

# False ἔνδοξα and fallacious argumentation

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## Abstract

Aristotle determines eristic argument as argument which either operates upon the basis of acceptable premisses (ἔνδοξα) and merely give the impression of being deductive, or argument which truly is deductive but operates upon the basis of premisses which seem to be acceptable, but are not (or, again, argument which uses both of these mechanisms). I attempt to understand what Aristotle has in mind when he says that someone is deceived into accepting premisses which seem to be acceptable but which are really not, and how this disqualifies such arguments from being dialectical. In the first section of the paper I interpret Aristotle's notion of ἔνδοξα in terms of a relational concept of acceptability. Real ἔνδοξα are propositions which are accepted by a qualified group or individual. False ἔνδοξα may also be accepted by someone or some group, and may even be true, but they are used to serve the purposes of eristical argumentation, which departs from certain standards of dialectical argumentation articulated in the notion of ἔνδοξα as a norm for premiss-acceptance. In particular, eristic arguments may even be valid in the sense of a συλλογισμός while still failing to be proper dialectical arguments. In the second part of the paper I consider how this can be, in examining certain types of fallacies in the *Sophistical Refutations* and the relationship between fallacious argumentation and false ἔνδοξα.

## 1. Introduction

In the first chapter of the *Topics* Aristotle introduces the notion of “eristic argument”:

Eristic is deductive argument upon the basis of premisses which seem to be reputable, but are not, as well as argument which seems deductive, be it from reputable or reputable-seeming premisses (ἐριστικός δ' ἐστὶ συλλογισμὸς ὁ ἐκ φαινομένων ἐνδόξων μὴ ὄντων δέ, καὶ ὁ ἐξ ἐνδόξων ἢ φαινομένων ἐνδόξων φαινόμενος). (*Top.* A 1, 100b24–25; cf. *SE* 2, 165b7–8)

This passage identifies two mechanisms by which the eristic arguer deceives his interlocutor. The first mechanism makes an argument seem to fulfill the conditions of a συλλογισμός, a deductive argument, when it really does not fulfill these conditions. Eristic arguments by this mechanism are not deductive arguments at all; their mechanism of deception is to seem deductive. The second mechanism of eristic argument may also be employed in deductive argument. It is therefore not, strictly speaking, a means of *logical* deception. It operates on the level of individual propositions used as reputable premisses and aims to effect the acceptance of certain propositions as reputable premisses when they are not. But what does Aristotle mean when he says that we may be fooled with regard to the reputability

of premisses which are offered as reputable and acceptable (ἔνδοξα), and how may we characterize this error with a view to the properly logical error of deeming conclusive a fallacious, i.e. not really deductive, argument? My purpose here is to outline the right answer to these questions.

The argumentative errors corresponding to the two mechanisms of eristic argument above are of course not mistakes on the part of the practitioner of eristic, who knows very well what he is doing and intends to do what he does. They correspond rather to sources of error in the recipient of the argument, who is deceived into believing that he has been legitimately refuted by an eristical arguer. The criterion or norm for identifying the first source of error is clear, and holds for all types of argument in Aristotle: it is the criterion of deductiveness in the sense of a συλλογισμός. (As will be noted below, this concept is wider than that of deductive validity. However, the fact that Aristotle recognizes that certain types of argument, such as inference from signs, can be acceptable and rational while nevertheless failing to meet the criterion of a συλλογισμός, does not relativize his criterion of deductiveness for arguments.) The criterion or criteria for identifying the second type of error is less clear. Are φαινόμενα ἔνδοξα trivially and recognizably false premisses? This would certainly make them forfeit their status as ἔνδοξα, but then they would hardly qualify as φαινόμενα. Or are they *prima facie* acceptable premisses which turn out to be not so acceptable as they seem at first sight, regardless of their truth? As I shall argue, this is more likely. A distinction between degrees of acceptability is well-suited to Aristotle's theory of dialectical argumentation, which is not primarily concerned with the truth of the premisses of dialectical argument. But there is a problem here. The claim that certain things which seem acceptable are not really so involves more than just a notion of relative acceptability; it seems to imply a sharp distinction between real and false, or genuine and merely apparent, acceptability. These are highly normative epistemological notions. In what follows, I attempt to understand how they are brought to bear within the context of Aristotle's theory of dialectical and eristic argumentation.

## 2. False ἔνδοξα as superficially acceptable premisses (*Topics* A 1)

One place to seek some elucidation of the notion of error through acceptance of merely apparently reputable premisses is in the passage immediately following the distinction adumbrated above (*Top.* A 1, 100b26–101a4). Here, Aristotle reiterates that not everything which seems to be acceptable is acceptable, and he justifies this statement in the following way:

An eristic argument is a deduction from premisses which seem to be ἔνδοξα, but are not really, as well as merely apparent deduction from real and apparent ἔνδοξα: for not everything which seems to be an ἔνδοξον is one. None of the aforementioned ἔνδοξα have their φαντασία completely on their surface, as the starting-points of eristic arguments happen to do. For the nature of the false in them usually becomes

quickly apparent to those who are able to detect nuances as well.<sup>1</sup> The first of the aforementioned types of eristic argument may be called a deduction, but the other eristic argument is not deductive, since it merely seems to deduce, but does not (*Top.* A 1, 100 b23–101a4).<sup>2</sup>

In interpreting this passage we must give an account of how we are fooled with regard to the acceptability of dialectical premisses, and of how we can know that something presented as a real ἔνδοξον is in fact a false or counter-feit ἔνδοξον. And we must account for what it is for propositions to “have their φαντασία completely on their surface” (100b27–28), as this is offered as a criterion for the distinction between false and real endoxical premisses.

Alexander’s interpretation (*In Aristot. Top.* 19.28–23.19) of this passage is extensive. He understands the qualification “superficial” (cf. “on the surface”, 100b27) with regard to premisses to mean that such premisses are refuted upon the basis of brief observation; and he classifies eristic premisses as being of this type (*In Aristot. Top.* 20.9). As examples of φαινόμενα ἔνδοξα Alexander cites such trick propositions as “what you have not lost, you have” and “whoever has vision, sees”. The paradoxical conclusions which may be inferred from such propositions (“one-eye has eyes”, “the sleeper (who has a dream, an ὄψις) sees”) show, he argues, that these inferences have “superficial plausibility” (their πίθωνον is ἐπιπόλαιον), since their falsehood quickly becomes clear to those with the faculty of discerning the μικρά (*In Aristot. Top.* 20.10–19).<sup>3</sup> Real ἔνδοξα are distinguished by the fact “that it is not easy for falsehood to be detected in them” (*In Aristot. Top.* 20.19–20).

Alexander’s comments focus on an important aspect of this passage which most modern English translations fail to make clear: at issue is the plausibil-

<sup>1</sup> I adopt here a non-orthodox reading of the phrase τοῖς καὶ μικρὰ συνορᾶν δυναμένοις suggested by Brunschwig (1967, 114–15, ad loc.). This phrase is usually rendered in one of two similar ways, either by taking the καὶ to modify μικρὰ (so e.g. Smith (1997, 1), “those capable of even modest discernment”) or with τοῖς δυναμένοις (e.g. Pickard-Cambridge in Barnes 1984, 167, “even to persons with little power of comprehension”). The former construal seems preferable; adverbial καὶ modifying a preceding word (or “post-placed” καὶ) is a possible construction, but not one peculiar to Aristotle. Both of these readings take μικρὰ as adverbial to συνορᾶν δυναμένοις, in assuming that the epistemic capacity for recognizing pseudo-ἔνδοξα will be minimal. I shall argue against that assumption in what follows; for the moment it must suffice to point out that this reading runs against the often positive connotation of συνορᾶν in Aristotle, not as a minimally basic faculty of reasoning but as a developed faculty of observation and judgement. See e.g. *De gen. et corr.* 316a5, *Met.* A 3, 984b2, and the conspicuous frequency of the phrase συνορᾶν δύνασθαι in the *Topics*: A 17, 108a14; A 18, 108b20; Γ 2, 117a6; Θ 2, 158a4–5; and especially Θ 14, 163b9–11: “for knowledge and philosophical wisdom, being able to see and to have detected (τὸ δύνασθαι συνορᾶν καὶ συνεωρακέναι) what follows from either of two theses, is no small tool.”

<sup>2</sup> *Top.* A 1, 100b23–101a4: ἐριστικὸς δ’ ἐστὶ συλλογισμὸς ὁ ἐκ φαινομένων ἐνδόξων μὴ ὄντων δέ, καὶ ὁ ἐξ ἐνδόξων ἢ φαινομένων ἐνδόξων φαινόμενος· οὐ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ φαινόμενον ἐνδοξόν καὶ ἔστιν ἐνδοξόν. οὐθὲν γὰρ τῶν λεγομένων ἐνδόξων ἐπιπόλαιον ἔχει παντελῶς τὴν φαντασίαν, καθάπερ περὶ τὰς τῶν ἐριστικῶν λόγων ἀρχὰς συμβέβηκεν ἔχειν· παραχρῆμα γὰρ καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τοῖς καὶ μικρὰ συνορᾶν δυναμένοις κατάδηλος ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ τοῦ ψεύδους ἐστὶ φύσις. ὁ μὲν οὖν πρότερος τῶν ῥηθέντων ἐριστικῶν συλλογισμῶν καὶ συλλογισμὸς λεγέσθω, ὁ δὲ λοιπὸς ἐριστικὸς μὲν συλλογισμὸς, συλλογισμὸς δ’ οὐ, ἐπειδὴ φαίνεται μὲν συλλογίζεσθαι, συλλογίζεται δ’ οὐ.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander is not explicit about his understanding of this phrase, but it is clear that he does not support the now orthodox adverbial reading of μικρὰ, which he takes as direct object in his paraphrase.

ity and acceptability of endoxical premisses, not their “appearance”.<sup>4</sup> Ascribing φαντασία to premisses is a substantival way of expressing their φαίνεσθαι, their “true-seeming”.<sup>5</sup> The problem with “phony” ἔνδοξα arises because there are different ways of seeming true, and not every thing which seems true is acceptable in the sense of an ἔνδοξον. But in making a distinction between real and phony ἔνδοξα a problem arises which we have already advertised above: the concept of acceptability which Aristotle employs is a relational one – what seems acceptable to some might be transparently eristic and unacceptable to others – and so it does not seem able to support a *definite* distinction between real and false or phony ἔνδοξα in terms of their content (see Smith 1997, 48–49). We must therefore explain how Aristotle can employ the distinction between real and apparent ἔνδοξα while assuming a relative concept of acceptability as part of his notion of ἔνδοξα.

Aristotle claims that “none of the aforementioned ἔνδοξα” (οὐθὲν γὰρ τῶν λεγομένων ἐνδόξων) have their seeming-true “completely” or “exclusively” “on the surface”. I take the “aforementioned ἔνδοξα” to refer to the passage immediately preceding in which Aristotle determines ἔνδοξα as “things which seem true to all, to the many, and to the wise, either to all the wise, or many of them, or to those who are most recognized and reputable” (100b21–3).<sup>6</sup> The common feature of ἔνδοξα on this description is their *seeming true to someone* (δοκεῖν τινι). This, I take it, is the relational feature of acceptability at issue in Aristotle’s notion of ἔνδοξα. For the relation of δοκεῖν τινι implies, at least in dialectical context, not just a seeming true to someone, but the acceptance of a proposition.<sup>7</sup> But *seeming true to someone* is not the same as *seeming true to just anyone*; in qualifying the relation of δοκεῖν τινι, Aristotle limits ἔνδοξα to that accepted by groups (“all”, “the many”, and “the wise”, either all or many of them) as well as by persons who are “most recognized and reputable” (μάλιστα γνωρίμοι καὶ ἔνδοξοι, 100b23). The notion of ἔνδοξα can also accommodate propositions which are logically equivalent to explicit ἔνδοξα, such as “things which are similar to ἔνδοξα” and the negation of things which contradict ἔνδοξα (*Top.* A 10, 104a12–14). And it includes not just

<sup>4</sup> In standard English translations of the *Topics* A 1, φαντασία is rendered as “appearance”; see Barnes 1984, 167 and Smith 1997, 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Bonitz 1870, 811a31ff. The substantive φαντασία has a verbal root, the verb φαίνεσθαι; and like this verb it can connote either a tendentially correct or incorrect seeming, be that seeming perceptual or cognitive. In our passage, the participle φαινόμενον serves to describe the cognitive pull of certain ἔνδοξα and indicate their tendentially incorrect or “mere” seeming. It is a cognitive pull in the wrong direction. The substantive φαντασία, in contrast, I take to be neutral in the sense that it affirms of a seeming that it has a certain cognitive pull, regardless of whether that pull is in the right direction. We should therefore understand the word in the sense of “plausibility” here, although it can also mean “reputation” (Liddell/Scott/Jones 1996, s.v. φαντασία), which is an important factor in Aristotle’s concept of acceptability (Barnes 1980, 493).

<sup>6</sup> *Top.* A 1, 100b21–3: ἔνδοξα δὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις.

<sup>7</sup> For a general theory of acceptability, it is important to distinguish between belief and acceptance, as Laurence Jonathan Cohen (1992) did in *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*. For the present purposes, it will suffice to note that modern epistemic concepts of “belief” come with certain assumptions which might lead to difficulties in understanding Aristotle’s notion of ἔνδοξα, or even the Greek philosophical notion of δόξα in general.

the opinions of those reputed to have the authority of “wisdom” in the widest sense (poets, seers, and the like), but embraces also expert authority in a more proper sense, “the opinions of the sciences which have been discovered” (*Top.* A 10, 104a14–15).

The identity of the group or individual which or who is said to accept a premiss will have a bearing on the degree to which that premiss seems acceptable. In this way, the acceptedness in the sense given in the determination of ἔνδοξα is – in Aristotle’s theory of dialectical argumentation and dialectical theory of rhetoric, at least – an indicator that the statement is true, and acceptable as a premiss. It has been noted by others that in this Aristotle seems to operate upon a somewhat surprising underlying assumption concerning acceptedness and acceptability: that things which are accepted by certain groups and individuals have, by that reason, some claim to the truth, and thus for (truly) seeming acceptable.<sup>8</sup> A modern theory of acceptable premisses is, by contrast, less prone to invoke acceptedness as a criterion for acceptability. This assumption is in fact there and it does have non-trivial consequences; but it should be noted that Aristotle makes it in the context of a theory of dialectical argument, and moreover that, in light of his description of ἔνδοξα, only things accepted *by certain groups and kinds of people* qualify as being acceptable on the grounds that they are accepted.

With this brief overview of “real” ἔνδοξα in view, let us return to the false ἔνδοξα in our passage and the question of how something can seem to be, but not be, an ἔνδοξον. In speaking of φαινόμενα or “merely apparent” ἔνδοξα, Aristotle refers to the ἔνδοξα of his own description, and thus is saying that there are propositions which *seem* to seem true to someone and to be accepted by them, but which really do not seem true to them and in fact are not accepted by them. How are we to detect such a thing? This is a question on which most modern interpreters of our passage seem to agree. Most translators, at least, think it must be easy to detect false ἔνδοξα, for – as noted above (fn. 2) – they render the sentence in more or less the following way:

For none of the opinions which we call reputable show their character entirely on the surface, as happens in the case of the principles of contentious arguments; for the nature of the falsity in these is obvious immediately, and for the most part even to persons with little power of comprehension (*Top.* A 1, 100b26–101a1).<sup>9</sup>

The evaluation of this rendering, and quite generally the interpretation of the entire passage, must be guided by Aristotle’s positive determination of the notion of ἔνδοξα. In introducing the notion of ἔνδοξα to describe dialectical premiss-taking, Aristotle makes it flexible but by no means arbitrary, naming specific sources of endoxical authority (all, the many, the wise, technical experts). The

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Burnyeat 1986, 12: “The fact that a proposition is believed by the majority or by experts is not for Aristotle just a sign that, if we asked them, they could cite evidence for the proposition. Their belief, as he treats it, is already some evidence in favour of what they believe; even if the opinion is not correct, it is likely to contain an element of truth which the dialectic can sift out and formulate clearly”.

<sup>9</sup> Translation by Pickard-Cambridge, based upon the text of Brunschwig, and printed in Barnes 1984, 177. The Greek text is cited above in fn. 3.

word ἔνδοξα itself is a term of art, coined to describe the best and most successful kind of dialectical practice for which Aristotle’s dialectical manual, the *Topics*, is supposed to prepare its reader. It is not clear why “persons with little power of comprehension” – a general description which will fit many people who don’t even engage in dialectic – should be a concern for the author of a manual on the particular practice of dialectic as Aristotle conceives it.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, even if we suppose that dialectical procedures such as Aristotle describes them were practiced with people outside the Academy or some other school-like setting, it does not seem likely that persons having only little power of comprehension would see through the principles of eristic argument. How could the art of eristic argumentation ever become the threat it was perceived to be if its principles are so obviously and transparently false? At the beginning of the *Topics* it would seem more likely for Aristotle to warn the would-be eristician that there will be skilled dialecticians (“those who can detect nuances, as well”) who could, for the most part even immediately, see through their premisses. But as we shall see in the second part of this article, *explaining why* something is an eristic and not a properly dialectical premiss – this is a central interest in *Sophistici Elenchi* – is another matter yet again, and not a trivial one.

There remains the question why Aristotle characterizes the premisses of *eristic* argument as φαινόμενα ἔνδοξα. There might be other kinds of argument, even non-dialectical arguments, which rely upon false ἔνδοξα. The deceptive use of “common notions” in a pseudo-scientific proof for the squaring of the circle, for example, might seem to be a case in which someone makes arguments using false ἔνδοξα outside of a dialectical context. This, one could suppose, is not eristic, i.e. pseudo-dialectical argument, but παραλογισμός, pseudo-scientific argument. Yet Aristotle explicitly determines παραλογισμός in such a way that ἔνδοξα are ruled out as premisses. The “drawer of false figures” (ὁ ψευδογραφῶν) who makes pseudo-scientific arguments does so neither upon the basis of true or primary premisses, nor upon the basis of ἔνδοξα in Aristotle’s sense of the term (things which seem true to all, the many, or the wise, etc.), but from “premisses particular to a science, but not true” (*Top.* A 1, 101a9–15). This limitation of pseudo-scientific reasoning to faulty reasoning upon the basis of premisses peculiar to a certain science has some interesting consequences. To name just one of them: it brings Aristotle to see the use of ἔνδοξα in the context of scientific questions as eristic argument, as in the case of Bryson’s squaring of the circle through a logical argument based upon relative magnitude (*SE* 11, 171b16ff.).<sup>11</sup> This indicates

<sup>10</sup> The fact that Aristotle mentions “encounters” (ἐντεύξεις) with the many among the three uses of his dialectical πραγματεία suggests that the use of dialectic for engaging “the many” was not at all self-evident (*Top.* A 2, 101a25–101b4). Moreover, the particular use of his study which Aristotle cites in that passage – “having enumerated the opinions of the many, we shall engage them not upon the basis of foreign opinions, but upon the basis of their own opinions, in changing whatever they seem to us not to say well” (101a31–34) – is indicative of the rhetorical application of Aristotle’s theory of dialectic, and not of its employment in any sort of public debate. On this passage and the dialectical component of Aristotle’s rhetorical theory see Rapp 2002, IV.1, 236ff., particularly 252, ad loc.

<sup>11</sup> For a reconstruction of Bryson’s argument along these lines, see Dorion 1995, ad loc.

that false ἔνδοξα can be manifest in the whole variety of problems and questions which may be discussed dialectically, and thus also eristically.

If real ἔνδοξα are the premisses of real or legitimate dialectic, and phony ἔνδοξα are the premisses of eristic, then what makes ἔνδοξα real or phony should also help us understand Aristotle's distinction between genuine dialectic and its corrupted counterpart, eristic. There seems to be an ethical dimension to the opposition between real and merely apparent ἔνδοξα, one which concerns the "spirit" of the argument and standards of dialectical fair play. In employing "argument from ἔνδοξα" as a positive description of dialectic at the outset of the *Topics*, Aristotle is describing a certain established practice of argumentation by picking out what is for him the feature which distinguishes it from other types of argument. The feature of using ἔνδοξα as premisses may well express a rule governing premiss-acceptance in (standard) dialectic for the sake of "training", as Oliver Primavesi has suggested.<sup>12</sup> The notion of ἔνδοξα and its use in Aristotle's determination of dialectic is, in any case, regulative: dialectic in a general and as yet undifferentiated, but nevertheless proper, sense admits only premisses which are ἔνδοξα, or at least premisses not more ἄδοξα than the conclusion defended by the answerer.<sup>13</sup> Argumentation from merely apparent, or false, acceptable premisses as well as apparently deductive argumentation is dialectic in bad faith, eristic.

In interpreting the notion of false or phony ἔνδοξα, it is helpful to recall this normative dimension of Aristotle's concept of ἔνδοξα and the dignity it bestows upon dialectic as a cooperative activity, which it is made out to be in the *Topics*. In a chapter on the critical evaluation of arguments (*ἐπιτιμησις*, *Top.* Θ 11), Aristotle speaks of the "bad companion" in terms of argument:

A bad companion is one who hinders the joint enterprise, and it is clear that this happens also in argument. For there is a joint enterprise set out also in these things, except in the case of competitive arguers. It is not possible for both of them to obtain their goal, since it is impossible for more than one to win. And it makes no difference if they do this through answering or questioning, for the contentious questioner will argue poorly, and in answering he will not grant what seems true (τὸ φαινόμενον) and will reject whatever the questioner wishes to inquire (*Top.* Θ 11, 161a37–b5).<sup>14</sup>

The moral of the passage, as Aristotle goes on to say, is that one must not judge an argument and the questioner who sets it up by the same standards, as the

<sup>12</sup> See Primavesi 1996, 23–24: "Die für Aristoteles nach *Top.* A 1 essentielle Bindung der dialektischen Argumentation an *Endoxa*, d.h. an weithin anerkannte Prämissen, beruht also auf einer bestimmten 'Spielregel' des in *Top.* A 2 an erster Stelle genannten Übungsgesprächs".

<sup>13</sup> The so-called Principle of Overarching from *Topics* Θ 5 states that when defending an endoxical thesis, the answerer may be compelled to co-operate by admitting not just things which seem acceptable, but also those which, though not acceptable, are at least more acceptable than the non-endoxical conclusion for which his opponent will be arguing (*Top.* Θ 5, 159b16–20). The principle is thus not innocent. It is discussed in Włodarczyk 2000.

<sup>14</sup> *Top.* Θ 11, 161a37–b5: ἐπεὶ δὲ φαῦλος κοινωνὸς ὁ ἐμποδίζων τὸ κοινὸν ἔργον, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἐν λόγῳ. κοινὸν γὰρ τι καὶ ἐν τούτοις προκείμενόν ἐστι, πλὴν τῶν ἀγωνιζομένων. τούτοις δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἀμφοτέροις τυχεῖν τοῦ αὐτοῦ τέλους· πλείους γὰρ ἐνὸς ἀδύνατον νικᾶν. διαφέρει δ' οὐδέν, ἂν τε διὰ τοῦ ἀποκρίνεσθαι ἂν τε διὰ τοῦ ἔρωτᾶν ποιῆ τοῦτο· ὅ τε γὰρ ἐριστικῶς ἔρωτῶν φαύλως διαλέγεται, ὅ τ' ἐν τῷ ἀποκρίνεσθαι μὴ διδοῦς τὸ φαινόμενον μὴδ' ἐκδεχόμενος ὅ τί ποτε βούλεται ὁ ἔρωτῶν πυθέσθαι.

questioner may have argued as well as possible, and nevertheless accomplished a poor argument (161b5–8): we get a taste of such dialectical meltdown in Plato's *Gorgias*. On the other hand, it is the mark of a good (i. e. co-operative) interlocutor to grant things which may undermine his thesis – so long as they seem acceptable, or more acceptable than the conclusion sought by the interlocutor.

With this moral of argumentation in view, we can see how the notion of false or phony  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  can refer to more than just a certain kind of deceptive acceptability. Even the most endoxical propositions can be employed deceptively by contentious arguers, and with absurd results: “plugging” propositions in to test their acceptability will, in any case, not be an acceptable test of acceptability in the sense of Aristotle's notion of  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  (*pace* Brunschwig 1967, 115). It is also difficult to see how the notion of apparent  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  could denote some formal flaw of argument, since Aristotle already has a very adequate description for formally fallacious eristic arguments: those which seem to be deductive, but which are not.<sup>15</sup> The notion of false or phony  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  is informed by a morale of argumentation, and indicates a kind of argument which makes pretensions to be dialectical, but which does not adhere to a key code of conduct in dialectical argumentation as Aristotle understands it.<sup>16</sup> False  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  are not only, not even necessarily, false in the sense that they are not true. They are false in the sense that they are deceptive “in regard to the matter”, i. e. they effect a deception concerning some matter in someone, often intentionally (though not necessarily) (see *SE* 11, 171b18–22). The description of eristic as argument from merely apparent  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  is a way of describing a *lack* of morale which Aristotle ascribes to the taking and accepting of premisses in genuine dialectic, and hence it can also serve as a description of at least one important aspect of eristic: a lack of fairness.<sup>17</sup>

Just as premiss-taking in standard dialectical argument is described in the *Topics* in terms of  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$ , and various dialectical procedures are specified through expanding or further qualifying this notion (as in *Top.* A 10 and  $\Theta$  5), so too we may expect Aristotle to give some account of premiss-acceptance using the notion of false  $\xi\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  in his treatment of eristic argument. In the second half of this article, I explore this further account of eristic and particularly eristical premisses.

<sup>15</sup> *Pace* Smith 1997, 48. See *Top.* A 1, 100b25; *Top.*  $\Theta$  12, 162b3–5; *SE* 2, 165b7–8; cf. *SE* 11, 171b18–25, and Alexander, *In Aristot. Top.*, who in fact distinguishes between materially and formally eristical arguments.

<sup>16</sup> Eristic is described as concerned with the same things as dialectic in *SE* 11, 171b3–12 and 171b34–7.

<sup>17</sup> See *SE* 11, 171b22–5: “Just as there is a certain form of dirty fighting which consists in foul play, the dirty fighting in the art of combative argument is eristic, for the ones who strive to conquer utterly and by any means are eristic arguers”.



### 3. False ἔνδοξα and fallacious argumentation in *De Sophisticis Elenchis*

Realizing that one has been deceived in such a way as to have accepted the unacceptable is one thing. Accounting for the mechanisms of deception with regard to acceptance is another matter. This is the proper province of Aristotle's *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, which provides an account of the mechanisms of eristic argument, and to which we must look for an account of the mechanisms involved in merely apparently acceptable premisses, or false ἔνδοξα.

It is general consensus that Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* mark the beginning of a tradition in the study of fallacies, but Aristotle did not possess a term directly equivalent to our word "fallacy". This word is used in a range of meanings more or less closely related to the concept of a valid argument. An "historical fallacy", for example, is simply an anachronistic claim, and does not refer to a particular formal defect of an argument. The original sense of the word in the English language is "deception, guile, trickery", and hence it can refer also to the state of being in error and the making of false statement, as well as to fallacious argument.<sup>18</sup>

What, for Aristotle, is fallacious argument? Aristotle developed, at some point, a concept of συλλογισμός as an argument which is deductive, the conclusion of which presents something other than that in the premisses, and which is caused through the premisses.<sup>19</sup> It is common to equate this with the concept of "valid" argument, but also somewhat misleading. Two main stipulations for συλλογισμός – that the conclusion 1. present something "new" which 2. is caused by the premisses – clearly do not hold for all valid arguments. Thus arguments may be fallacious by the standards of συλλογισμός without being invalid. Moreover, with regard to refutations, a certain type of συλλογισμός, Aristotle states that not only is that refutation "sophistical" which seems to be a συλλογισμός when it is not: also an argument which is a συλλογισμός, but which is not "appropriate to the matter" (οἰκείον τοῦ πράγματος), counts as a sophistical refutation (*SE* 8, 169b20–3), or fallacious argument. One may also add those arguments in which there is an only apparent contradiction between the deduction's conclusion and the original thesis, a notorious effect of equivocation.<sup>20</sup>

It is therefore not quite accurate to say that "a fallacious argument, as almost every account from Aristotle onwards tells you, is one that *seems to be valid* but *is not so*" (Hamblin 1970, 12, his own italics). For at least Aristotle's notion of sophistical and eristical refutation, which will cover certain types of "fallacious argumentation", includes, as we have seen, not just arguments which seem to

<sup>18</sup> See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "fallacy" (Simpson/Weiner 1989, 693–694).

<sup>19</sup> *An. Pr.* A 1, 24b18–22; *Top.* A 1, 100a25–7; *SE* 1, 164b27–165a3 (ἐλεγχος is a συλλογισμός with the contradiction of the conclusion); *Rhet.* A 2, 1356b16–18.

<sup>20</sup> This kind of false refutation motivates the first part of the exhaustive determination of ἐλεγχος in *SE* 5, 167a23–7: "A refutation is a contradiction of one and the same thing, not in respect to the name but in respect to the matter, by use of a word which is not equivocal but the same, and which follows of necessity from the things granted".

be “valid” in the sense of συλλογισμός but are not. It also includes those arguments which are valid in the sense of a συλλογισμός but have phony endoxical premisses, as well as deductive arguments inappropriate to the matter. It is also somewhat misleading to characterize the *Sophistical Refutations* as a study in fallacious argumentation *tout court*, for Aristotle examines in this work a particular kind of fallacious argument, namely pseudo-dialectical argumentation, which he calls “eristic”, but also “sophistic”: though Aristotle can differentiate these two in terms of motive (trying to win vs. trying to seem wise), both are conceived as fallacious argumentation upon the basis of dialectical premisses.<sup>21</sup> Fallacious argumentation upon the basis of principles proper to a discipline constitutes an object of study and refutation for the practitioner of that discipline, whereas eristic and sophistic fallacies can concern anything, just as dialectical argumentation can.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the study of eristic and sophistic refutation and fallacies evidently belongs, for Aristotle, to a theory of dialectical argumentation.

In accord with the treatment of eristic as argumentation which is defective in a specifically dialectical way, Aristotle identifies and classifies particular mechanisms of eristic argumentation. He divides eristic arguments into those “by means of linguistic expression” (παρὰ τὴν λέξιν, *in dictione*) and those “outside of linguistic expression” (ἔξω τῆς λέξεως, *extra dictionem*) as “two types of refuting” (*SE* 4, 165b23–24). In his identification of six “things inducing true-seeming through linguistic expression” (τὰ μὲν παρὰ τὴν λέξιν ἐμποιοῦντα τὴν φαντασίαν, b24–5), we find phrasing which recalls the passage on φαινόμενα ἔνδοξα from the beginning of the *Topics*. The six mechanisms of linguistic deception do not refer directly to inferential procedures: “homonymy” and “amphiboly” are sources of error with respect to the signification of words, and the mechanisms of “composition” and “division” are performed on single propositions in order to manipulate their sense.<sup>23</sup> The same also holds for “prosody” or “accentuation”, a means of changing the meaning of a statement by changing the accent on a particular word in that statement, and for “figure of speech”, malapropism which enters by way of etymologically established patterns of expression.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “Eristic” is Aristotle’s term of choice for designating degenerate dialectical argumentation about particular subjects; see especially *SE* 11, 171b34–172a2: “The practitioner of eristic bears a relationship to the dialectician which is similar to that of the drawer of false figures to a genuine geometrician. For he argues upon the same basis as the dialectician, and the drawer of false figures argues upon the same basis as the geometrician. But the drawer of false figures is not an eristic arguer, since he draws false figures upon the basis of the principles and conclusions which fall under his discipline, whereas the one who argues eristically upon the basis of dialectical principles will clearly practice eristic also in regard to other things”. The term “eristic” is conspicuously frequent in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (e.g. *A* 11, 1371a7; *B* 24, 1402a3, 14, 27; *Γ* 14, 1414b28). “Sophistic” is a word with a wider scope and more baggage; in Aristotle, it can refer to the use of defective dialectical argumentation in philosophical contexts. Cf. e.g. Plato, *Soph.* 223b5 (sophistic as the pursuit of the new, rich, and ἔνδοξοι) and Plato, *Prot.* 316d (the sophistic art is an old and venerable one) with *SE* 1, 165a21–3 (sophistic seems to be wisdom but is not, and the sophist is a peddler of true-seeming but false wisdom) and *Met.* *Γ* 2, 1004b17ff. (dialecticians speak about all things to which being is attributed, which is also the realm of the philosopher; dialectic tests the things which philosophy knows and sophistic seems to know, but does not).

<sup>22</sup> See *Top.* *A* 1, 101a8–10.

<sup>23</sup> Homonymy and amphiboly: *SE* 4, 165b30–166a21, composition and division: *SE* 4, 166a23–38.

<sup>24</sup> Prosody or accentuation: *SE* 4, 166b1–9, figure of speech: *SE* 4, 166b10–19.

The linguistic fallacies are of interest to Aristotle as means of eristically fallacious argumentation, but are not, in themselves, arguments which seem to be deductive but are not so. They are rather means of manipulating language at the level of “names and phrases” (ὀνόμασι καὶ λόγοις, 165b29). It is easy to see how such mechanisms can be grasped in terms of the notion of false ἔνδοξα. In order to have any sheen of plausibility, false ἔνδοξα must be presented as things which everyone does in fact accept. Linguistic conventions are just such things. Consider this argument from an equivocation: “it is the knowers who learn (μανθάνουσιν); for those who can learn the alphabet know (μανθάνουσιν, i.e. understand) what is dictated” (SE 4, 165b31–2).<sup>25</sup> The premiss – that those who are capable of knowing letters (οἱ γραμματικοί) understand what is dictated – is, by itself, acceptable and plausible on an easy understanding of the words it contains. Only when presented as evidence for a statement featuring a different meaning of the homonymous μανθάνειν does the premiss seem suspect.

This argument, like most from the stock of sophistic, trades on semantic ambiguity; but not all fallacies παρὰ λέξιν are semantic, even though they are sometimes generated by instances of syntactical ambiguity.<sup>26</sup> However, Aristotle’s analysis often seems to straddle the distinction between the syntactical and the semantic. For example the eristical question: “What someone knows, does he know this/ does this know?” trades on the opacity of the reference of the third person singular active in this Greek expression (the neuter pronoun τοῦτο could grammatically be either object or subject of the verb). Aristotle diagnoses the problem this way: “the knower and the known can be expressed as if they were both knowers by this phrase” (166a7–9).<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle’s purpose here, as in his discussion of the other fallacies *in dictione* – combination, division, accent, and form of expression – is to account for how grammatically well-formed and conventionally acceptable expressions may be misappropriated or misapprehended in such a way that they become false, or abet false reasoning. These types of fallacy have in common that they are instances of manipulation of language at the level of expressions and phrases, not of inference. And this is where we may expect to find a main source of the error in accepting the disreputable as a *premiss*. For premiss acceptance is

<sup>25</sup> SE 4, 165b31–2: μανθάνουσιν οἱ ἐπιστάμενοι, τὰ γὰρ ἀποστοματιζόμενα μανθάνουσιν οἱ γραμματικοί. A similar but slightly different argument is cited in Plato’s *Euthydemus*, 276c2–7: “When the grammar teacher used to dictate to you, which of the children were learning what was dictated, the clever ones (οἱ σοφοί) or the ignorant ones? – The clever ones, Kleinias said. – So it was the clever ones who were learning and not the ignorant ones, and so you did not answer Euthydemus correctly just now”. Kleinias had just been made to accept the claim that the ignorant “learn” (μανθάνειν), not the “clever”/ “wise” (οἱ σοφοί). As Kirwan 1979, 40, points out, this argument does not trade on equivocation in the use of the verb μανθάνειν (as Aristotle’s example does), but in the use of σοφοί, which may mean both “apt at learning, clever” and “knowing, learned”.

<sup>26</sup> See SE 6, 168a23–8: “Of the linguistic fallacies, the ones are by equivocation, for example homonymy, ambiguity in definition, and similarity of form (for we are accustomed to assume that all these things signify something), the others are combination and division and accent, which arise because the word or account, when altered, is not the same”.

<sup>27</sup> SE 4, 166a7–9: “ἄρ’ ὁ τις γινώσκει, τοῦτο γινώσκει;” καὶ γὰρ τὸν γινώσκοντα καὶ τὸ γινώσκόμενον ἐνδέχεται ὡς γινώσκοντα σημῆναι τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ.

characterized by the fact that it operates upon immediate epistemic considerations which are not the result of further inference. And so it is reasonable that a part of Aristotle's account of argumentation from false *ἔνδοξα* is given in terms of the use of language and linguistic convention, which inform the practice of premiss acceptance.

But it is not just equivocation in the formulation of premisses which makes for false *ἔνδοξα*. Eristic premisses may also be false *ἔνδοξα* by simply resembling acceptable principles. Several of the seven non-linguistic types of fallacy illustrate this phenomenon. Fallacies generated by “using a particular expression without qualification or in a certain way, and not in the proper sense” (166b37–8) may seem acceptable because of a false but true-seeming general principle, namely: that to be something or in some way is the same as to be in an unqualified sense (167a2–3), or, conversely, that not to be something or in some way is the same as not to be in an unqualified sense (167a4–5). In some cases, Aristotle claims, fallacious arguments based upon such principles are easily detected, but in others they often escape detection (167a10–20). This is the case when an attribute is ascribed in a particular respect, but would seem to follow without qualification, or when it is not easy to see which of two attributes belongs in a proper sense, as when opposites (*ἀντικείμενα*) may be predicated of one and the same thing (167a14–20).

Fallacious argument by recourse to the consequent (*παρὰ τὸ ἐπόμενον*) occurs because people tend to believe that the consequent is convertible, i. they think that if B necessarily follows from A, A will necessarily follow from B (167b1–3). Interestingly, in illustrating this fallacy Aristotle gives examples from two very different contexts: one which he calls “syllogistical”, which concerns Melissus's argument that the universe is unbounded, and another from cases of deception in the formation of judgements based upon sense-perception (167b4–20). The assumption that the consequent necessitates its antecedent is a mistake characteristic of the observation of regularities and inference from signs. Examples of mistakes from observation: when one infers that bile is honey because both are yellow, or that, if the earth is wet, it necessarily has rained (167b5–8). If the notion of false *ἔνδοξα* can be applied to such examples of reasoning, then it extends well beyond only the dialectical context to include true-seeming but false principles quite generally.

The remaining two examples, from forensic and philosophical contexts, suggest a wider application of the notion of false *ἔνδοξα* beyond dialectical contexts in the strictest sense. Aristotle's forensic example of fallacious argument from the consequent – that the man who dresses finely and is seen walking at night is an adulterer – belongs, as Aristotle says, to “proofs by sign” (*αἱ κατὰ σημεῖον ἀποδείξεις*) in rhetorical arguments (167b8–12). Aristotle elsewhere distinguishes the probable (*τὸ εἰκός*) and the sign (*τὸ σημεῖον*) as types of propositions (*προτάσεις*) and claims that the probable is an endoxical proposition, and that the sign in a demonstrative proposition which is either necessary or endoxical (*An. Pr.* B 27, 70a2–9). But this does not present a difficulty for my interpretation of fallacy of the consequent as a false *ἔνδοξον*, for in the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle is seeking to show how even certain legitimate principles may be used

to generate fallacious argumentation. And inference from the probable and from signs, though reasonable, certainly can.

There remains the interpretation of Melissus' claim – the universe is unbounded since it is ungenerated – in light of a principle which seems to be acceptable but is not. It is of course unlikely that the false principle involved in this claim was endoxical in the sense that it was believed by all or the majority. The principle must, rather, be one of those things which seems true to those reputed to be wise. Aristotle gives it as “if the universe did not come to be, then it has no beginning, so that it is unbounded” (167b16–18), and he replies by saying that if the universe (or anything), in coming to be, has a beginning, it does not follow that what has a beginning comes to be. Aristotle's objection to this principle seems itself somewhat eristical.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the discussion of this particular ἔνδοξον is clearly relevant to more than strictly dialectical contexts, as Aristotle is at pains in other works – i.e. in *Physics* Γ 4–8 – to show why it is unacceptable (and thus false). Still, recognizing how these works are based upon the discussion of endoxical or, in Aristotle's view, pseudo-endoxical propositions can help us understand why his procedure in them is sometimes strikingly “dialectical”.

#### 4. Conclusion

Both linguistic and as well as extra-linguistic fallacies are relevant mechanisms for making propositions seem acceptable when they are not so, i.e. as the causes of false or phony ἔνδοξα and fallacious argumentation. They are sources of error in regard to a statement's acceptability – and thus are sources of eristically fallacious argumentation, even when the arguments they appear in are “valid” in the sense of a συλλογισμός.

This conclusion is important, for Aristotle has been accused of wrongly attributing formal defects of argument to a “material” fallacy (equivocation) (Kirwan 1979, 35–46). The accusation is based upon the correct thesis that equivocation need not formally invalidate an argument or inference, and the further assumption that Aristotle's discussion of linguistic fallacies is motivated by the concern to show how they cause the acceptance of refutational arguments as valid when they are not so. But Aristotle explicitly recognizes a class of eristic arguments which are valid in the sense of a συλλογισμός, but nevertheless dialectically “unsound”: real συλλογισμός upon the basis of things which seem to be, but are not, ἔνδοξα pertinent to the subject at hand (fake ἔνδοξα: *Top.* A 1, 100b23–25; merely apparent relevance of the premisses: *SE* 8, 169b 20–23). If we take this statement to articulate (albeit negatively) criteria for the soundness of dialectical arguments and the overall integrity of dialectical procedures, then Aristotle may be exonerated of the charge of having himself committed a “formal fallacy” by making misleading forms of expression out to be the causes of formally defective, or

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle's objection to the principle: “That would be like if it would necessarily follow for a hot man to have a fever if the man who gets a fever is hot” (*SE* 5, 167b18–20). It is not clear to me how this is relevant to the principle under discussion, even if it is an example of fallacy by the consequent.

invalid, argument (see Kirwan 1979, 38ff.).<sup>29</sup> The criterion of validity is, in any case, inappropriate for evaluating the dialectical soundness of an argument, and irrelevant to semantic and syntactic mechanisms of deception on the propositional level.

The study of what makes certain unacceptable premisses seem acceptable takes an important place in Aristotle's theory of eristic argument. I have presented an account of why this is so. Aristotle's concept of eristic argument is dependent upon his concept of dialectical argument insofar as eristic is conceived as *counterfeit* dialectic. Dialectic is conceived as deductive argument upon the basis of  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$ ; eristic is argument from premisses which seem to be  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  but are not, or apparently deductive argument from real or merely apparent  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  (see *Top.* A 1, 100a29–b26; *SE* 2, 165b3–4 and 7–8; and especially *SE* 11, 171b3–12 and 171b34–7, noted above). As I have argued in the first section of this article, the lack of commitment to  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  in eristic reflects the lack of a co-operative morale and rule-governed procedure which Aristotle imputes to dialectical debate in general in determining it as argument from  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$ . An aspect of this morale is that one introduce only those propositions as premisses which are reputable and acceptable in the sense of Aristotle's concept of  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  (seeming true to all, most, or the wise, etc.) – or at least more reputable and acceptable than the conclusion sought. Given the importance of the concept of  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  for Aristotle's characterization of premiss-taking in dialectic, it is understandable that Aristotle provides in his theory of eristic argument an account of how certain propositions seem to be, but are not, acceptable.

Considering the sophistication of this theory of deception by false acceptability, it is likely, at least, that the epistemic capacity for *grasping* “the nature of the false” in eristic principles is not minimal. In fact, because Aristotle tends to consider eristic arguments fair game in the absence of something better, eristic imposes a significant burden upon those who would resist the inferences made from eristic premisses. And the terrain between logic, semantics and grammar which must be covered in order to debunk fake  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\xi\alpha$  is rather something for those who can appreciate “finer points” than for those who are capable of comprehending “even just a little” (see *Top.* A 1, 100b29–101a1).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This does not directly address Kirwan's further criticism of Aristotle's classification of fallacies, which must be defended through an interpretation of Aristotle's argument for the reduction of the thirteen types of fallacies to *ignoratio elenchi* (*SE* 6).

<sup>30</sup> Pieter Sjoerd Hasper, Marko Malink and Christof Rapp made comments on earlier drafts of this paper and in so doing bettered my argument much, which I most gratefully acknowledge.

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