

On the Alleged Epitome of Dialectic: *Nicomachean Ethics* vii 1.1145b2-7

Nevim Borçin

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Whether Aristotle employs a scientific or a dialectical method of inquiry in general and in ethics especially is an ongoing debate. Put briefly, dialectical methodology involves dialectical syllogisms that reason from ἔνδοξα, i.e., reputable opinions, whereas scientific inquiries rest on syllogisms that reason from facts (*Top.* 100a25-30).¹ I believe that Aristotle practices a similar scientific method in his practical and theoretical philosophy alike. Nevertheless, one of the major obstacles to such a *scientific* interpretation has been a methodological statement that precedes the discussion on lack of self-control (ἀκρασία), self-control (ἐγκράτεια) and some related states in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) vii 1.1145b2-7. This passage has been the focal point of interest for those who engage in the debate. The received interpretation is that it is the clearest announcement, endorsement, and application of dialectical method. I argue that the received construal of *EN* 1145b2-7 is mistaken and a correct interpretation of that passage is in fact congruous with the scientific methodology. I show that the presupposition that this statement epitomizes dialectical method is in effect unwarranted. Although Aristotle employs some dialectical strategies in this procedure, they only play a restricted role to facilitate the investigation and make the discovery of truth easier.

Scholarship today offers a wide variety of interpretations of Aristotle's methodology. While the great majority of scholars believe that Aristotle practiced dialectical method in his ethics, Berti 1996, Nussbaum 1982, and Kraut 2006 think that Aristotle employs dialectic in all areas of inquiry.² Recently some, such as Frede 2012, have explicitly disputed this universal claim, along with Salmieri 2009, Natali 2007, 2010, and 2015, and Karbowski 2015 and 2019 that have attacked the dialectical interpretation of Aristotle's ethics. Zingano 2007 and Cooper 2009 think that Aristotle employed dialectic in his early career whereas in his mature works, such as the *EN*, he abandoned it and opted for a less aporetic and puzzle free scientific methodology.

The passage in *EN* vii 1 reads:

We must, as in all other cases, [1] set the phenomena (τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα) before us and, [2] after first discussing the difficulties, [3] go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the reputable opinions (ἔνδοξα) about these affections or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions undisturbed, we shall

¹ In section 4 we will see that this crude description will have to be qualified in some ways, e.g., Aristotle allows some good dialectical arguments to start from ἄδοξα which are the opposite of ἔνδοξα.

² Irwin 1978, 1981, 1988, Roche 1988, and Lawrence 2006 restrict it to ethics. Burnet 1900, xxxi-xlvi thought *EN* is 'dialectical throughout'. Owen 1961 claims that ethics and physics *qua* a philosophical discipline are dialectical. Broadie 2002, 385 takes the *EN* vii 1 method as Aristotle's 'characteristic method' that is described 'once' at 1145b2-7.

have proved the case sufficiently. (1145b2-7, Barnes ed. trans., sometimes modified)

According to the received interpretation, Aristotle tells his audience that the ensuing enquiry will be in three stages.³ He will first set down the *phainomena*, i.e., appearances. Second, he will raise puzzles or difficulties based on the *phainomena* initially set down. Finally, he will show the truth of as many *endoxa*, reputable opinions, as possible.⁴ It is generally agreed that these four claims hold true for *EN* vii:

(1) *Tithenai ta phainomena* means ‘to set down the appearances’, and those appearances are the *endoxa* listed at the outset.

(2) The inquiry involves three successive stages, namely, setting down the appearances, raising difficulties, and resolving those difficulties.

(3) The goal of the inquiry is to salvage all, or most, or the most authoritative *endoxa* by getting rid of conflicting views and modifying others.

(4) The method of *EN* vii 1, which is also called the ‘method of *endoxa*’ is the paradigm of the dialectical method.⁵

I think this account misconstrues what Aristotle says in this passage. By holding to the interpretation (1-4) listed above, we can neither make sense of what Aristotle actually practices in the following inquiry, nor can we reconcile such a rigid method with what Aristotle does in the rest of the *EN* and other treatises. I try to rehabilitate the method of *EN* vii 1 by providing a clearer and improved interpretation of it, which agrees with the scientific methodology. I am broadly sympathetic to those scholars who think that Aristotle’s methodology in general and of ethics in particular is scientifically oriented. Nevertheless, they have failed to evade the prevailing dialectical reading of *EN* vii 1. Absent a satisfactory scientific account, *EN* vii 1 must be explained away. I hope by reconsidering this passage to show it accords with Aristotle’s scientific approach both within and outside ethics.

In this methodological preface, Aristotle is in fact offering a more widely applicable account of what he does in ethics and in the other treatises. He announces that he will carry out an inquiry on *akrasia* and other states based on *phainomena*, which might involve some *endoxa*, observations, and other presuppositions only insofar as they are facts. And the goal of the inquiry is to reach definitions and principles— a procedure that is consistent with the scientific methodology of the *Posterior Analytics* (*APo*). As outlined in *APo* ii, the scientific method of inquiry is based on arguments whose premises or starting points are considered facts (τὸ ὄντι) that are amassed through reliable truth gathering processes and contain a strong

³ Barnes 1980, Nussbaum 1982 and 1986, Bolton 1991, Zingano 2007, Natali 2010, Frede 2012, Scott 2015, and Karbowski 2015, 2019 offer generally the same account of the *EN* vii 1 method, their different nuances need not concern us here.

⁴ I will use *phainomena* and appearances and *endoxa* and reputable opinions interchangeably.

⁵ The method practiced in *EN* vii has widely been called ‘the method of *endoxa*’ (Barnes 1980, 494). Instead, I will use the phrase *the method of EN vii 1* and its renderings to avoid inflation of names of methods and unnecessary connotations.

presumption of truth.⁶ The goal of such an inquiry is to reach explanatory definitions that yield *epistêmê*, i.e., scientific knowledge. I think Aristotle employs dialectical method in a limited role which by itself is not sufficient for the discovery and justification of principles in philosophical inquiries. According to the *Topics* the art of dialectic equips us with a critical ability to reason on various sides of an issue and thus it can make the detection of the truth easier. However, I do not think dialectical method is necessary or sufficient for discovering the truth. In *EN* vii dialectic is used in such a restricted facilitating role in the service of the philosopher to contribute to the search for the scientific account of the states under scrutiny.

My alternative interpretation of *EN* vii 1 similarly boils down to four claims to be established in the course of this paper:

(1') *Tithenai ta phainomena* means to set down the appearances in a committed way with an assertoric force and those appearances are not coextensive with the *endoxa* listed at the outset.

(2') The inquiry involves two successive stages, namely, raising and resolving difficulties. The appearances are used to guide and constrain the inquiry throughout.

(3') While the preservation of some of the most authoritative *endoxa* might be a necessary requirement, the goal is to reach an account in the form of definitions.

(4') Although *EN* vii employs some dialectical strategies, they merely play a restricted role to make the investigation of the difficult subject easier.

This account of *EN* vii 1 is deflationary and flexible in the sense that contrary to the common reception this procedure merely consists of two essential stages, and the endoxic claims that fuel the puzzles do not necessarily occur in a discrete stage.⁷ In order to develop this interpretation, I will appeal to passages and discussions both inside and outside the *EN*. Although I believe that the method of *EN* vii 1 has wider application in Aristotle's practical and theoretical works, I engage more with practical texts for two reasons. First, the controversial passage occurs in the *EN*, and thus it makes sense to relate it to ethical works in the first place. Second, as mentioned above, while there are some who claim that dialectical method is employed pervasively in both theoretical and practical works, the majority of scholars take it to be the method of ethics. Hence, although this work provides additional support from theoretical works, I take up the more challenging task by focusing attention on

⁶ In *EN* 1098b3-4 Aristotle lists perception, induction, and habituation as examples of some of the sources from which facts originate. For perception of particulars see *APo* 81b6, 87b29-38, *Meta.* 981b10-13; Cf. *De Caelo* 306a16-7; *GA* 760b27-33. For induction from particulars to universals see *Meta.* 981a10-12, cf. *APo* 81b5-6, 81b8-9.

⁷ Recently Davia 2017 provided another deflationary account of *EN* vii 1 that bears some *prima facie* resemblances to my account. Since he has a completely different interpretation of the terms *phainomena* and *endoxa*, his account diverges from mine. He takes up Frede 2012's suggestion that *kai* at 1145b3 can be read in an explicative sense and claims that by *tithentas ta phainomena* Aristotle means to put forth accounts of the subject under consideration (390). He thinks *endoxa* are only those views that are preserved after the difficulties are resolved instead of the ones listed at the outset. See note 12.

ethics. A treatment of the ramifications of this proposal in Aristotle's other works must wait for a future occasion.

In what follows I will argue for my claims (1'), (2'), (3') in sections from 1-3 to provide a new and more adequate interpretation of *EN* vii 1 which challenges the received dialectical construal. In section 4 I will provide a brief overview of Aristotle's account of dialectic as set out in the *Topics* and discuss the limited role dialectic plays in *EN* vii 1 procedure as described in claim (4').

I. *Tithenai ta phainomena*

The concept of *phainomena* that occurs in the methodological preface preceding the discussion of *akrasia* does not narrowly denote *endoxa* but denotes some *endoxa*, observations, or other presuppositions insofar as they are facts. I claim that when certain *endoxa* are treated as *phainomena*, it is by courtesy of their contents that involve a presumption of truth and not merely because they happen to be believed. In other words, the claim of my paper is about the intensions of the terms *phainomena* and *endoxa*. I argue, contrary to the received interpretation, these two terms do not have the same intension. That is why I acknowledge that some propositions that fall under the extension of *endoxa* can also fall under the extension of *phainomena*. Second, I suggest a different use of the verb τίθημι (1145b3: τιθέντας) which fits better with those *phainomena*. By *tithentas* what is meant is to set down appearances with commitment or an assertoric force. Thus construed, I will show that the task of *tithentas ta phainomena* does not correspond to making a list of *endoxa* at the outset since the *endoxa* are themselves in need of verification. Instead, the phrase refers to setting down the facts (i.e. justified truths) that might involve *endoxa* and observations in a criterial sense to guide and constrain the inquiry.

The phrase used by Aristotle as *tithentas ta phainomena* with a slight modification became the title of Owen 1961. Owen translated the phrase 'set down the *phainomena*', with a construal that influenced the commentators and the translators who followed him. For example, Barnes ed. 1984 has 'set the *phainomena* before us', Kraut 2006, 77 'set out what seems to be the case', and Rowe 2002 'set out what appears to be true about our subjects'.⁸ All these authors concur with Owen in associating the *phainomena* to be set down with the list of *legomena* and *endoxa* at the beginning of the inquiry.⁹ Owen 1961, 85 disputes Ross' translation of the term *phainomena* into 'observed facts' on the grounds that what Aristotle subsequently sets down are *endoxa*, and not observed facts. Owen thinks that the opinions in the list are *endoxa* because Aristotle concludes the survey with the words 'these are the things that are said [λεγόμενα]'. Further, Owen thinks, the *phainomena* cannot refer to the facts because Aristotle also says that Socrates' view of *akrasia* plainly conflicts with the *phainomena*. Since Owen believes that Aristotle's conclusion about *akrasia* eventually coincides with what Socrates maintained, 'Socrates' claim conflicts not with the facts but with what would commonly be said on the subject' (86). Thus, Owen thinks what is

⁸ This passage occurring a common book of the two *Ethics*, translators of the *Eudemian Ethics* also follow suit, see Inwood and Woolf trans. 2012 and Simpson 2017.

⁹ Although in principle I do not identify all *legomena* with *endoxa*, I take the *legomena* of *EN* vii to be *endoxa*. Henceforth I will use *endoxa* alone in the context of *EN* vii for convenience and to avoid repetition.

commonly said on the subject, namely, the *endoxa* listed at the outset constitute the *phainomena* of Aristotle's argument.¹⁰

However, because Aristotle moves on to rehearse *ta legomena* after the methodological statement, we might be tempted to make two mistakes. The first is to infer that the term *phainomena* refers to the *legomena* and *endoxa*. The second is to take the meaning of the 'set down the *phainomena*' as in the received interpretation to refer to enumerating the *legomena* and *endoxa*. These two mistaken temptations should be avoided. This reading is defended not merely by Owen and his followers, but the critics of dialectical method have also followed suit. For instance, Salmieri 2009, Frede 2012, and Karbowski 2013, 2015, and 2019 have identified the *phainomena* in vii 1 with the *endoxa* listed at the outset. They believe that *tithenai ta phainomena* exclusively refers to the initial procedure where Aristotle enumerates *endoxa* on the subject.

In chapter two, however, when he starts out raising difficulties, Aristotle mentions that Socrates is completely against the existence of *akrasia*, i.e., doing what one knows to be wrong. As Owen observed, Aristotle points out that Socrates' view contradicts the *phainomena* (1145b27). Nevertheless, among the *endoxa* listed at the outset, there is at least one view that closely resembles Socrates' view: 'The man of practical wisdom, they sometimes say, cannot be incontinent' (1145b17-18). Since this saying is consistent with Socrates' view, we cannot conclude, as Owen does, that the *phainomena* with which Socrates' view conflicts simply refer to the *endoxa* or need to be coextensive with the *endoxa* initially enumerated. Moreover, Aristotle arguably treats Socrates' well-known view itself as an *endoxon*. If Socrates' view conflicts with *phainomena*, it is highly unlikely that the *phainomena* in question coincide with the entire initial list of *endoxa*.¹¹

The parallel discussion on *akrasia* in *Magna Moralia* (*MM*) ii supports this conclusion in a remarkable way. The author of *MM* ii does not provide a list of *endoxa* before he raises any difficulties concerning the subject in question. As he invokes Socrates' view that rejects *akrasia*, he introduces it as one of the arguments that runs counter to *phainomena* (1200b20-24). He finds Socrates' view wrong and absurd, as it rejects 'what credibly occurs' (1200b31: τὸ πιθανῶς γινόμενον). Since we do not have a list of *endoxa* at the beginning of this investigation, the *phainomena* with which Socrates' view disagrees cannot be simply a collection of *endoxa* but more plausibly the reliable facts about *akrasia*. Sure enough, as facts they might at the same time be contents of beliefs held by some people. Yet, this does not contest their status as facts about 'what credibly occurs'.

¹⁰ Nussbaum 1982, 267-268 endorses Owen's criticism of Ross with the same putative evidence. She urges that *phainomena* need to be translated as appearances or 'what we believe' or 'what we say', thus assimilating all *phainomena* to *endoxa*. The internal realist position that grounds her dialectical interpretation has rightly been criticized from various directions. See Wians 1971 and Cooper 1999 who criticize Nussbaum on that score.

¹¹ The second point has also been made in Cooper 1999, 287. Frede 2012 attempts to reconsider the reference of *tithenai ta phainomena* but I believe her suggestion remains far-fetched. She suggests that the *phainomena* to be 'set down' need not be confined to the presuppositions but may also refer to the confirmed results of an investigation (188). However, instead of taking up this suggestion and drawing its implications, she follows the received interpretation. Inspired by Frede's suggestion, Davia 2017 developed an ingenious, but I believe, mistaken account.

In case some might disapprove of consulting *MM* due to the controversy concerning its authenticity, let me appeal to some evidence from the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*). At *EE* vii, when Aristotle sets out to investigate friendship, he initiates the discussion with some views by prominent thinkers such as Empedocles ('like is dear to like') and Heraclitus ('the opposite is dear to opposite'). Aristotle dismisses these two views (*doxai*) right away on the grounds that they are overly general and bring in extrinsic considerations to the inquiry (1235a29-30). By this he means they bring in notions from a general physics or first philosophy rather than sticking to pertinent considerations for practical science. Instead, he suggests that 'there are others (*allai*), which are obviously more relevant and germane to the appearances (*phainomenôn*)' (1235a30-31, my emphasis). Thereupon, he proceeds by presenting the views of those who think that bad people cannot be friends, but only the good and so on. Now, the term 'others' (*allai*) obviously is meant to refer to the 'other views' because they are presented as alternatives to the previous *doxai* that are far removed from the ethical inquiry. That he subsequently moves on to present other views also confirms this. So, if there are other *doxai* that are nearer or more appropriate to the *phainomena*,¹² then the term *phainomena* obviously does not pick out those dubiously relevant *doxai* but evidently refers to the ethically relevant observations concerning friendship with which 'other views' are more congruous.¹³

Additionally, in some methodological remarks in the *EE* Aristotle advises his audience to confirm arguments with the *phainomena* (1217a10) or to seek conviction 'using the *phainomena* as witnesses (*marturiois*) and examples (*paradeigmasi*)' (1216b27-8).¹⁴ As the discussions following these remarks reveal, Aristotle often appeals to a range of appearances that include universally held beliefs as well as other *endoxa* (1219a40); facts about crafts that are familiar to Aristotle and his audience from ordinary life experiences (1219a2-5); observations about people's ethical practices or reactions with regard to certain character traits (1228a16-18) and so on. As these cases also attest, the *phainomena* deployed in the *EE* similarly refers to factual claims and these need not be coextensive with *endoxa*.¹⁵

¹² Although Aristotle is not against logical (*logikos*) arguments entirely, he often criticizes some predecessors for relying much on general arguments without 'doing justice' (See *EE* 1236a25, *Meta.* 1073b36f and b38f) to the facts pertaining to the subject in question (See *GC* 325a19-25, 316a5-10, *De Caelo* 306a3-7, 306a7-17, *Resp.* 470b5-12). General discussions which are more appropriate to the dialectical approach is something he urges to avoid and instead advises that one should focus on experience and get familiar with the facts to take up questions in a scientific and philosophical way. A true education should avoid over-emphasizing such general argumentation but rather direct attention to the familiarity with the reality and the facts in order to allow students to distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant and what is true from false (See *EE* 1216b40-1217a10, Cf. *EN* 1181a12-b12). See Kelsey 2015 which instructively analyses some of those passages.

¹³ I believe *EE* vii on friendship bears close resemblances with *EN* vii in terms of the method employed. By contrast, Zingano 2007 uses it in defence of his view that Aristotle used dialectical method in his earlier works.

¹⁴ Recently in his translation and commentary on the *EE*, Simpson 2013, 243 has misguidedly interpreted the term *phainomena* that appears in those passages as 'the prevalent opinions that, in ethics, are the relevant phenomena'. However, the only *endoxa* that are treated as *phainomena* in these specific roles as "witnesses" and "examples" in *EE* are merely the universally accepted beliefs which involve a strong presumption of truth. Universal agreement is a sign of truth for Aristotle (*EN* 1172b36-1173a1). This is also emphasized in Karbowski 2019, 117-119.

¹⁵ However, Bostock 2000, Zingano 2007, Cooper 2009 and Devereux 2015 overlook this evidence and have directed their attention to the *EE* to explain away *EN* vii. They have argued that because *EN* vii occurs in one of

Notice that in a parallel passage at *EN* i 8 where Aristotle reiterates the same point about deploying *phainomena* to corroborate arguments, he uses the term *huparchonta* interchangeably with *phainomena*.¹⁶ Having reached a definition of happiness as a result of the function argument, he notes that he must consider this account in light of ‘what is commonly said (*legomenon*) about it, for with a true view all the facts (*ta huparchonta*) harmonize’ (1098b9-11; cf. *EE* 1221a25). When he shows that his account agrees with some reputable opinions by many and the wise, his description of those opinions as ‘the facts (*ta huparchonta*)’ is revealing. He undeniably treats those opinions as facts.¹⁷ Hence, Aristotle appeals to those views not just because they are *endoxa*, but because he considers them factual claims the truth of which he takes for granted. This consideration is reinforced by a well-known passage in the *Prior Analytics* (*APr*) i 30 where Aristotle explicitly says that experience provides the principles of any subject. He uses the term *huparchonta* interchangeably with *phainomena* and clearly enunciates that in any craft or science, the facts should be grasped before setting out the demonstration (46a17-27). This all-applicable methodological remark concerning the import of the facts on the inquiry clearly extends to ethics, too (cf. *APr* 43a21-22, 46a3-4, 53a2-3).¹⁸

Hence, it is evident that *endoxa* and *phainomena* have different statuses and Aristotle does not treat all the *endoxa* concerning a subject matter as the relevant *phainomena* to be used. When Aristotle employs some *endoxa* among the *phainomena* of an investigation, he treats them under the description of facts that contain a strong presumption of truth. He seems to be committed to the view that the *phainomena* correspond to the facts, and as facts they might involve *endoxa* as well as other observations and presuppositions which are the most likely

the common books (*EN* vii=*EE* vi), it is a vestige of Aristotle’s early period where he practiced dialectic, and that otherwise the *EN* is nearly free of dialectical method.

¹⁶ See Salmieri 2009, Frede 2012, and Karbowski 2015 who stress this point. They argue for a close link between *phainomena*, starting points (*archai*) and ‘what is familiar or more knowable to us’ (*ta gnôrima*) as those premises or claims that initiate and guide the inquiry. They claim that these starting points are to be facts that contain a strong presumption of truth to get the inquiry off the ground towards first principles and causes—a point consonant with the starting points of scientific inquiry and my argument.

¹⁷ In the *EN* Aristotle declares at least in two places that ethical starting points (*ἀρχαί*) are facts (*τὸ ὄν*): 1095b6 and 1098b2. I take them to be starting points of inquiry rather than starting points of knowledge, that is, first principles. Although ethical inquiry is distinctive in some ways, it still follows the program of *APo* ii in the sense that one starts with the unexplained facts of the domain and seek causal definitions that explain them.

¹⁸ Salmieri 2009, 321ff. emphasizes Aristotle’s employment of ‘observations’ and ‘evaluations’ about people, actions and states etc. as starting points of inquiries in *EN*. However, Salmieri seems to downplay the role certain *endoxa* play as *phainomena* in inquiries, perhaps as an extreme reaction to Kraut 2006, 79 that collapses all premises in Aristotle’s arguments into *endoxa*. I concur with the assessment of *endoxa* by Karbowski 2015, 123, which rightly treats some *endoxa* that contain a presumption of truth as facts that could function as *phainomena*. Cf. Barnes 2011, 166-167.

true starting points.¹⁹ In this sense, the core of the *phainomena* have a criterial function.²⁰ Inasmuch as they are facts they serve as the criteria or standards that a good account and the *endoxa* in circulation will be tested against. In this sense, they guide and constrain the inquiry to reach a satisfactory account.

Armed with an adequate conception of *phainomena* that fits Aristotle's use more accurately,²¹ we should return to the methodological passage at *EN* vii 1. The next thing to do will be to provide a better interpretation of *tithenai ta phainomena*. Let us recall the context. Once Aristotle makes the methodological remark, he proceeds right away to list a set of *endoxa* concerning *akrasia* and other states. After enumerating those claims, he starts his aporetic discussion to raise difficulties and subject those views to testing. *Tithenai ta phainomena* is commonly construed as 'setting down the appearances' in the sense of enumerating the *endoxa* prior to the aporetic discussion. However, as evidenced by the foregoing reflection, this interpretation is quite dubious.

I grant that a plausible translation of *tithenai ta phainomena* is 'to set down the appearances'. However, I think there can be two different ways in which one can use the verb *tithêmi*. (1) First, by *tithêmi* one can mean to set down certain claims with commitment, that is, with an assertoric force. In this sense, those claims can have a criterial role because of the conviction in their truth. (2) Second, by *tithêmi* one can mean to set down certain claims non-committally because the claims themselves will need verification. Regrettably, scholars have gone astray in taking *tithêmi* in the (2) non-committal sense and claiming that the *phainomena* to be set down are the *endoxa* that are claims that need testing and verification themselves. However, we should not give in to the temptation of associating *tithenai ta phainomena* with the survey of those endoxic claims at the outset just because the methodological statement is followed right away by a list of *endoxa*. Aristotle is indeed committed to the *phainomena* he employs, and he uses them in a criterial sense to guide and constrain the inquiry. In other words, the *phainomena* that will be set down should be already settled items that are ready at hand to be drawn in bit by bit as we go through the discussion.

¹⁹ Even though some observations about ordinary life experiences are likely to be believed by most people and thus happen to be *endoxa*, Aristotle is not interested in them because they are *endoxa* but because they are truths that we are familiar with from ordinary experience. Thus, considered one might wonder whether the methodological debate is merely concerned about whether *endoxa* or facts get us going or whether the debate is merely terminological. It might be true that much of what argue here can be expressed in a different terminology in which case the next level of the discussion would be very much about the terminological shift. But I don't have the space to take up such a task. That said, it must be first noted that the term 'the fact' (τὸ ὄν) is not present in the *Topics*, the major treatise on dialectic. It is only used in philosophical works (*APo* 78a36-7, 78b12, 89b24-7, 89b37-8; *DA* 413a13; *Meta.* 1041a15; *EN* 1095b6, 1098b2). Second, I believe that the main drawback of dialectical method is that it does not seem to equip one with the ability to distinguish what is true from what is false, and it is not capable of producing *epistêmê*. More on this in section 4.

²⁰ Note that I don't claim that the *phainomena* are indefeasible and indubitable.

²¹ See *GA* i 21 where Aristotle consults observations about copulation among certain insects, birds and fish as facts (729b23) that corroborate his discussion about the contribution of the male to reproduction. For observations of 'what we have seen in the heavens' see *De Caelo* 292a3, *Meteor.* 345a1, 343b1. Note that Owen and most of his followers consider empirical observations to be *phainomena* in sciences such as astronomy, biology, and meteorology. See also Owen's reference to the perceptual *phainomena* as the ultimate criteria to assess the correctness of the principles in physics. He cites *De Caelo* 303a22-23 (τῶν φαινόμενων κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν) and 306a16-7 (τὸ φαινόμενον ἀεὶ κυρίως κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν) as textual evidence. (1961, 89-90)

They will serve as the cornerstone of the inquiry. Therefore, I take Aristotle to mean that he will set down some factual claims before himself with commitment for their criterial role throughout the inquiry and those *phainomena* which are treated as facts might involve certain *endoxa*, observations and presuppositions.

In light of these results, we have to reconsider the stages of that specific method. I shall now turn to the claim (2') about the stages of the inquiry which will also further our understanding of the foregoing discussion in a broader framework.

II. The stages of the method

According to the received interpretation, the method described and practiced at *EN* vii is composed of three stages. Having argued that *tithenai ta phainomena* does not refer to an initial collection of *endoxa*, we must also refrain from identifying the catalogue of *endoxa* at the outset as the first stage of the method. Once we do so, we will end up having merely two integral stages. In what follows, I shall first defend this claim with regards to *EN* vii 1 and then sketch out some cases in and outside ethics in support of it.

It is widely believed that the method of *EN* vii 1 is composed of the following three successive stages: (1) setting down the *phainomena* in the sense of collecting *endoxa*, (2) raising difficulties, and (3) resolving those difficulties by preserving all or the most or the most authoritative *endoxa*. As my discussion has so far revealed, we cannot retain (1). I suggest removing it as a discrete first stage. By setting down the *phainomena*, I take Aristotle to mean that he will set down certain endoxic and non-endoxic claims before himself in a criterial role while presenting *aporiai* and resolving them. The *phainomena* whose elements are reliable groundwork will be invoked and thus, set down *along* the investigation to guide and constrain the inquiry rather than in a discrete first stage.²² Hence, *pace* the prevailing view, I consider this method to include essentially two stages: (1) raising difficulties among *endoxa* and other presuppositions (2) resolving the difficulties and reaching an account by preserving some or the most authoritative *endoxa*. These are the only stages of this method there are. Here is an alternative translation of the methodological passage that squares better with this interpretation:

As in the other cases, setting the phenomena before us and, [1] after first discussing the difficulties, [2] we must go on to prove here too, if possible, the truth of all the reputable opinions about these affections or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.

²² One may contend that even if we take the *phainomena* in the sense suggested here, one will need primarily to have access to those premises. Hence, this task could be considered as a stage, and we would have three instead of two stages. I think this is true as a philosophical task that needs to be done, my point is rather whether Aristotle introduces those *phainomena* neatly as constituted by *endoxa* at the outset. One might also argue that whether Aristotle gives a collection of *endoxa* and *aporiai* separately or whether he combines offering the *endoxa* and those *aporiai* that arise from them is not an aspect of the procedure worth considering. However, it must be observed that by emphasizing the stages aspect of the *EN* vii 1 procedure, I correct a scholarly mistake which searches for an orderly three-stage procedure in Aristotle's discussions to assess the other applications of *EN* vii 1.

In what follows, I shall make two points to defend this interpretation. First, the reputable opinions surveyed following this methodological passage do not constrain the difficulties or the puzzles and their resolution. If the task of setting down the *phainomena* referred to that initial enumeration of the *endoxa*, one would expect those opinions to restrict the ensuing stages of the inquiry. Second, since, *tithentas ta phainomena* does not refer to setting down the *endoxa* in a discrete step, a survey of the *endoxa* need not be an independent and integral stage of the method. I will illustrate this with some example cases in which a prior survey of *endoxa* is absent and the endoxic claims are introduced concurrently with the difficulty raising stage.

As to the first point, in the course of raising puzzles and resolving them, we observe that Aristotle can step out of the *endoxa* rehearsed and include unmentioned aspects of the subject under consideration. For instance, among the *endoxa* listed at *EN* vii 1, one of them reads that “the incontinent man, knowing that what he does is bad does it as a result of passion, while the continent man, knowing that his appetites are bad, does not follow them because of reason.” (1145b11-13) When Aristotle puzzles through the *endoxa*, we find an *aporia* at 1146a31-1146b2 that is only partly related to this *endoxon* and is not restricted by it. One part of the difficulty raised belongs to this *endoxon*, namely, that the incontinent man does what he does as a result of passion. Yet, the additional part about the curability of someone who acts on conviction and the incurability of the incontinent person does not stem from the previous *endoxon*. At least, the question of curability or incurability has not been raised as an aspect of the subject that needs to be examined. This textual evidence reveals that Aristotle steps outside the endoxic claims listed or at least integrates some new objections that raise doubt on some unmentioned aspects of the subject. This finding is also important because it shows that Aristotle isn’t as concerned about and aiming narrowly at refining and modifying *endoxa* and thus preserving all or most of the *endoxa* listed at the outset as the adherents of dialectical method are.²³

With regard to the second point, the parallel discussion on *akrasia* in *MM* is my first example case from which a discrete section devoted to the *endoxa* is absent. At *MM* ii 6 the author does not catalogue *endoxa* separately and create the wrong impression that they constitute the whole supply of the *phainomena* to be employed as the bedrock of further argumentation, that is, to guide and constrain the inquiry. Following the parallel methodological passage, without enumerating the *endoxa*, he proceeds immediately to pose difficulties by introducing an *endoxon* on each occasion. He first introduces an *endoxon*, and then subjects it to an aporetic treatment right away (e.g., 1201a10-13). After he practices this procedure of introducing an *endoxon* and testing it simultaneously four times, the author indicates that he has the points which present a difficulty and that it is necessary to solve those difficulties (1201b1). Then he moves on to resolve those difficulties. Hence, instead of first assembling

²³ See Scott 2015, 192 for various examples of puzzles raised without taking premises from the initial list of *endoxa*. Cooper 2009, Salmieri 2009, Frede 2012 also recognize that Aristotle’s investigation in the stages of presenting and resolving *aporiai* is not constrained by the *endoxa* listed at the outset. On the other hand, although the *phainomena* deployed throughout the discussion are not coextensive with the *endoxa* enumerated at the outset, it doesn’t follow that Aristotle selects *endoxa* and *phainomena* in any haphazard way. As long as sufficiently many *endoxa* are introduced throughout the discussion it doesn’t impede the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the investigation.

the *endoxa* and then puzzling through them in discrete stages, he undertakes both tasks simultaneously and proceeds to resolve the puzzles afterwards. In conformity with our interpretation of *EN* vii, the *MM*'s discussion of *akrasia* occurs merely in two stages.

My second example case is the discussion of place at *Physics* iv 1-5. Similarly, we don't have a catalogue of *endoxa* at the outset that motivates the ensuing puzzles. We observe that during the discussion on place, Aristotle in fact presents difficulties with regard to certain *endoxa* in an entangled manner in chapters 1-3. In chapter 1, the inquiry begins by indicating that the physicist needs to know whether there is such a thing as place (*ei estin*) and what place is (*ti estin*) (208a27-29). After he enunciates that the question of what place is presents many difficulties (208a32: *pollas aporias*), he goes on to give arguments and pose puzzles concerning the existence and definition of place. The claims held by ordinary people or reputable thinkers are often presented with well-known *endoxa*-flagging markers such as *dokei* (208b1, 208b4, 209b28, 209b32) or *legousin* (208b26). He occasionally consults the views of some reputable predecessors by invoking them explicitly by name (e.g., Hesiod 208b28, Zeno 209a23 and Plato 209b11) in the course of presenting difficulties about different aspects of the subject. Hence, the employment of *endoxa* and the procedure of raising puzzles occur concurrently. In chapter 4, once Aristotle completes raising difficulties, he proceeds to present some "attributes that seemingly belong to" (*ta dokounta huparchein*) place that survive the preliminary discussion (210b32-211a6). After Aristotle resolves the difficulties in chapters 4 and 5, some of those attributes are left standing (212a20-30). It is worth noting that in both stages where he raises and resolves difficulties, Aristotle appeals to *phainomena* which involve some endoxic claims as well as certain presuppositions or observations that Aristotle takes to be reliable in guiding and constraining the inquiry.

These brief overviews show that (1) raising difficulties and (2) resolving those difficulties to reach the truth about the subject matter constitute the whole procedure outlined and practiced at *EN* vii. Hence, we shouldn't consider the survey of *endoxa* as the first stage that is a *sine qua non* of the method of *EN* vii, a method as our examples attest has application in and outside ethical treatises.

A mistaken and superfluous argument used by the adherents of the scientific method to undermine a dialectical interpretation of Aristotle's methodology puts them in a conundrum. On the one hand, subscribing to the received interpretation of *EN* vii 1, they take its method to be dialectic. On the other hand, they do not admit that this method is employed in any other passages in Aristotle's corpus. They hold to an account of the *EN* vii 1 that follows a systematically and rigidly structured three stage procedure in which *endoxa* are gathered, tested, and preserved, while they try to show to their advantage that Aristotle does not employ this method anywhere else, and so deny he practices dialectical method ubiquitously. As my interpretation reveals, we need not appeal to this maneuver to ward off dialectical method. Correct interpretation of *EN* vii 1 is compatible with a scientific methodology, which

also might strategically employ dialectic, and the practice of this sort of inquiry in various places does not have to be overly rigid.²⁴

If I am correct that the task of setting down the *phainomena* need not refer to enumerating all the *endoxa* initially but even throughout the inquiry as the perplexities are gone through, we should not always expect a separate catalogue of the *endoxa*. Aristotle can introduce the endoxic claims concurrently with the perplexities they provoke and his resolutions. Once we appreciate *EN* vii 1 in this light, we recognize the inescapable dialectical aspect of Aristotle's scientific inquiry in any scientific field. My account explains the purport and the application range of the phrase 'just as in other cases' (ὡςπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, *EN* vii 1 1145b3). Aristotle announces that he practices this procedure here similarly as elsewhere.

III. The goal of the method

The goal of the method articulated and employed in *EN* vii is to work towards accounts in the form of principles and definitions. Resolving the difficulties and preserving the most authoritative *endoxa* offers these accounts and makes them convincing. Thus, the *EN* vii method proves consistent with the scientific inquiry elaborated in *APo* ii.

Aristotle occasionally emphasizes that a good account should be able to shed light on the disagreements among different views.²⁵ Therefore, the success of the method described at *EN* vii 1 will also be measured with respect to its ability to resolve disagreements and puzzles among *endoxa* and its ability to preserve many or at least the most authoritative *endoxa*. However, I argue this doesn't constitute the ultimate purpose of this method.

Aquinas is one of the few commentators who rightly notices that in the *akrasia* discussion in *EN*, after raising difficulties, Aristotle first considers 'the general aspect and then considers the peculiar nature of the subject' (1964, 363). At the beginning of chapter 3 Aristotle says that 'we must consider first, then whether incontinent people act knowingly or not' (1146b9-10), which reveals his intention first to settle the question of there being incontinence and continence. He already said that Socrates' view conflicts with what appears, thus implying that he accepts incontinence. After Aristotle discards what is problematic in Socrates' denial, he confirms incontinence by showing 'what happens to such a man' (1145b28). He does so by developing three different manners of knowing something—actual and potential knowledge (1146b31-33), particular and universal knowledge (1146b35-1147a7), and different senses of being in possession of knowledge (1147a10-14)—to account for the knowing condition of the incontinent person and to defuse Socrates' argument. Then he continues the investigation as to 'what it is', to give an account of the nature of incontinence

²⁴ For instance, Frede 2012, 202 has denied associating the discussion of place with the method of *EN* vii 1 partly because an initial list of opinions (*legomena*) and a list of *aporai* concerning those opinions are absent from the discussion. She makes the same point for the discussion of friendship in *EE* vii. Karbowski 2013, 347 also writes that 'any other legitimate application of this method must have the same three-stage structure exhibited by *NE* VII.1', and he also denies any methodological resemblances between the discussion on friendship in *EE* vii and *EN* vii 1 (2019, 131).

²⁵ E.g., at *EE* 1215a20-22 Aristotle says that 'most of the disagreements and difficulties raised will become clear if we define (ὀρίσθῃ) well what we ought to think happiness to be'.

and other related states. Aristotle concludes the discussion by saying that he has ‘stated what (*ti...estin*) continence, incontinence, endurance, and softness are’ (10.1152a34-35).

Aristotle’s continuous and sustained use of the phrase *ti esti* and its cognates in almost all philosophical inquiries flags his quest for the scientific definitions and principles. He rejects any construal of the Socratic position that ethics is a theoretical science and knowledge of ethical concepts is the ultimate goal of ethics, since for him action is the ultimate goal of political science broadly construed (*EN* 1095a5, 1099b29-32, 1179a35-b3, *EE* 1216b10-25). Nonetheless, as seen here, Aristotle’s ethical inquiry involves a search for the notions related to human ethical conduct. Hence, we he says about happiness that ‘a clearer account of what it is (*ti estin*)’ (*EN* 1097b23) is desired; that ‘we must investigate...virtue of character—what it is (*ti estin*)’ (*EE* 1220a14); that ‘we must investigate friendship, what it is (*ti esti*) and what qualities it has’ (*EE* 1234b18-9) and so on (see *EN* 1130b6-8, 1137b21-22, 1112a13, 1139b19-20, 1111a22-25, 1138b33-35, 1131b17-18).

Observe that according to *APo* ii 1, securing that a subject matter is (*ei esti*) and definitional (*ti esti*) questions are the major scientific questions in any subject domain.²⁶ The resolution of the puzzle pertaining to *akrasia*, as we have seen, centers around the being of the matter and definitional questions—the two standard scientific questions (1146b9-10; 1152a34-5). Securing that there is a subject matter and determining what it is may be the result of induction widely construed to include dialectical dealing with perplexities and observations (see *APo* 71a1-17).

Observe that definitions of ethical concepts need not be different from the definitions of items in theoretical sciences in terms of their explanatory power. Hence, we should avoid associating ethical definitions with dialectical ones presented in *Topics* or *De anima*. In *DA* i 1, Aristotle unambiguously contrasts a dialectical definition with a scientific one on the grounds that the former is not explanatory and cannot yield *epistêmê*, whereas the latter is. (403a2). That ethical definitions also have the same explanatory power as the scientific ones can be seen from the following passage in the *EE* i 6 where Aristotle urges for the adoption of his methodological precepts.

Now in every inquiry there is a difference between philosophic and unphilosophic argument (*methodon*); therefore we should not think even in political philosophy that the sort of consideration which not only makes the nature of the thing (*to ti*) evident but also its cause (*dia ti*) is superfluous; for such consideration is in every inquiry the truly philosophic method.²⁷ (1216b35-40)

Its language (*to ti...alla kai to dia ti*) is revealing as it bears a striking resemblance to what Aristotle presents in *APo* ii 8 ff. If we take Aristotle at his word, this passage undeniably

²⁶ Cf. Lennox 2021, 47 that takes *APo* ii to provide general philosophical norms applicable to all domains.

²⁷ Relying on this passage and some other textual evidence, Inwood and Woolf 2012, xii-xiv argue that *EE* is more scientifically orientated than *EN*.

supports our claim about the scientific status of ethical definitions and the goal we ascribe to *EN* vii.²⁸

The goal of this method, i.e., of scientific inquiry, is to reach definitions. Yet Barnes 1980, 492 and Brunschwig 2000, 118 instead propose it is the preservation of ‘the largest set of the initial *endoxa*’ or ‘sacrificing only the smallest possible portion of *endoxa*’ is the goal of the method. As Socrates’ view about incontinence being impossible is an *endoxon* introduced later, the goal need not be to obtain the largest set of the initially assembled *endoxa*. And if the goal was indeed to reach the largest consistent set of the initial *endoxa*, one would expect the views on the initial list to constrain the rest of the inquiry where Aristotle poses difficulties and suggests solutions to them. As I have already illustrated, however, the initial *endoxa* are not addressed one by one, and he also raises and works out additional questions, e.g., the difficulty raised about the curability/incurability of the incontinent person is not included in any endoxic views enumerated earlier (1146a31-b2).

Third, this unfavourable interpretation seems to have forced its adherents to treat any other credible claim introduced throughout the inquiry as *endoxon*. If the goal is restricted to save a consistent set of the *endoxa*, then all observations or presuppositions Aristotle brings in as premises to his arguments should better be collapsed into *endoxa*. Hence, they have a hard time in particular making sense of the arguments Aristotle introduces when he gets to resolve the puzzles. They think, e.g., Aristotle’s distinctions pertaining to different kinds of knowledge that he introduces to resolve the puzzle of *akrasia* are *endoxa* shared by Aristotle and Plato. If they can gloss over every premise of Aristotle’s reasoning and treat them as if they are *endoxa*, only then they can consistently hold that the aim of the method is to preserve all or the majority of *endoxa* of this augmented set.²⁹ That said, my account renders such manoeuvres superfluous. If the goal of the method is taken to be reaching principles and essential definitions as I construe it, we are liberated from trying to treat every proposition indiscriminately as *endoxa* and devise strategies to accommodate the text to square with our purposes. Otherwise, we resemble the mythological figure Procrustes the bandit who cropped the limbs of his victims to force them to fit into his iron bed.

IV. *EN* vii 1 and dialectic

Now that I have defended my claims (1’-3’) that provide a new interpretation of the *EN* vii 1 which is compatible with the scientific method, I shall discuss what role could be ascribed to

²⁸ Resting their claims on Aristotle’s several remarks about the ‘imprecision’ of ethics, some argue that in ethics and politics Aristotle does not practice a scientific method. However, although Aristotle distinguishes ethics and theoretical disciplines on this score, this difference need not be pertinent to the method but rather concern the results of the ethical inquiry. As far as I know, Aristotle nowhere says that the method of ethics should be different from that of the theoretical sciences. The manner in which he reaches his definitions of ethical and political concepts progressively by first establishing the being of the subject matters is consistent with the scientific method Aristotle applies in theoretical inquiries. See Anagnostopoulos 1994, Reeve 1992, and Karbowski 2019 which try to explain how ethics can be a science despite the statements about ‘imprecision’.

²⁹ This reading leads them to overlook the *phusikōs* argument Aristotle gives to elucidate the cause of *akrasia* from the sources of natural science which would undermine a dialectical interpretation (1147a24). See Bolton 1991, 21-22 who tries to downplay the role of this *phusikōs* argument in favor of a dialectical reading of *EN* vii. Cf. *EN* 1167b28ff where Aristotle consults arguments from natural philosophy for causes (1167b29: δόξειε δ’ ἂν φυσικώτερον εἶναι τὸ αἴτιον).

dialectic in *EN* vii. To argue for my claim (4') that views a restricted role for dialectic, I shall turn to the *Topics* to provide a brief overview of the dialectical discussions.

Relying on the opening sections of the *Topics*, scholars often view dialectic narrowly as a type of argumentation that reason from *endoxa*³⁰ and consider the statement at 100b21-23 to be the definition of the *endoxa*:

Those opinions are reputable which are accepted by everyone or by the majority or by the wise—i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them.

However, a closer inspection through *Topics* reveals that there are at least two further important features of dialectical arguments. First, dialectical arguments proceed through question and answer between two disputants who take different roles (104a8-9). While the answerer is supposed to defend a 'thesis,' the questioner is supposed to construct an argument on the basis of reputable opinions and aims to refute the thesis by establishing its contradictory. Second, dialectical arguments lack any subjects of their own and hence can be about any subject matter whatsoever (100a18-21).³¹

Moreover, observe that the aforementioned statement about *endoxa* is not Aristotle's final word on the issue. Consider *Top.* i 10 where Aristotle enumerates what could be a dialectical premise in a dialectical argument:

Now a dialectical proposition consists in asking something [1] that is reputable (ἔνδοξος) to all men or to most men or to the wise, i.e., either to all, or to most, or to the most notable of these, provided it is not paradoxical; for a man would probably assent to the view of the wise, if it be not contrary to the opinions of most men. Dialectical propositions also include [2] views which are like those which are reputable (ἐνδόξοις); [3] also propositions which contradict the contraries of opinions that are taken to be reputable (ἐνδόξοις), and also [4] all opinions (δόξαι) that are in accordance with the recognized arts. (104a8-15)

We read that dialectical premises involve [1] the *endoxa* mentioned earlier, [2-3] two new classes of opinions that are also treated as *endoxa* and [4] the opinions of experts from established arts. This extended list of *endoxa* suggests that what we have at 100b21-23 should not be treated as the definition of *endoxa*.³² There Aristotle clarifies different types of *endoxa* rather than explaining their meaning.³³ This point is noteworthy because in the dialectical debates the questioner needs to argue from reputable premises that are acceptable to the

³⁰ In *Top.* i 1 Aristotle presents a dialectical deduction in contrast with scientific demonstration, however even if it is hardly mentioned, the dialectical disputants can use other modes of reasoning such as induction (*Top.* 155b21-2; 105a10-19) and analogical arguments (156b10-17).

³¹ In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle treats rhetoric as counterpart of dialectic because both are concerned about things common for all to know and are "not about any separate genus" (1355b8-9).

³² Whether the opinions of the experts are *endoxa* is a controversial issue but at *Top.* 105a34-105b1 Aristotle treats the opinions of experts separately from the opinions of the wise and the many which might suggest that Aristotle does not see them as *endoxa*. This point need not concern us here.

³³ *Rhet.* 1356b28-35 says that rhetoric has to consider what is persuasive with regard to a certain type of group and similarly dialectic must distinguish what is *endoxon* with reference to several groups.

respondent. Since he tries to deduce conclusions from the position of his opponent, the questioner needs assent to his premises and thus has to appeal to reputable opinions that his opponent can concede.³⁴ The proviso added to the opinions of the wise confirms this. The opinion of the wise can be a dialectical premise “so long as it is not paradoxical: for someone will concede what seems so to the wise, if it is not contrary to the views of the many” (104a10-12). Therefore, we don’t have a definition of what counts as *endoxa* but various types of *endoxa*, because arguments need to proceed on the basis of reputable premises that are acceptable to certain respondents.³⁵

At *Top.* 100a18-21 Aristotle declares that the goal of the treatise is to “find a method (*πραγματείας μέθοδον*) with which we shall be able to construct deductions from reputable opinions.” At 183a37-b1 he confirms this goal and says that “our intention was to find a certain power of deducing about a problem from the most *endoxa* (*ἐνδοξοτάτων*) premises.”³⁶ Now, consider Aristotle’s statement about the uses of the treatise:

Next in order after the foregoing, we must say for how many and for what purposes the treatise (*πραγματεία*) is useful. They are three—practice, casual encounters, and the philosophical sciences. (101a25-28)

It is often thought that in this passage Aristotle mentions the uses of dialectic itself. However, arguably he provides the uses of the treatise rather than dialectic. Since the goal is indicated to be finding a dialectical art or method, Aristotle is most likely talking about the uses of dialectical art as provided in the treatise.³⁷ The *Topics* indeed involves instructions about how to get collections of endoxic premises that could usefully be employed by disputants as well as system of rules, guidelines and strategies that will allow the interlocutors to execute valid arguments³⁸ in both competitive and cooperative debates.³⁹ The mastery in the art of dialectic generates a critical power that could be useful in three domains already cited. The third use which is concerned about philosophical sciences is of great importance for our purpose:

For the study of the philosophical sciences it is useful, [1] because the ability to puzzle on both sides of a subject will make us detect more easily the truth and error about the several points that arise. [2] It has a further use in relation to the principles used in the several sciences. For it is impossible to say anything about them at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are primitive in relation to everything else: it is through reputable opinions about them that these have to be discussed (*διελθεῖν*), and this task belongs properly, or most

³⁴ See esp. *SE* 183b5-6; *APo* 81b18-22.

³⁵ See *Top.* 104a4-104a8, 105b11-12, 105b17-18.

³⁶ This is from the end of *Sophistical Refutations* and Aristotle always refers to it as part of the *Topics*.

³⁷ See *Top.* 101b11-13 where Aristotle describes the art of dialectic. See Smith 1993, 340-7, 1999 44-7 and Karbowski 2019, 21-51 which emphasize this distinction.

³⁸ Dialectical arguments differ from sophistical (*eristic*) arguments in which the questioner is not concerned about making valid arguments or whether the premises are acceptable to his opponent. The disputants in sophistical discussions can use any means to achieve their end and defeat the opponent.

³⁹ Competitive debates aim victory whereas cooperative arguments (for trial [*peiras*] and inquiry [*skepseōs*]) aim a common task of developing an argument from premises that are more endoxic than the conclusion. For further features of these debates see *Top.* 155b26-8, 159a10-14, 159a38-b22, 159b89, 160a14-17. See Bolton 1990: 212-19 on *peirastikê* and its relationship to dialectic.

appropriately, to dialectic; for dialectic is a process of criticism (ἐξεταστική)⁴⁰ wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries (μεθόδων). (101a34-101b4)

The art of dialectic can be useful in two ways in philosophy. [1] The critical power will enable us to assess the assets and drawbacks of various opinions by raising difficulties on both sides. Note that Aristotle does not say that it can enable us to discover or find the truth that is sought but rather that it makes the detection of truth easier. So, dialectical art is presented as an ability to contribute to the discovery of truth.⁴¹

This interpretation is supported by a passage towards the end of the *Topics* where Aristotle clearly enunciates that for discerning the truth, we require another ability:

And also, when it comes to knowledge and the wisdom that comes from philosophy, being able to discern-or already having discerned-the consequences of either assumption is no small instrument: for it remains to choose one or the other of these rightly. In order to do that, one must be naturally gifted (εὐφυᾶ), and this is what it is to be naturally gifted (εὐφυῖα) with respect to truth: to be able properly to choose the true and avoid the false. (*Top.* 163b9-15, tr. Smith)

So, although dialectical art can equip us with a critical ability to reason on both sides of a subject matter which contributes to truth seeking, it is incapable of discovering the truth. For it we need to be ‘naturally gifted.’⁴² Although Aristotle is not clear about the nature of this ‘giftedness’ and its role in his theory of knowledge, his point about the insufficiency of dialectic is obvious.⁴³

The second use of the art of dialectic is in relation to the first principles. Owen and many others take [2] to be the declaration that dialectic establishes first principles of the sciences.⁴⁴ However, Aristotle merely says that ‘discussing’ (διελθεῖν) the starting points of philosophical sciences is especially appropriate to dialectic. Critical examination of the views of the wise and the many is clearly a part of Aristotle’s philosophical method however this passage which deserves a more extensive treatment that can be provided here does not say that dialectic can establish those first principles.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Socrates used the verb *exetazein* to ‘examine’ the opinions of others in order to refute them and reveal their ignorance (See *SE* 183b6-8 where Aristotle mentions Socratic examination and associates it with dialectical arguments). Nevertheless, in this passage examination of views is said to be useful in discussing principles which is a far cry from claiming that by examination the dialectician establishes scientific principles.

⁴¹ Devereux 2015, 134-9 and Salmieri 2009, 312-13 acknowledge a restricted role to dialectical art in philosophy.

⁴² See Barnes 2011, 168 which makes the same point.

⁴³ See Devereux 2015, 131-134 on Aristotle’s treatment of dialectical discussions and philosophical inquiry as distinct activities in the *Topics*.

⁴⁴ Owen 1961, 92.

⁴⁵ Irwin 1988 grants that in the *Organon* and *Physics* Aristotle treats dialectic as a mere critical instrument. He thinks that dialectic “has a way towards first principles” and helps philosophy to discover first principles however, it is not capable of establishing them. He supposes that in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle abandons his earlier position and proceeds to practice what he calls ‘strong dialectic.’ I think the restricted role Aristotle ascribes to dialectic is retained in the *Metaphysics*. In the *Meta.* 1004b23-4 Aristotle distinguishes philosophy from dialectic in terms of its power (*dunamis*): “dialectic is merely capable of testing (πειραστική) whereas philosophy is capable of producing knowledge (γνωριστική)” (1004b25-6). See *Meta.* 995b20-25, 1004b15-26 for some of Aristotle’s remarks on methodology where he explicitly distinguishes the task of dialectic from philosophy. Cf. Berti 1996 which argues against Irwin’s developmental thesis about methodology.

Note that Aristotle often indicates that dialectic is in fact incapable of proving (*deiknunai*) anything (*APo* 77a31-5; *SE* 171a38-b2; 11, 172a15-20; *Rh* 1355a33-5).⁴⁶ It is right that in those passages what is denied to dialectic is demonstration nevertheless, it would be surprising if Aristotle would think dialectic can establish first principles of sciences while it cannot fulfil the less demanding task of demonstrating claims.

That the discovery of truth is not within the power of dialectical art and hence the fact that truth is not the concern of the disputants is best evidenced by the selection of the dialectical premises. As already mentioned, in a dialectical exchange the questioner tries to deduce conclusions on the basis of beliefs that are acceptable to his opponent⁴⁷ and he needs to have at his disposal various classes of beliefs that are relative to the wise, the many or the expert in order to advance premises that his opponent can concede.⁴⁸ Aristotle ranks certain opinions as more or less *endoxon* on the grounds that they entertain more or less reputation, not because they have higher or lower truth value.⁴⁹ For instance, a more or most *endoxon* premise is one that is accepted by all relevant groups. A more *endoxon* premise is a more reputable proposition and such a premise is more likely to be accepted by the opponent than a less *endoxon* one.⁵⁰ Note that a questioner might need to base his arguments on premises that are recognizably false or argue for similarly false conclusions.⁵¹ Hence the selection of *endoxa* in dialectical debate seems unlikely to express any concern with the truth but rather occurs with a view to certain individual or a group.⁵² Indeed, dialectical argument seems to be exempted from a truth requirement, and we don't find any passages where Aristotle advises dialecticians to assess the premises they present or concede with reference to truth.⁵³

In the *Rhetoric* where Aristotle treats rhetoric hand in hand with dialectic, he writes that “neither rhetoric nor dialectic is the scientific study of any separate subject: both are faculties for providing arguments” (1356a32-5). He further warns that “the more we try to make either dialectic or rhetoric not, what they really are, practical faculties, but sciences, the more we shall inadvertently be destroying their true nature” (1359b10-14). So, he indicates that while rhetoric or dialectic as faculties for providing arguments may deal with any subject of sciences, the full philosophical treatment of those subjects falls to the relevant sciences (1359b16-18).

In light of this brief and incomplete discussion of dialectic let us consider our passage at *EN* vii 1 before we end this section. I believe that the role the art of dialectic plays in *EN* vii 1 is a

⁴⁶ See Smith 1997, 54 and Karbowski 2019, 41 who make the same point.

⁴⁷ Sometimes the answerer concedes or refuses propositions with reference to a different person rather than himself. For instance, one can adopt the persona of a famous person such as Heraclitus (*Top.* 159b27-35) and provide responses that are confined to the belief set of that person.

⁴⁸ See Rapp 2017, 123-129 for an illuminative and instructive discussion of the relativized and non-relativized interpretation of dialectical premises and whether dialectic has any serious concern for truth and his negative conclusion.

⁴⁹ See *SE* 175a32-34 where Aristotle contrasts ‘deducing something ἐνδόξως’ with ‘deducing ἀληθῶς’.

⁵⁰ See Bolton 1990, 208-12 for degrees of reputability of different types of *endoxa*.

⁵¹ See *Top.* 161a24-33, 162a8-10. At 162b27-28 Aristotle says: “For if it depends on false but reputable premisses, the argument is dialectical; if on true but implausible premisses, it is bad.”

⁵² See Frede 2012, 195 and 199 and Devereux 2015, 131-134 in support of this point.

⁵³ In several passages Aristotle claims that dialectical arguments are ‘according to opinion’ (*kata doxan*) while scientific ones that are ‘according to the truth’ (*kat’ alētheian*): *APo* 81b19-23, *APr* 46a4-10, 65a35-37, *Top.* 105b30-37, 162b31-33. In scientific arguments the truth is the ultimate standard rather than who believes what.

facilitating role to critically examine various views to contribute to the detection of truth more easily as described in its first use in *Topics* i 2.

Note that at *MM* ii 6 version of the methodological preface prior to the investigation of *akrasia*, the author seems to justify the use of that specific procedure with a similar role in mind. The linguistic parallels of the first use of dialectical art at *Topics* 101a34-7 and this passage are indeed close:

But with regard to incontinence and self-control we must first state the difficulties and the arguments which run counter to appearances, in order that, having viewed the matter together from the point of view of the difficulties and counter-arguments, and having examined these, we may see the truth about them so far as possible; *for it will be more easy to see the truth* in that way. (1200b20-24, my emphasis).

If in *EN* vii Aristotle was using dialectic in a more substantial role to establish principles and if *EN* vii 1 was its declaration, one would expect such a statement to occur at the beginning of the treatise rather than in the seventh book of a ten-book treatise. Observe that at the beginning of his treatises Aristotle discusses at considerable length the methodological precepts that he would pursue in those works.⁵⁴ If dialectic had any such important role in seeking and discovering first principles one would expect to find some remarks hinting at it in those methodological reflections and not at the outset of a random subject of *akrasia* towards the end of the *EN*. To conclude I believe that dialectical strategies play an unquestionable role in the *EN* vii discussion as well as other cases where the *EN* vii 1 procedure is employed, be it in practical or theoretical works. Nevertheless, owing to the restrictions Aristotle places on dialectic in philosophical inquiries, this role is a restricted facilitating one to contribute to the discovery of principles and causes.

Conclusion

To sum up, having claimed that the methodological passage at *EN* vii 1 has been misconstrued by both the advocates and the critics of dialectical method, I have provided an improved and more adequate account of this procedure which is more widely applicable than some scholars have thought. I have argued that the traditional account has made two basic mistakes of identifying the term *phainomena* with *endoxa* and considering *tithêmi* in the sense of ‘set down’ without commitment or any assertoric force. This misreading has led them to associate the procedure described by *tithenai phainomena* with the catalogue of the *endoxa* at the beginning of the inquiry. I have suggested that Aristotle, in fact, means to *set down* the appearances in a committed way. Aristotle enunciates that he will carry out the inquiry by employing the *phainomena*, that is, the facts that might involve certain *endoxa*, observations and other presuppositions to guide and constrain the inquiry throughout. This interpretation has revealed that the method of *EN* vii 1 essentially comprises two stages where certain puzzles are raised and resolved afterwards. Since the claims that are subject to testing can be introduced simultaneously as difficulties are raised, a collection of the *endoxa* need not occur in a discrete initial stage. Further, I argued that the goal of the method cannot simply be resolving inconsistencies among various claims to salvage the largest coherent set

⁵⁴ See Lennox 2021 who directs attention to the opening books of Aristotle’s treatises where methodological concerns to be pursued are discussed.

among the initial *endoxa*. Rather Aristotle aims to reach an account in the form of a definition of the *akrasia* and other states by inquiring two standard scientific questions concerning existence and definition while preserving some or the most authoritative *endoxa*.

In conclusion I want to suggest that we should stop using the phrase the ‘method of *endoxa*’ which is not present in Aristotle’s text but has been coined by Barnes and has widely been embraced by scholars. Since this label does not solely refer to the use of certain *endoxa* in an inquiry but has come to denote a substantial method as outlined in the introduction, this term is not innocuous, and it should be treated with caution. Further debates on the methodology in connection to *EN* vii 1, should instead employ the term ‘dialectic’ and its renderings which is Aristotle’s own preferred term to call the type of arguments that rest on endoxic premises. However, *EN* vii 1 cannot even be considered to epitomize dialectic. The method of *EN* vii 1 is ultimately consistent with the scientific methodology whereas it employs some dialectical strategies for their facilitative role. Hence, we should bear in mind Aristotle’s admonition in the *Rhetoric* about refraining from making dialectic what it really is not while acknowledging the limited role it plays in philosophical inquiries.

Finally, I submit that the methodological passage at *EN* vii 1 need not take the centre stage of the debate about the method and should not be used to test other texts for their adherence to dialectic. Its prominent place and privileged status have been a result of the received interpretation which is mistaken. Hence, we don’t need to treat it differently from the parallel methodological passages that occur in *MM* ii (*akrasia*), *EE* vii (friendship) and *Physics* vi (place) where the method is broadly scientific, and some dialectical strategies have similarly been employed in a limited role. However, the application of the results of this study on similar passages should wait for a future occasion.

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