 1153^b9–12.

¹⁴ *ἐπιπολάζειν* and the adjective *ἐπιπόλαιος* refer to what is at the surface, and often have the negative connotation of superficiality, an objection Aristotle subsequently raises against a life dedicated to honour (5, 1095^a24). The parallel passage at *EE* 1214^b28–1215^a2 is quite explicit that some opinions about happiness are not worth serious thought. Cf. also the impatience with 'needless *πάρρηγα*' expressed in *NE* 1. 7, 1098^a32–4.

in 10. 6–8. And the life aiming at wealth is dismissed out of hand because it represents a confusion of means and ends.

More important, Aristotle's own fundamental presuppositions and injunctions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are nowhere treated as *endoxa*. Nor are they subjected to any kind of aporetic treatment at all. They are explained and sometimes exemplified, and occasionally there is a question raised, but they are not subjected to a scrutiny (*exetazein*) worthy of that term. This is also true of Aristotle's preliminary sketch of the good life in book 1, and of his distinction between virtues of character and virtues of the intellect. It applies equally to the determination of the character-virtues as intermediates between excess and defect in book 2 (and their detailed discussion from 3. 6 to book 5), to the distinction of the voluntary and involuntary, to deliberation and decision, to wish in book 3, to the determination of *phronēsis* as practical reason in book 6, and to the discussion of the different kinds of friendship in books 8 and 9.

But there is a further reason that speaks against the assumption of some scholars that Aristotle's own views should be considered as a case of 'the most reputable of all reputable views' (*Top.* 1. 1, 100^b23). For, not only would this be an unusual display of conceit on Aristotle's side, but it flatly contradicts the meaning of *endoxon*. Something that sees the light of day for the first time can *eo ipso* not (yet) have become a reputable view, something that is commonly said, a *legomenon*, not even if Aristotle, its father, is a most reputable philosopher.

But what about the extended surveys of his predecessors' positions that Aristotle sometimes uses as an introduction in several other major works, such as *Metaphysics A*, *Physics* 1, or *De anima* 1?¹⁵ They are the views of distinguished philosophers and are, after all, supposed to make important contributions to the determination of the subject-matter. The problem with these surveys is that they are not used to 'set down the phenomena' in the way indicated in *NE* 7. 1–2. Instead, they set the stage for Aristotle's own points of view. Thus at *Metaph. A* 3, 983^a33–^b4, Aristotle proposes an investigation of his predecessors' treatment of first causes as a confirmation of both the necessity and the superiority of his

¹⁵ *Metaphysics B* as a whole famously presents *aporiai* concerning the topics to be dealt with by metaphysics, but the problems are not preceded by a list of reputable opinions. On the character of that work see M. Crubellier and A. Laks (eds.), *Aristotle: Metaphysics B. Symposium Aristotelicum* (Oxford, 2009), 1–24.

own canon of four causes. To be sure, in his extensive doxography he also includes certain *aporiai* (7, 988^b18–20). But he does not do so in order to establish the opinions of his predecessors, but rather to point out their weaknesses.¹⁶ The same attitude is displayed, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to his predecessors' treatment of the *archai* in *Physics* 1. 2–6, and their conception of the soul in *De anima* 1. 2–5.¹⁷ Nor, one should add, does Aristotle ever use the word *endoxon* in that connection. But in order to see why he does not do so, it is necessary to take a closer look at the term *endoxon*, its meaning and use, elsewhere in Aristotle.

3. The origin and meaning of *endoxon* in Aristotle

Before Aristotle, *endoxon* was used as an adjective that applied to cities, persons, and to deeds of public importance. It indicates that the cities, families, individuals or their actions in question enjoy a certain *doxa*, a reputation or fame that is due to their role in history, but also to their wealth, nobility, or power.¹⁸ Aristotle seems to be the first to apply that epithet to propositions in philosophical debate. That this extension originated with the *Topics*, by general consent an early work, is likely not only because *endoxon* is most frequently used in that work and in the *Sophistici elenchi*, but also because Aristotle clearly introduces it there to characterize the premisses of the dialectical syllogism, with a definition (*Top.* 1. 1, 100^a30–^b23) that he elsewhere takes for granted: cf. *Pr.*

¹⁶ Cf. the explanation at the beginning of *Metaph.* a 1, 993^a31–^b19: 'No one is able to attain the truth adequately, while on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but everyone says something true about the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed.' This assessment reminds one of Aristotle's appreciation of the good judgement of 'the many' in the *Politics*, whose joint contributions may outdo an expert (e.g. *Pol.* 3. 11, 1281^a40–^b10; 1282^a14–17, 33–42; 15, 1286^a24–31). But no such appreciation of the views of the many seems behind the *endoxa* in *NE* 7. 1–2.

¹⁷ Cf. *DA* 1. 2, 403^b20–3: 'For our study of the soul, while formulating the problems of which in our further advance we are to find the solutions, it is necessary to call into council the views of those of our predecessors who have declared any opinion on this subject, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their suggestions and avoid their errors.' In fact the latter consideration receives much more attention than the former.

¹⁸ Apart from orators in the classical age, who frequently use that term, there are six occurrences in Xenophon, all of them referring to persons, cities, or actions. Plato uses it once in the *Sophist* in his definition of the sophist as hunter of wealthy youths of the upper class (223 B 5: *νέων πλουσίων καὶ ἐνδόξων*).

An. 1. 1, 24^b12.¹⁹ He thereby intends to preserve the connotation of worthiness and notability in a somewhat generous sense. For the ambiguous status of *endoxa* allows Aristotle to distinguish premisses suitable for the dialectical syllogism from those of scientific or apodeictic proofs on the one side, and from those of eristic arguments on the other (*Top.* 1. 1, 100^a20: *ex endoxōn*). While the premisses of an *apodeixis* must be true and primary (or be deduced from premisses of that kind), the premisses of a dialectical deduction are those ‘that are accepted [*τὰ δοκοῦντα*] by all, or by most, or by the wise, and of those either by all, or by most, or by those that are best known and most reputable [*τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις*]’ (100^b21–3).²⁰ Dialectical syllogisms in turn differ from the eristic type in that the latter are based on premisses that only seem acceptable, because their falsity will be obvious to everyone capable of some discrimination (100^b23–31). The endoxic premisses hold, then, a middle position between those that are obviously true and those that are obviously false, at least to critical inspection, as Aristotle is going to confirm later (1. 10, 104^a5–10). It is a middle position because the former leave no room for doubt and therefore no room for debate, while to the latter no sensible person would assent.²¹ Reputable opinions, by contrast, do not clearly show their character at the surface (100^b26–8: *οὐδὲν . . . ἐπιπόλαιον ἔχει παντελῶς τὴν φαντασίαν*), so that they present a challenge for both sides in a debate.

What does this tell us about the endoxic premisses of dialectic syllogisms? Though not necessarily true, their key characteristic is that they carry considerable conviction or ‘currency’, as Brunschwig has expressed it.²² The point of using *endoxa* as premisses in

¹⁹ In *Pr. An.* 2. 27, 70^a4, ‘reputable’ is treated as a synonym for ‘likely’ (*εἰκός*) and is used for propositions that are true for the most part, a use that is also found in *Rhet.* 1. 1, 1355^a16–18.

²⁰ Pragmatic reasons seem to be behind the astonishing breadth of holders of ‘reputable views’: whatever happens to be available may serve as an argument in debate.

²¹ As Clarke pointed out in his comments, such premisses might also be obviously true; what is excluded is only the obviousness typical of scientific premisses, i.e. that they are primary, immediate, and necessarily true. Nevertheless, the obviousness of the truth of the thesis should not be such that it makes a debate vacuous by forcing one of the opponents to argue against what is readily accepted by all.

²² J. Brunschwig, *Aristote: Topique I* (Paris, 1967), xxxiv–xxxvii and notes ad loc. Brunschwig translates *endoxa* by ‘idées admises’ but is conscious that this is just a makeshift, because it does not convey the point that these are views that are not just probably true but ‘véritablement approuvées’.

dialectical arguments is, then, that both questioner and respondent are concerned with the attack and defence of a plausible, worthwhile position. Since the defender has a choice between two contradictory positions, he will choose the one he thinks the audience will regard as most important and plausible, but the opponent must also find the opposite thesis worthwhile, and so must the audience if the debate is to have some poignancy. To be sure, of two contradictory theses one must be true, the other false. But this does not mean that they cannot both be reputable in the sense that both have their backers (even if not both can be held by all), and that explains why their truth or falsity must not be obvious, in contradistinction to apodeictic and eristic arguments.

In considering the evidence of the *Topics*, it should be kept in mind that dialectic is a kind of intellectual *game*. As Aristotle asserts at the beginning of the *Topics*, the overall goal is to find a way to argue about any proposed topic on the basis of reputable premisses, and when defending a thesis, not to get trapped in contradictions.²³ The truth of the premisses is therefore not at stake, and the aim of the game is winning, not the establishment of some truth or the refutation of some falsehood.²⁴ This explains why Aristotle quite consciously preserves the original meaning of *endoxon* as ‘well known’ or ‘renowned’, by asserting that such are the positions of persons considered as *gnōrimoi* and *endoxoi* (*Top.* 100^b23). Thus, not just common views or commonplaces are at stake, as many translations suggest. Barnes, rather, is more to the point when he prefers ‘reputable’ or ‘noteworthy’.²⁵

Such reputability notwithstanding, it is clear that Aristotle did not intend *endoxon* as an honorific title, one that is meant to assign some elevated status to dialectical arguments that exceeds plausibility. This emerges from the fact that there are two opposites of

²³ This is not to deny that Aristotle does not confine dialectic to its ‘agonistic’ element but explicitly states that its use consists in ‘exercise’ (*γυμνάσια*), ‘encounters with the many’ (*ἐντεύξεις*), and philosophical insights (*τὰς κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμας*), and attributes some quite heuristic value to dialectical exercises (*Top.* 1. 2). More on this on pp. 197–8.

²⁴ At *SE* 1. 17, 175^a31–3, Aristotle opposes ‘deducing something *endoxōs*’ to ‘deducing *alēthōs*’. Depending on the context, Aristotle sees more or less affinity between *endoxa* and truth (cf. *Rhet.* 1. 1, 1355^a16–18)

²⁵ This explains the wide range of the *endoxa*: the dialectician will choose whatever suits his case best and therefore pick either what is held by all or what is held by most . . . , etc. His choice will be determined by pragmatic considerations of what is available, not by the question of what is most likely to be true.

endoxon. (a) A *paradoxon* is a thesis that no one would assent to, because it flies in the face of all acceptable views, even though it may be defended by some philosopher against all odds (*Top.* 1. 10, 104^a10; 11, 104^b19, 34). (b) An *adoxon* is not disreputable, but is none the less an implausible thesis. Thus, in *Top.* 8. 5–12 Aristotle distinguishes between *endoxa*, *adoxa*, and what is neither the one nor the other.²⁶ This contrast sheds a significant light on the meaning of *endoxon* in the *Topics* because it shows that Aristotle has in mind plausible views, in contradistinction to implausible and neutral ones. Thus he concludes at chapter 12, 162^b28–30: ‘For if it depends on false but reputable premisses, the argument is dialectical; if on true but implausible [*adoxon*] premisses, it is bad; if they are both false and also all too implausible [*adoxon*], clearly the argument is bad, either without qualification or else in relation to the particular matter at hand.’

In this sense of ‘reputable’ or ‘plausible’ (but not necessarily true) Aristotle also uses the expression *endoxon* in the *Analytics*, sometimes with explicit reference to the *Topics* or to dialectical procedure in general (*Pr. An.* 1. 1, 24^b12).²⁷ As one would expect, in addition to the *Topics* and *Sophistici elenchi*, *endoxa* are also occasionally referred to in the *Rhetoric*, where aiming for *endoxa* is said to provide a good chance of hitting the truth (1. 1, 1355^a16–18), while arguments that are not based on *endoxa* are not sufficiently persuasive and therefore stand in need of proof themselves (2, 1357^a8–14).²⁸ So for pragmatic reasons a rhetorician is well advised to look for arguments that rely on *endoxa*. In his scientific works, including the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle does not mention *endoxa*, with the exception

²⁶ *Adoxos*, which otherwise means ‘undistinguished’, occurs as an epithet for arguments only in the *Topics* and the *Sophistici elenchi*.

²⁷ At *Pr. An.* 2. 10, 62^a12–19, Aristotle justifies the claim that contradictory rather than contrary statements should be used in deductions, because if one of the contradictories is rejected as not true, it is *endoxon* that the contradictory should be accepted. It seems odd that the use of the principle of the excluded middle should be called ‘reputable’ here, but Aristotle wants to avoid calling it either necessary or true, when it is unclear which of the two actually holds. In the final chapter of *Pr. An.* 2 Aristotle equates likely (*εἰκότα*) and endoxic premisses, and claims that they are ‘true for the most part’. In the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle is less friendly to *endoxa* (cf. *Post. An.* 1. 6, 74^b22–5, and 1. 19, 81^b—concerning a middle term that only seems to be one), but that is only to be expected, given that he is concerned with the first principles of science. Cf. the remark at *Metaph. B* 1, 995^b24, that dialectic is concerned with ‘reputables’ only (*ἐνδόξων μόνων*).

²⁸ Reputable premisses are sometimes opposed to what is true (see *SE* 17, 175^a31–3).

of one passage in the *De caelo*, where he objects to the atomic theory that it contradicts many of the *endoxa* as well as what appears to the senses (3. 4, 303^a22). But this reference is a virtually unique exception, not the rule.²⁹

Apart from these dialectical contexts, Aristotle rarely uses *endoxon*, and if he does, he does so in the customary meaning of 'famous' or 'well known' as epithets of persons or actions of repute. He does so on four occasions in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, sometimes in a positive, sometimes in a detached sense. Thus, at *NE* 1. 8, 1098^b28, *endoxoi andres* are mentioned, among others, as witnesses to the conditions of the good life; at 4. 2, 1122^b32, it is stated that the magnificent man is likely to be of a noble family or otherwise noteworthy; and according to 7, 1127^a21, the boisterous man pretends to have done noteworthy things, while mock modest persons such as Socrates disavow the possession of noteworthy qualities, 1127^b25.

We have to grant to the defenders of an expansive conception of the endoxic method that there is more to dialectic than the exercise of argumentative skills on worthwhile theses. Thus, in chapter 2 of the *Topics* Aristotle emphasizes the benefits of this technique to philosophy: (i) the ability to raise difficulties on both sides via *endoxa* will in each case facilitate the distinction of what is true from what is false; (ii) though the first principles of every science cannot be established by deduction, it is possible to discuss them on the basis of *endoxa*. This task, so he claims, is either proper to dialectic or most akin to it, 'for dialectic, being investigative [*ἐξεταστική*], provides a path to the starting-points of all enquiries'. Aristotle gives no further explanation concerning the precise contribution of the *endoxa* in such investigations, but it is not hard to construe one for either case. (i) Reputable arguments are a repository of arguments both for and against every given position, and thereby provide a route to ferreting out the truth by careful reflection on their respective strength and weakness. (ii) Though it is not possible to provide knowledge of first principles, *endoxa* concerning a particular field can lead to a better understanding of the principles and their connection; thus, the well-known phenomenon of interception of light can be used as an elucidation of the nature of an eclipse.

But if there are such positive applications of the *endoxa* in the justification and elucidation of first principles in philosophy, does this

²⁹ In the Greek commentators on Aristotle, from Alexander to Simplicius, the use of *endoxa* is also largely restricted to dialectical or rhetorical arguments.

not, after all, support the position of the friends of the *endoxa* who regard them as fundamental for all parts of Aristotle's philosophy? The philosophical usefulness of the reputable positions envisaged in the *Topics* is limited because they are employed there only as a means to evaluate or to clarify first principles; they are not themselves principles, nor do they supply them. But the limitation of the use of *endoxa* in the *Topics* does not *eo ipso* rule out that they have a wider use elsewhere.

4. The relation of *endoxa* to other principles

What speaks, then, against the assumption that by *endoxa* in *NE* 7 Aristotle means what he elsewhere calls *gnōrima*, i.e. what is (better) known to us? For that term is frequently used to designate the starting-points in philosophical and scientific questions that are not first principles. Indeed, Aristotle also uses *gnōrima* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in his depiction of the points about which there must be agreement in order to proceed to the general principles (I. 4, 1095^b2–7). This assumption seems to gain some support from the fact that in the introduction of the *endoxa* in *Top.* I. 1, 100^b21, Aristotle attributes them to, *inter alios*, 'the best-known [*gnōrimoi*] and reputable [*endoxoi*] persons', thereby treating the two terms like synonyms. If that is so, there seems *prima facie* no reason to separate opinions that are *gnōrima* from those that contain *endoxa*. Furthermore, both kinds are closely tied to *phainomena* in the sense of 'familiar experiences', so this would suggest a connection between the endoxic method and Aristotle's treatment of basic presuppositions that rely on *phainomena*.³⁰ So why should not there be a life for *endoxa* outside of dialectic proper, despite the fact that Aristotle rarely uses that term elsewhere?³¹

There are several objections to the simple solution of equating

³⁰ *Metaph. A* 3, 984^a19–20: 'the fact of the matter [*αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα*]' showed them the way and forced them to go further in their investigations; 984^b8–11: similarly, they are 'forced by the truth [*ἀλήθεια*]' to search for the cause of goodness and beauty, instead of sticking to matter as the only cause.

³¹ For a thorough critical evaluation of the dialectic methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics* see G. Salmieri, 'Aristotle's Non-"Dialectical" Methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Ancient Philosophy*, 29 (2009), 311–35. This study is concerned to show in detail that the procedure followed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is largely foundationalist rather than coherentist, uses as starting-points the opinions of Aristotle's well-brought-up audience with sufficient experience of life's

the *endoxa* in *NE* 7 with ‘what is (better) known to us’. As mentioned earlier, in the *Topics* Aristotle explicitly denies that a thesis that is *endoxos* should be what is obvious to everyone or to most, because there would be nothing questionable about it (104^a7: τὸ πᾶσι φανερόν . . . οὐκ ἔχει ἀπορίαν). As mentioned before, ‘reputable’ is not the same as ‘obvious’, and reputable views need not be identical with common assumptions accepted as beyond doubt by all people, let alone with shared experiences. Aristotle seems to have exploited a certain ambiguity of the meaning of *endoxon* in ordinary Greek: it refers to someone or something well known, famous, of repute, but leaves open the justification of such prominence.³² Though most well-known or renowned cities, men, or actions probably deserve that epithet, there is no specific kind of worth tied to it, let alone a moral value. Hence ‘reputable’ has to be taken with caution, in the sense that it entails no entitlement to truth in the case of propositions and to acceptance by everyone. That *endoxa* need not be true does, of course, not mean that they cannot be true or that their status is dubious. It only means that they are both in need of and worthy of further scrutiny. And that is precisely what happens in *NE* 7, as noted earlier. For not all items on Aristotle’s list can and will pass closer inspection.

This is not the occasion to investigate the nature and status of what is ‘better known to us’ as far as its claim to truth is concerned. But even a perfunctory survey would show that Aristotle—at least most of the time—presupposes that such beliefs are true: they concern the *facts*, the *hoti*, from which we take our departure in order to find the reason why, the *dioti* (cf. 1. 7, 1098^b2–3). If this were not his presupposition, there would be no point to induction (*epagōgē*), i.e. proceeding from the particular to the universal. If what is better known (or familiar) to us could be false, it would not provide a suitable starting-point to the first principles at all. In his discussion of induction Aristotle never takes into consideration the possibility that the facts familiar to us may not actually be *facts*.³³ True, he

conditions, and employs *aporai* mostly as a means of confirmation and expansion of Aristotle’s own positions.

³² Cooper, ‘*Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1–2’, 24–6, seems to have overlooked this fact, as witnessed by his query whether the *endoxa* on the list in 7. 1 lose their status once they have been discarded, and should therefore be demoted to mere *legomena* or common views.

³³ Aristotle sometimes also speaks of *ὑπάρχοντα* in its absolute sense to designate facts; see *NE* 1. 8, 1098^b 11–12; *Post. An.* 1. 10, 76^b3–5.

sometimes mentions that our preliminary understanding may be muddled (*Physics* 1. 1), but nowhere does he suggest that facts are to be taken as facts only after they have been submitted to the kind of aporetic treatment that he has in mind for the *endoxa*. Instead, in book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle treats what is ‘better known to us’ as the result of a good moral upbringing:

Hence anyone who is to listen intelligently to a lecture about what is noble and just, and generally, about the subjects of political science, must have been brought up in good habits. For the facts [*to hoti*] are the starting-points, and if they are sufficiently plain to him, he will not need the reason why [*to dioti*] as well. (*NE* 1. 4, 1095^b2–8)

In ethics it is quite possible that views acquired by a good upbringing can also be *endoxa* that stand in need of further scrutiny, even if Aristotle does not use that term in that connection. But this does not at all apply to the facts on which the sciences are based. Instead, Aristotle clearly relies on observations as his starting-points, and the collections of facts that constitute science are a matter of empirical study and generalizations on the basis of them, not of collecting prevalent opinions and subjecting them to aporetic scrutiny. That the moon is waxing and waning is a matter of observation. Why it does so and what causes that waxing and waning is for theory to explain. It would therefore not just be an inflation of the use of *endoxon* if we were to extend it to scientific observations, it would cause an unnecessary muddle. That would equate assumptions that stand in need of further scrutiny with well-established truths.

5. A short and eclectic doxography of the endoxic method

The importance of the ‘appearances’ and their connection with the *endoxa* in Aristotle was first emphasized in G. E. L. Owen’s canonical article ‘*Tithenai ta phainomena*’.³⁴ Because this article is by now more often referred to than studied, a short recapitulation is apposite. Owen’s first point is that the contrast between the *Analytics* and the *Physics* is not due to the alleged fact that the *Analy-*

³⁴ G. E. L. Owen, ‘*Tithenai ta phainomena*’, in S. Mansion (ed.), *Aristote et les problèmes de méthode: communications présentées au Symposium Aristotelicum tenu à Louvain du 24 août au 1^{er} septembre 1960* (Louvain, 1961), 83–103; repr. in Owen, *Logic, Science and Dialectic: Collected Papers in Greek Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 239–51.

tics works with a rigorously deductive procedure, while the *Physics* is more tentative and accommodating both in its premisses and in its methods. The *Analytics*, rather, distinguishes the processes of finding and applying the principles, while the *Physics* takes no pains to separate the two processes. But that is still not the whole story. There is also a difference between the means by which the principles of the sciences are reached. Thus, in the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle attributes the first steps to experience. In astronomy experience first grasps the *phainomena* that subsequently become the subject of proofs (*Pr. An.* 1. 30, 46^a17–22: ληφθέντων . . . ἰκανὼς τῶν φαινόμενων). Just as it is in astronomy, this procedure is also applied in Aristotle's biology and meteorology, but not in the *Physics*. There the principles are established by a 'conceptual analysis' that is often guided or illustrated by, but not founded upon, empirical data. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to *NE* 7. 1, where, according to Owen, the Socratic position's contradiction of the *phainomena* cannot mean a contradiction to the 'observed facts', but rather to the 'commonly held views'. The difficulties addressed in what follows are therefore not recalcitrant facts but conflicting opinions. This, according to Owen, is also at stake in *Physics* 4. 1–5, concerning the definition of 'place'.

While Owen's characterization of the method in *NE* 7. 1 is unobjectionable, if one leaves aside the question of 'conceptual analysis', it should be pointed out that the determination of 'place' in the *Physics* is an application of the endoxic method only in a quite attenuated sense, despite the fact that Aristotle is, *inter alia*, concerned with clearing up conceptual muddles. For at the very beginning of that discussion Aristotle claims that he could not rely on any previous doctrine. With the exception of some commonplace assumptions, such as that everything that exists has a place and that there is change of place (1, 208^b1–5), no *endoxa* on place are invoked at all.³⁵ Instead, the catalogue of four possibilities that Aristotle discusses (4, 211^b5–9) are carefully selected theoretical positions clad in Aristotelian terminology. They are not taken from the large field of common parlance that would contain place in the sense of location or position, space in the sense of extension, as well as in the

³⁵ Everyone who wants to be understood has to start from the common use of a central concept and to clear up vagueness. But it is one thing to depart from widely accepted concepts, ideas, and manners of expression and quite another to make them the centre of investigation.

wider senses of region, area, etc.³⁶ Nor does Aristotle pretend to be working in a well-prepared field of controversies. For as he emphatically asserts in an elegant play of words, none of his predecessors managed even to raise the appropriate questions (*proēporēmenōn*), let alone solve them (*proeuporoumenōn*) (1, 208^a34–^b1). The only previous account of place Aristotle acknowledges at all is that in Plato's *Timaeus* and the so-called *agrapha dogmata*. But Aristotle rejects that account as fundamentally mistaken, because Plato (allegedly) identified *chōra* with matter (2, 209^b11–17). Thus, we find neither a list of *legomena* about place, nor a list of *aporiai* concerning these *legomena*, as the basis of Aristotle's own solution. The difficulties he raises rather concern the need to provide a coherent account of place as a basic conception of physics, and the *dokounta* he refers to now and then concern his own tenets, which he expects all those among his readers to share who are able to follow his line of argument. Aristotle's definition of place as the 'boundary of the surrounding body' is quite original, and it is not reached by a scrutiny of common views on place and their difficulties.³⁷

There remains one passage in the discussion of place (*Phys.* 4. 4, 211^a7–11) where Aristotle seems to be describing a procedure that to some degree resembles that in *NE* 7. 1. But as a closer look shows, the similarities are misleading. In the context it emerges that instead of reputable views or *endoxa* Aristotle's own considerations concerning place are at stake. For he lists his own *axiōmata* about place as the basis of his definition:

Once these have been laid down [*hupokeimenōn*], the rest should be inspec-

³⁶ As Algra's careful discussion of the 'unorthodox conceptions of *topos*' shows (K. Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought* (Leiden, 1995), § 4.5), they do play a significant role in Aristotle's physical works because the conception of place as worked out in *Phys.* 4. 1–5 is designed to account for the location of static bodies (188). But Algra's explanation of 'common parlance and everyday thought' as the starting-points of Aristotle's discussion of *topos* has to be taken with quite a pinch of salt. This is not to detract from the value of Algra's painstaking investigation, but despite his critical stance towards Owen's interpretation, in many respects he overlooks the difference in kind between the *endoxa* and their treatment in *NE* 7. 1–2 and the carefully selected positions discussed in *Phys.* 4. 1–5.

³⁷ Though Owen is quite judicious in his selection of examples of the endoxic method, in a way he started its inflationary use; for he refers to *Div. somn.* 1, 462^b14–18, with the claim that '*Endoxa* also rest on experience, even if they misrepresent.' A check of the text shows, however, that Aristotle says only that 'all or many suppose [*ὑπολαμβάνειν*] that dreams have a special significance', and though he grants that this is a reason for thinking there must be something to it, he altogether denies the soundness of such beliefs.

ted. The investigation is to determine the essence [*to ti estin*], to solve the difficulties, so that what appears to be true is shown to be true, and the cause of the recalcitrance and difficulties will be apparent.

The difficulties under discussion are clearly those that Aristotle faced—not those encountered in a survey of ‘reputable views’. So *pace* Owen, *Physics* 4. 1–5 is not a parallel of *Nicomachean Ethics* 7, nor does it show that the *phainomena* that Aristotle pays most attention to are data familiar from dialectic. It should be noted that Owen is more discriminating with respect to what can count as *endoxa* than many of the later ‘friends of the *endoxa*’. For he limits *endoxa* to opinions other than those derived from sense-experience. Not everything that is ‘better known to us’ is therefore at the same time an *endoxon*.³⁸

An article by Barnes³⁹ has done a great deal to make the ‘endoxic method’ a household name. Barnes claims that *phainomena*, *legomena*, and *endoxa*, while not synonyms, all have the same reference, namely ‘things that seem to be the case’. He also points to parallels such as *EE* 7. 1, 1235^a4–^b12, where *ta dokounta* is used in the same sense as *endoxa* in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the method it describes is similar, namely to investigate contradictions or seeming contradictions in order to establish the truth. While Barnes admits differences between the procedure in the *Ethics* and that in *Physics* 4, he regards those differences as comparatively trivial. Therefore he agrees that in a way it is *the* method in Aristotle, at least where results are achieved by arbitration between conflicting views (494–5). While Barnes rejects previous attempts to turn Aristotle into a card-carrying member of Common Sense Philosophy, he holds that the method’s intention is to make explicit beliefs that are latent in language but manifest in actions (501). Barnes disagrees with the Common Sense party by defending the view that *endoxa* do not just include common views but also uncommon ones, namely the views

³⁸ The second part of Owen’s article deals with the close connection between certain basic tenets in Aristotle’s *Physics* and some of the arguments in the second part of Plato’s *Parmenides*. The connections concern questions such as whether points can have a place or are parts of a continuum, and the possibility of change at a moment. Owen’s contention is right that Aristotle’s discussions of these problems address logical distinctions and are in that sense dialectical, with little or no reliance on empirical facts. But Aristotle does not treat these problems as *endoxa* that involve commonly accepted views.

³⁹ J. Barnes, ‘Aristotle and the Methods of Ethics’, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 34 (1980), 490–511.

of experts. That *endoxa* are not what just anyone would think is documented in Aristotle's refusal to consider all views about *eudaimonia* at *EE* 1. 3, 1214^b28–1215^a7. Instead, Aristotle is quite restrictive (505). What made the method attractive for Aristotle, according to Barnes, is that it can be used for different purposes in different disciplines. Thus Barnes's discussion, despite some critical reservations, in the last analysis greatly contributes to the inflation of *endoxa*. For though he acknowledges that there is a gap between the fact that all men have an aptitude to find the truth on the one hand, and the claim that *endoxa* are a deep well of truth on the other, he also holds that this gap is easily bridged because there are few propositions that cannot somehow be made to fit together if they are generously treated (509). At the same time this fact justifies Barnes's final, quite ambiguous, verdict on the method. (i) While it is not formally vacuous, it has little content. (ii) One of its positive aspects is that it did not keep Aristotle from discussing rather bizarre theories. (iii) Theorizing about that method did not much interfere with Aristotle's practice. These considerations lead Barnes to the quixotic conclusion that one of its positive aspects is that Aristotle did not put 'the method' to too much use.

Terence Irwin, by contrast,⁴⁰ has assigned to the endoxic method a fundamental role in establishing the first principles in Aristotle. While Irwin's position cannot be discussed in detail here, it should be mentioned that it presupposes a neat dichotomy between empirical and non-empirical science, with *endoxa* as the basis of all research that is not based on empirical observation. Thus, they are the starting-points of *epagōgē* leading to the first principles in non-empirical sciences. This challenges the traditional assumption that such principles are grasped by direct insight (*nous*). Instead, according to Irwin, the principles are the result of dialectical examination of *endoxa* that survive the test via 'the puzzles'.⁴¹ Therefore not only are all non-observational appearances *endoxa*, but philosophy's critical task concerning them is 'dialectic'. While Irwin's favourite translation of *endoxa* as 'common beliefs' suggests a kind of catholic approach, that impression turns out to be misleading: he restricts

⁴⁰ *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford, 1988), ch. 2.

⁴¹ 'Since the characteristic method of Aristotle's philosophical work is dialectical, doubts about dialectic imply doubts about his philosophical arguments' (ibid. 27). Dialectic turns out to be the ability to do practically everything that is not derived either from empirical evidence or from scientific deduction.

those beliefs to the reflections of educated persons on science that lead to the establishment of their first principles.⁴² 'Appearances' that lead to the formation of a theory are primarily those that appear convincing to a trained and experienced observer as the result of systematic enquiry (32), and that meet the demands of what Irwin calls 'strong dialectic'.

A proper evaluation of the dialectical method Irwin attributes to Aristotle would take us too far afield.⁴³ Suffice it to say that Irwin's overall dichotomy between the different kinds of principle is well taken; but when it comes to Aristotle's actual procedure in different fields it tells us next to nothing, because 'dialectic' would seem to cover critical reflections on quite different points of view,⁴⁴ their advantages and their drawbacks. But since these reflections vary from work to work and from problem to problem, there is at best a remote resemblance to what Aristotle himself calls dialectic. In that sense all our philosophical reflections and discussions might be called 'dialectic', without providing any information concerning the special treatment required to establish basic principles.

Nussbaum's interpretation of *endoxa* in terms of a Putnamean internal realism can be mentioned only in brief here. Its basic assumption is that Aristotle is talking about 'our most common beliefs and thoughts' that are about 'the world as it appears to, as it is experienced by, observers who are members of our kind'.⁴⁵ And

⁴² For a critical discussion of the impact of the endoxic method see R. Smith, 'Dialectic and Method in Aristotle', in R. Sims (ed.), *From Puzzles to Principles? Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic* (Lanham, Md., 1998), 39–55, esp. 43–44. Smith's overall concern is with the question of whether the solution of puzzles constitutes proof rather than persuasion. He therefore scrutinizes the nature of dialectic in general and that of dialectical proof in particular. As far as 'the method' is concerned, he pits himself specifically against Irwin's account (*Aristotle's First Principles*, 36–50) and points out why the art of dialectic as expounded in the *Topics* is not intended as a particular type of scientific investigation at all.

⁴³ For a detailed analysis and critique of Irwin's depiction of Aristotle's dialectical procedure in the *Nicomachean Ethics* see Salmieri, 'Aristotle's Non-"Dialectical" Methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*'. The counter-picture provided by T. Roche, 'On the Alleged Metaphysical Foundation of Aristotle's *Ethics*', *Ancient Philosophy*, 8 (1988), 49–62, esp. 57–60, presupposes a distinction between 'surface *endoxa*' and 'deep *endoxa*'; the problems with this 'all-endoxic approach' cannot be discussed here.

⁴⁴ One of the effects of Irwin's schematic procedure is his treatment of most occurrences of *phaívera* as cases of APPEARANCES in his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis, 1999)), as if they formed a homogeneous class.

⁴⁵ M. Nussbaum, 'Saving Aristotle's Appearances', in M. Schofield and M. Nuss-

its overall aim is to establish some general solidarity and ‘shared view’ among humankind. Nussbaum’s translation of 7. 1, 1145^b2–6, therefore suggests that the *endoxa* include Aristotle’s own point of view: ‘the truth of all the beliefs *we* hold [*ta endoxa*] . . .’.⁴⁶ The ‘saving’ promised in the title of her essay does not, then, concern internal problems with Aristotle’s treatment of endoxic views or their meaning, but addresses the lack of appreciation of ‘appearances’ as the basis of his philosophy in the secondary literature. What allegedly needs to be saved is a proper understanding of the connection between appearances and ordinary belief in Aristotle’s philosophy, as well as of the fact that he thereby radically opposes the tradition from Parmenides to Plato.

Nussbaum’s interpretation of *phainomena* and *endoxa* as ‘our common beliefs, usually as revealed in things we say’⁴⁷ has been subjected to criticism from many sides,⁴⁸ among them by Cooper,⁴⁹ and it is with his view that this short doxographical survey will be concluded, since Kraut’s all-inclusive view has been discussed earlier in this article. In his critique of Nussbaum Cooper points out that the *endoxa* in *NE* 7. 1 are far from representing the common view of all; instead, some of them are the views of specialists. More important, Aristotle does not regard it as his task to vindicate ‘the common views’. This emerges from the fact that the Socratic position is not rejected, despite the fact that it is in direct conflict with the sacrosanct common views. Instead, ‘the appearances’ are reworked in such a way that in a modified sense they are compatible with the central Socratic contention. In so far as Cooper holds to the position that for Aristotle the established views are at least in conformity with the most reputable ones, he attributes that fact

baum (eds.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1982), 267–93 at 274. A more extensive discussion of her position provides the methodological background of her later monograph, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁶ ‘Saving Aristotle’s Appearances’, 267–8.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 272.

⁴⁸ Cf. the critique by W. Wians, ‘Saving Aristotle from Nussbaum’s *Phainomena*’, in A. Preus and J. P. Anton (eds.), *Aristotle’s Ontology* (Albany, NY, 1992), 133–49, of Nussbaum’s more extensive defence of her views in chapter 8 of *The Fragility of Goodness*. This article contains a survey of the use of *phainomena* in Aristotelian science, and shows in what way Nussbaum’s paraphrases of Aristotle illegitimately bend his language to meet her own commitment to internal realism.

⁴⁹ J. M. Cooper, ‘Aristotle on the Authority of “Appearances”’, in Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, 1999), 281–91.

to the structure of language, to age-old experience, and to the Aristotelian conviction that human beings, as intelligent animals, are able to discover how things actually are.

In a 2009 article Cooper is even more reserved about the endoxic method than in his short discussion of Nussbaum.⁵⁰ In a way this is only to be expected, given that this essay aims at a careful interpretation of chapters 1 and 2 of that book and not an overall evaluation of the treatment of *endoxa* in Aristotle. In Cooper's painstaking analysis of Aristotle's procedure *one* particular feature emerges very clearly: the three stages of the investigation are hand-tailored to the problems at hand, i.e. the explanation of the nature and most important characteristics of incontinence or lack of control. The investigation has three stages: (i) things said; (ii) difficulties, both concerning conflicting views in the *legomena* and giving rise to further difficulties—the latter do so in the light of certain well-entrenched philosophical and ethical principles that are not among the appearances collected in the first stage; and (iii) discussing and working out solutions, not only to the puzzles but also to other questions not raised in or provoked by the puzzles. In his comments on this complex methodological procedure Cooper draws attention to the fact that Aristotle's use of the endoxic method is not all-encompassing and defies simple classification. As Cooper emphasizes, the famous Socratic position is not one of the 'appearances', because Aristotle limits them to 'things said' directly about self-control or lack of control.⁵¹ Therefore, though famous and reputable, the Socratic denial of *akrasia* is not on the list of *endoxa* about self-control. The same applies to other results in *NE* 7. 1–10.

Most important for our purposes, Cooper acknowledges that, apart from book 7, the puzzle-solving method is not characteristic of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with its 'smooth and puzzle-free exposition'.⁵² Instead, he finds the aporetic treatment of problems much more characteristic of the procedure in the *Eudemian Ethics*, and therefore assumes that book 7, with certain modifications,

⁵⁰ Cooper, 'Nicomachean Ethics VII. 1–2'. A quite restrictive and generally critical interpretation of the endoxic method as a way of establishing first principles had been defended earlier by C. C. W. Taylor, 'Aristotle's Epistemology', in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology* (Cambridge, 1990), 116–42, esp. 132–5.

⁵¹ 'Nicomachean Ethics VII. 1–2', 23–4.

⁵² *Ibid.* 27. Cooper regards the treatment of pleasure in chapter 12 as the only exception, but for the reasons given earlier (see above, n. 11), this assumption does not fit Aristotle's treatment of current views on pleasure.

must be part of the earlier version of Aristotle's ethics. This is also Cooper's explanation for the *one* feature that is often used to justify the claim of the ubiquity of the endoxic method, namely that Aristotle starts out on his investigation with the request: 'We must, as in the other cases [*ᾧσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων*], set down the phenomena.' According to Cooper (loc. cit.), Aristotle's remark should not be taken in an all-inclusive sense. Instead, it is the remnant of a reference to the aporetic treatment of the views under consideration in the original version of the *Eudemian Ethics*, a remnant that has no clear application in the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as it stands. Whether the characterization of the *Eudemian Ethics* as more aporetic is justified or not must be sidestepped here.⁵³ But Cooper's simple explanation at least does away with the assumption that 'the other cases' must be interpreted as 'all the other cases' and includes every philosophical question under the sun.⁵⁴

6. *Endoxa* and *akrasia*

If, as has been the contention of this article all along, 'the endoxic method' is quite a *rara avis* in Aristotle, there must be some explanation of why he not only introduces it at all, but also uses it in such an elaborate fashion in *NE* 7. What makes the issue under discussion here so special? At first sight the most plausible explanation would be that the use of *endoxa* and the corresponding *aporiai* provide the opportunity for a lengthy discussion of the Socratic opposition to *akrasia*, its justification and limitation. This opposition, after all, is a view held by one of the 'most distinguished of the wise', and the resonance of the discussion of *akrasia* to this day seems to justify this assumption. But a second look at the text suggests a quite different explanation, one that takes into consideration that Aristotle in 7. 1 is speaking from a wider perspective. It is a perspective that has implications for his conception of virtue and vice as a whole.

Up to this point the *Nicomachean Ethics* has treated virtue and

⁵³ For an emphasis on the value of the investigation of *aporiai* in the *Eudemian Ethics* see 1. 3, 121^a3–7.

⁵⁴ The phrase *ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων* is frequently used in a quite non-committal way elsewhere in Aristotle in the sense of 'for the rest' or 'in other such cases' (see *Post. An.* 1. 12, 77^a41; 1. 24, 85^a26; *Cat.* 5, 3^a6 *et passim*), in contradistinction to even vaguer alternatives, where the article is omitted (*ἐπ'* ἄλλων).

vice as exclusive alternatives. At the beginning of book 7 Aristotle makes a new start by introducing the possibility of three bad and three good states of character: besides vice proper there is *akrasia* and subhuman brutishness, and besides virtue proper there is continence and superhuman virtue (1, 1145^a15–22). Though Aristotle has little to say about superhuman virtue,⁵⁵ brutishness is a condition that he will discuss in some detail (chapter 5). But his real concern is with the dispositions of incontinence and softness, continence and endurance, dispositions that are somehow different from both virtue and vice, but that are not members of another genus (1145^a35–^b2). This widening of the conceptions of virtue and vice comes late in the day, after the virtual conclusion of the discussion of virtue and vice of character, their different kinds, and their relation to practical reason, *phronēsis*. This extension therefore calls for a special treatment that does not put the long-established dichotomy of virtue and vice in jeopardy, while at the same time justifying significant modifications of its claim to exclusivity.⁵⁶ Hence a survey of ‘reputable views’ concerning the conditions of continence and incontinence, endurance and softness, and their relation to the respective virtue and vice, as well as a scrutiny of the difficulties involved in those views, is a suitable way to introduce a clarification of what is tenable about them and what is not. That fact also explains why the *endoxa* listed are clearly not all compatible and therefore cannot all be true.

But the introduction of a different method of procedure is not motivated merely by the intention to make the modification of the dichotomy of virtue and vice appear as natural as possible. The fact that the *endoxa* on Aristotle’s list are not all compatible with each other suggests some further considerations, namely the importance of the differences among the views actually held about these phenomena. For, as far as we can tell, there were quite different positions on the nature of *enkrateia*, *karteria*, *akrasia*, *malakia*, etc. Plato, for instance, does not make any distinction between *akrateia* and *akolasia*, nor does he treat *enkrateia* and *sōphrosunē* as different dispositions. Whoever does not have his appetites under control is *akratēs* and whoever holds them in check is *enkratēs*: whether reason

⁵⁵ On this issue see Cooper, ‘Aristotle on the Authority of “Appearances”’, 18–19.

⁵⁶ The fact that *enkrateia* and *akrasia* are derivatives of virtue and vice has been mentioned repeatedly before (*NE* 1. 3, 1095^a9; 13, 1102^b14–18; 3. 2, 1111^b13–15; 5. 9, 1136^b1–9), but no explanation has as yet been given as to how they fit into the system of the ‘proper’ virtues and vices of character.

rules over the appetites or not is the only criterion that counts. As Plato has it in the *Republic* (4, 439 E–440 A), the crucial point in the case of Leontius is not that in principle he has the right universal convictions about the appropriate behaviour when passing the sight of execution but that his appetites prevail over his reason. Given the wide range of *sōphrosunē* in ordinary Greek in the classical age,⁵⁷ it is only to be expected that most people would have quite different views on the relationship between moderation and self-control, self-indulgence and lack of control, if they differentiated between them at all. That is why ‘some hold that the *phronimos* cannot be uncontrolled, while others say the opposite’, and the same diagnosis applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other points of disagreement between the *endoxa* on Aristotle’s list

As has been mentioned before, the ‘difficulties’ raised in *NE* 7. 2 do not systematically discuss the reasons for those disagreements, one by one. Instead, they focus largely on the question of the kind of ignorance that is at work in the case of the acratia personality. In addition, they raise some further problems that are not immediately connected with the *endoxa* or the *aporiai*, such as whether there is a bad kind of continence and a good kind of incontinence,⁵⁸ and whether two wrongs can make a right, as suggested by the sophistic puzzle.⁵⁹ Aristotle thereby draws attention to the possibility of further complications if the principles are not properly specified, i.e. that in addition to being rational they must also be good, while admitting at the same time that not all difficulties are really worth clearing up (7. 2, 1146^b6–8).

The reason for Aristotle’s insouciance concerning the disagreements within the list of *endoxa*, then, is not hard to find. He trusts that once it has become clear what types of disposition continence, incontinence, softness, and endurance are, no one will confuse them any longer with virtue unqualified or vice unqualified. Thus no one who has understood what *akrasia* is will regard it as the same as *akolasia* or claim that a temperate person will sometimes act acra-

⁵⁷ See H. North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, NY, 1966).

⁵⁸ Cf. 7. 2, 1146^a16–21: the case of stubbornness in holding onto wrong convictions, and Neoptolemus’ ‘acratia’ abandonment of Odysseus’ plot to trick Philoctetes in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*.

⁵⁹ Cf. 7. 2, 1146^a21: the sophistic argument maintains that ignorance of the correct universal in combination with incontinence will be virtue, because the acratia will then do the right thing.

tically (as presupposed by some, according to *endoxa* (iv)–(vi)). The endoxic method, as described in 7. 1–2, is, then, a good example of what Aristotle means by his claim about common consensus at *EE* 1. 5, 1216^b26–35: that it is best if all agree on what is said, but if not, they will do so after their mind has been redirected (*μεταβιβάζομενοι*). The fact that such a ‘redirection’ of the views is necessary for a proper understanding of the tripartition of dispositions in *NE* 7. 1 explains, then, why Aristotle invokes *endoxa* at this point: they are sufficiently well-known positions whose truth is neither obvious nor out of the question, but some of which stand in need of clarification or revision. That the treatment of the *aporiai* involved in those views also provides the opportunity to point out what is right and what is wrong in the Socratic denial of *akrasia* must have been a special incentive to discuss that question at an unusual length and depth. But it clearly forms only a part of Aristotle’s concern with *enkrateia* and *akrasia* as ‘para-virtues’ and ‘para-vices’.

Aristotle no doubt knew ahead of time that not all *endoxa* listed in 7. 1 would remain standing, and also which ones would and which ones would not. This is indicated right away by his injunction that self-control is less good than temperance, while belonging to the same genus, and that the same predicament applies to lack of control and indulgence (1145^a35–^b2). If he then states that the truth will emerge from a scrutiny of the *endoxa*, this is not meant as a route to self-enlightenment, but to that of his audience/readers. The prediction that ‘all . . . or most *endoxa* will be confirmed’ is a slight exaggeration, most likely for pedagogical reasons: an initial announcement that most *endoxa* will need correction, if not elimination, would be not much of an encouragement to study them with proper care. At the same time the fact that Aristotle does not expect all or even most of the *endoxa* to be true explains why he does not end the discussion (in chapter 10) with a neat summary that states which of them are left standing without modification and which are corrected, but leaves it to his readers to figure that out for themselves by a careful study of his discussion of the problems.⁶⁰

The explanation of why the endoxic method as deployed in *NE* 7. 1–2 is rarely used in Aristotle does not mean to suggest that its rarity is due to the fact that he does not encounter con-

⁶⁰ For a short summary of Aristotle’s treatment of the puzzles and the extent to which they are dealt with in the subsequent chapters see Cooper, ‘*Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1–2’, 37–9.

fusions concerning central conceptions elsewhere. Aristotle could have used such a method of clarification, and in fact may have employed it for himself wherever he encountered problems of comparable complexity. But, as a matter of fact, in his texts as far as we have them, most of the time he prefers to present his own well-worked-out points of view without a detour via a list of ‘reputable views’ and the problems involved in them. This should not be taken as a sign of arrogance. Had he included surveys of all well-known views, with the necessary corrections, at every corner, the *Nicomachean Ethics* would have become a work of enormous length.⁶¹ Not only that: it is highly dubious that such surveys would have added much to the clarity and inner consistency of Aristotle’s own position.

In the preliminary stages of the development of his own views Aristotle may well have inspected general assumptions and their confusions, and therefore regarded a dialectical treatment with the help of differing views and the problems entailed by them as a valuable heuristic device, as he asserts at *Top.* 1. 2, 101^b34–6. But if that has been his usual way of proceeding, there are few traces left of it. Most of the time Aristotle presents his thoughts in a finished form and discusses *legomena* and *aporiai*, if at all, as a confirmation of his own views rather than as a method of developing them. Thus, after the introduction of his own definition of the good human life, he suggests at *NE* 1. 8, 1098^b9–12: ‘We should examine it not only from the conclusions and the premisses of the argument, but also from what is said about it [*ἐκ τῶν λεγομένων περὶ αὐτῆς*].’ A little later he adds that his definition of the good as the best activity of the soul agrees with the ‘ancient doctrine that was held by the philosophers’ (116–18). The definition’s agreement with the ‘opinion of the many and people of old’, as well as with that of the ‘few and reputable’, is treated as a confirmation of his contention that virtuous activity contains pleasure and includes the need for external goods, on the ground that neither group is entirely mistaken but may even be right for the most part (122–9). But at this point the *endoxa* clearly serve only as confirmations of Aristotle’s own principles, not as the heuristic device for their discovery, and this is how Aristotle makes use of *legomena* on many occasions. So there are quite different uses of *endoxa* in Aristotle’s works, but

⁶¹ *Embaras de richesse* may explain why in his ethics, of all subjects, Aristotle omits doxography almost completely.

the application of *the* endoxic method in 7. 1–2 is in fact quite unique.⁶²

7. Conclusion: a word about ‘dialectic’

In recent years it has become fashionable to call Aristotle’s preliminary clarifications of basic conceptions and assumptions ‘dialectical’. Against this fashion it should be pointed out that there is nothing specifically Aristotelian in this practice. We all, at least inasmuch as we call ourselves philosophers, engage in reflections on the meaning of basic concepts, on the plausibility of our standpoint, and on possible objections. In addition, we teach our students that they should consider possible objections before committing themselves to a definitive point of view. But if that is to be called ‘dialectic’, then it is a ubiquitously applicable and therefore quite vacuous epithet. It reminds the older ones among us of the invocation of ‘dialectical materialism’ by Marxists as the universal explanation of any and every kind of development in history.

It is simply good human practice to start with what is ‘better known to us’ and to proceed to what is ‘better known as such’. But if this is so, there is nothing special in Aristotle’s procedure, except that he was the first to give it those names. The same applies to his use of ‘it seems’ (*phainetai*) and ‘it appears/it is thought’ (*dokei*). Given that many philosophical texts use phrases such as ‘it would seem that’ or ‘it is commonly assumed that’, or ‘it is plausible that’, there is nothing particularly Aristotelian in that use. Whether a philosopher introduces his own thoughts by such cautionary phrases or simply presents them as a given is often a matter of style and convention. Thus, to assume that every use of *phainetai* or *dokei* is an indication of an appearance or an *endoxon* makes Aristotle look like a very odd philosopher indeed, because it suggests that he is speaking about appearances and accepted views all the time.⁶³ But for the most part these phrases are only a manner of speaking, just like his use of the untranslatable *isōs* that is not meant to throw doubt

⁶² For a short, succinct, and richly annotated review of the entire issue that agrees in part with some critical points raised in this article but refers to a host of literature not mentioned here see J. Mansfeld, ‘*Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b2–6’, in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle: Metaphysics and Practical Philosophy. Studies in Honour of Enrico Berti* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011), 165–76.

⁶³ On this issue cf. the comments on Irwin’s interpretation on p. 205 and in n. 44.

on the respective point of view but is often no more than a sign of politeness and self-restraint. Hence we moderns would be well advised to use interpretative self-restraint, and to speak of ‘*the* endoxic method’ and ‘dialectic procedure’ only where Aristotle’s texts justify such a characterization.⁶⁴ Moreover, it is highly recommendable to preserve Aristotle’s own vocabulary and to discriminate carefully between *endoxa*, *legomena*, and *phainomena* where he does so himself, rather than treating them as different names for one and the same thing. For, as I have argued as the main point of this essay, with each of these different terms he may want to refer to a special form of procedure, a fact that loses its significance if they are used in an inflationary and indiscriminate way. Habits, once they have become endemic, are hard to fight. The habitual attitude of treating Aristotle as the father of endoxic wisdom has itself become endoxic: it is accepted either by all, or by most, or by the wise, and of the latter by all, or by most, or by the most noteworthy and reputable among contemporary Aristotelians. It is, nevertheless, a habit that should be indulged only with caution because *endoxa*, as has emerged in this article, are not necessarily true but to be handled with care and discretion.

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⁶⁴ In the case of dialectic the two specifications of its philosophical use recommended at *Top.* 2, 101^a34–^b3, are crucial. (1) By arguing both *pro* and *contra* a given view, the truth and falsity will in each case become easier to see. (2) The first principles, being primitive, cannot be deduced; investigation on the basis of *endoxa* provides access to the first principles of all disciplines. Appeal to dialectic should be restricted to these two procedures, and it should be kept in mind that Aristotle neither gives a guarantee of success nor claims that *only* dialectic provides access to the first principles.

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