

# A Note on Endoxa in Aristotle' Dialectic

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In this note, I will modify a little my own intention of examining several interpretations on the relationship between dialectic and endoxa in the philosophy of Aristotle, in order to make clear what Aristotle is trying to say, above all, concerning "endoxa" and "dialectic".

## I. A general description on "dialectic" in *Topica*

The *Topics* claims to present us with a dialectical method, i.e. "διαλεκτική(dialectic)", and the opening passage is as follows,

Ἡ μὲν πρόθεσις τῆς πραγματείας μέθοδον εὐρεῖν ἀφ' ἧς δυνασόμεθα συλλογίζεσθαι περὶ παντὸς τοῦ προτεθέντος προβλήματος ἐξ ἐνδόξων, καὶ αὐτοὶ λόγον ὑπέχοντες μηθὲν ἐροῦμεν ὑπεναντίον.

OUR treatise proposes to find a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted about every problem propounded to us, and also shall ourselves, when standing up to an argument, avoid saying anything that will obstruct us. (translated by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge)

The purpose of the present treatise is to discover a method by which we shall be able to reason from generally accepted opinions about any problem set before us and shall ourselves, when sustaining an argument, avoid

saying anything self-contradictory. (translated by E. S. Forster)

The goal of this study is to find a method with which we shall be able to construct deductions from acceptable premisses concerning any problem that is proposed -- when submitting to argument ourselves -- will not say anything inconsistent. (translated by R. Smith)

(Top. A, 1, 100a18-21)

This seems to be one of the most important passages in *Corpus* for us to understand what Aristotle thought "dialectic" to be. In fact, scholars have divergent views on just how "dialectic" is to be defined, but some traits of "dialectic" can be extracted, at least, from this passage. Thus, "dialectic" is 1)a sort of method, 2)deduces from "endoxa", and 3)can argue about any problem that is proposed, and so forth. The second (2) is repeated, as follows,

διαλεκτικὸς δὲ συλλογισμὸς ὁ ἐξ ἐνδόξων συλλογιζόμενος.

Reasoning, on the other hand, is 'dialectical', if it reasons from opinions that are generally accepted. (translated by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge)

Reasoning is dialectical which reasons from generally accepted opinions. (translated by E. S. Forster)

A dialectical deduction, on the other hand, is one which deduces from what is acceptable. (translated by R. Smith)

(Top. A, 1, 100a29-30)

We can find two traits of "dialectic" in this passage. "Dialectic" is a kind of deduction(or reasoning, syllogism) on the one hand, and it deduces(or reasons) from endoxa on the other.

## II. "Endoxa" and its validity

In *Topics*, Aristotle explains what is "endoxa" in this context. "Endoxa" is not a mere "doxa", which contains some false belief, but is accepted generally by the majority or the specialists in question.

ἔνδοξα δὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις.

On the other hand, those opinions are 'generally accepted' which are accepted by every one or by the majority or by the philosophers-i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them. (translated by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge)

Generally accepted opinions, on the other hand, are those which commend themselves to all or to the majority or to the wise -- that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them. (translated by E. S. Forster)

Those are acceptable, on the other hand, which seem so to everyone, or to most people, or to the wise -- to all of them, or to most, or to the most famous and esteemed. (translated by R. Smith)

(Top. A, 1, 100b21-23)

"Endoxa" mentioned above, is not necessarily true, but seems to have some true portion of the whole. In ethical writings of Aristotle, we find that he gives a positive account of "endoxa", of which the probability of their truth there is.

δει δ', ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ πρῶτον διαπορήσαντας οὕτω δεικνύναι μάλιστα μὲν πάντα τὰ ἔνδοξα περὶ ταῦτα τὰ πάθη, εἰ δὲ μή, τὰ πλείστα καὶ κυριώτατα· ἐὰν γὰρ λύηται τε τὰ δυσχερῆ καὶ καταλείπηται τὰ ἔνδοξα, δεδειγμένον ἂν εἴη ἱκανῶς.

We must, as in all other cases, set the observed facts before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the common opinions about these affections of the mind, or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both refute the objections and leave the common opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.

(*EN*, VII, 1145b2-7, translated by W. D. Ross)

Aristotle refers to the common opinions about ethical problems accepted by people, and suggests that they should be true or, at least, there should be some probability of their truth.

τούτων δὲ τὰ μὲν πολλοὶ καὶ παλαιοὶ λέγουσιν, τὰ δὲ ὀλίγοι καὶ ἔνδοξοι ἄνδρες· οὐδετέρους δὲ τούτων εὐλογον διαμαρτάνειν τοῖς ὅλοις, ἀλλ' ἔν γέ τι ἢ καὶ τὰ πλείστα κατορθοῦν.

Now some of these views have been held by many men and men of old, others by a few eminent persons; and it is not probable that either of

these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects.

(*EN*, I, 1098b27–29, translated by W. D. Ross)

The validity of "endoxa" should be examined and verified by means of "dialectic", i.e. a kind of method, which is mostly supposed to be "syllogismos(or deduction)" but occasionally "epagoge(or induction)"(cf., *Top. A*, 12).

Some problems\* remain to be solved, 1)what is difference between "endoxa" in dialectic and in rhetoric(or enthymeme), and 2)how can we find the relationship between "endoxa" in dialectic and propositions of premises of (not dialectical but)"demonstrative"syllogism.

\* In addition to these problems, or, to consider from another point of view, we have now several interpretations on the relationship between dialectic and endoxa in the philosophy of Aristotle. According to F.E.Peters(Peters, 52-53), "what the historical Socrates did in conversation and Plato refined into the literary form of dialogue, Aristotle analyzed into method: "A syllogism is demonstrative[apodeixis] when it proceeds from premisses that are true and primary. . . ; it is dialectical when it reasons from endoxa. . . Endoxa are propositions that seem true to all or to the majority or to the wise"(*Top.I*, 100a-b). The definition of endoxa in the above cited text suggests that opinions have both a quantitative and qualitative basis. The first seems Socratic, i.e., canvassing what may be termed the "common-sense" view, and this approach is followed at various points in the ethical treatises(cf. *EN VII*, 1145b), as well as at the very opening of the *Metaphysics*(*Metaph. I*, 982a). In this latter text Aristotle is seeking the nature of sophia and the procedure he adopts is to start from commonly held views of what a wise man is. And he can take this tack because of a presumption that is left unspoken in Plato: the unitive and progressive nature of philosophy where the truth is not the preserve of any on man but the result of a continuous and cumulative investigation(*Metaph.*, 993a-b). But the definition of endoxa in the *Topics* opens the possibility of an appeal to qualitative opinion, to the "professional" rather than the "common-sense" views, to "what

seems true to the sophoi." Thus begins the history of philosophy, cast not in the role of an independent historical discipline, but as part of the method of philosophy, the major premiss, so to speak, in a dialectical syllogism. In Aristotle considerations of the opinions of his philosophical predecessors are always woven into his own investigations. "

But it is not apparent that the validity of this or the following several interpretations can be confirmed on the basis of texts or the philological procedure. Then, if we examine the following interpretations[cf. Studies] respectively, we will have to see far into the relationship between dialectic and endoxa in Aristotle.

### Studies

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