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Ethical Method in Aristotle:
Setting Out the Phainomena

I

Recent work on Aristotle's method in ethics has enabled us more than ever to appreciate the power and sophistication of his thinking in this area. We now have a much firmer basis for believing that we may have important lessons to learn from Aristotle about the nature and limits of moral theory. However, it is not yet clear what those important lessons are for there is fundamental disagreement about the nature of Aristotle's method. Some claim that the moral theory of the Ethics rests on principles that are not susceptible to any form of rational justification; others claim that, although moral first principles cannot be scientifically demonstrated, they can be justified through dialectical arguments - arguments based on opinions that are widely shared or held by figures who can speak with some authority about the matters in question. Still another view has it that Aristotle bases his moral theory on certain principles about human nature drawn from his psychology and metaphysics.

The diversity of these views reflects, I believe, the complexity of the phenomena we have to account for in a study of Aristotle's method in ethics. There are passages that provide some support for each of the views I have mentioned, and it is therefore hard to see how the divergent strands of his thought can be made coherent. Whether or not we can hope for a coherent picture in the end, the first task, as Aristotle says, is to set out the phenomena and discuss the difficulties. The phenomena I have in mind are not only remarks about ethical method but passages in which we can clearly see methodological principles being applied. I hope to show that more work is needed on this first stage of a study of Aristotle's ethical method; what we need and do not yet have is a careful and complete setting out of the phenomena.¹

Several of the key passages on method in the ethical treatises are thought to be related to Aristotle's theory of dialectic. For instance, the well known passage that serves as a preface to the discussion of *akrasia* in NE VII has been described as a convenient summary of what dialectic meant for Aristotle. In the first part of my discussion I will give a brief account of dialectic as it is portrayed in the Topics, and will try to show that it is quite different from the "method of endoxa" described in NE VII. I will then turn to the discussion of happiness in NE I, and argue that some of the procedures used by Aristotle fit the method of endoxa, but some do not. Finally, I will try to determine the exact role of endoxa in the discussion of happiness in NE I, and make a foray into the question, What sort of rational justification, if any, does Aristotle offer for his ethical first principles?

II

Dialectic, as Aristotle understands it in the Topics, is a particular

kind of rule-governed discussion.² The kinds of questions appropriately addressed in a dialectical discussion are those over which people are divided in their views - i.e. matters of controversy and doubt.³ Such discussions apparently take place in public and are always between two individuals, a questioner and an answerer. The answerer either chooses or is assigned a "thesis" to defend. The aim of the questioner is to refute the thesis by establishing its contradictory.⁴ The questioner must formulate his questions so that they admit of a simple yes or no answer. Aristotle sets out rules and guidelines for both questioner and answerer.⁵ Some of the rules are of the nature of requirements that must be met if the discussion is to qualify as dialectical; others are designed to tell one how to achieve success as a dialectician. Success is not determined by whether one succeeds, as an answerer, in defending a thesis, or, as a questioner, in refuting the opponent's thesis; one might lose the debate but still perform better than one's adversary if, for example, you had to defend a thesis that was relatively easy to refute but you made it quite difficult for your opponent.⁶

The currency of dialectical discussion is opinion rather than truth.⁷ The premises of dialectical arguments are endoxa-"reputable opinions", following the felicitous translation of Jonathan Barnes.⁸ Reputable opinions can be ranked in terms of their degree of reputability; some endoxa are more endoxon than others.⁹ In formulating his arguments, the dialectician will make the best use of the available resources; in other words, his arguments will be based on the most reputable opinions available.¹⁰ (The answerer must be careful to concede only premises that have a fairly high degree of reputability relative to the thesis he is defending.)¹¹ The dialectician will sometimes need to base his argument on premises which he recognizes to be false; sometimes he will argue for false conclusions.¹² This is in no way incompatible with dialectic since what is important in dialectical arguments is not whether the premises are true but whether they are reputable opinions.

For if it depends on false but reputable premises, the argument is dialectical (logikos); if on true but not reputable premises, it is a bad argument [i.e., from the point of view of dialectic]. (Top. VIII 12, 162b 27-28.)

Aristotle contrasts dialectical discussions with sophistical discussions, on the one hand, and discussions for the sake of teaching and learning on the other.¹³ Participants in a sophistical discussion rely on premises which only appear to be endoxa and their arguments are often apparent but not true syllogisms.¹⁴ Sophistic discussions are purely competitive; contestants will use virtually any means to achieve their end of appearing to defeat the opponent, or at least of not suffering defeat.¹⁵ At the other end of the spectrum are discussions between teacher and learner - "didactic" discussions. Here the commitment to truth is absolute: the learner, who plays the part of answerer in the discussion, must always say what he thinks is true, and the teacher qua teacher must always show what is true.

Aristotle says that dialectical discussions are undertaken for the sake of "training, testing and inquiry."¹⁶ The dialectician gains proficiency in

argumentation since he must argue with valid syllogisms, and must learn to recognize fallacies. Sometimes such discussions are undertaken not just for the sake of training and practice in argumentation, but for the purpose of testing a knowledge claim. The defender of a thesis may claim to know that the thesis is true, and dialectic provides one with the ability to test such claims. (Aristotle thus speaks of peirastike, the "art of testing", as a part or form of dialectic.)¹⁷ Even though the aim of dialectical arguments is not to establish truth - indeed, as we have seen, the dialectician sometimes argues for false conclusions and rests his arguments on false premises - nevertheless, such arguments may be useful for philosophical inquiry insofar as they indicate the extent to which different views can be supported by reputable opinions. An initially paradoxical thesis might seem more plausible if one can show that it is implied by certain views that are commonly held. (Some of Socrates' arguments seem to fit this description.) Dialectic may also help us in philosophy by enabling us to argue both for and against a given thesis: Aristotle suggests that when we are engaged in a philosophical inquiry (not a dialectical discussion), the ability to argue both sides will help us to see more readily where the truth lies.¹⁸ This ability to see both strengths and weaknesses in a position is especially useful when one is inquiring into the first principles of a particular science or discipline, for since the principles are primitive in relation to the other truths of the science, the relevant reputable opinions are all one has to go on.¹⁹

While practice in dialectic is useful for philosophy in several different ways, Aristotle clearly treats dialectical discussion and philosophical inquiry as distinct, nonoverlapping activities: insofar as one is engaged in dialectical discussion one is not engaged in philosophical inquiry, and vice versa.²⁰ In the Topics the terms "dialectic" and "dialectical" are used exclusively for the kind of rule-governed discussion I have described. Aristotle does not speak of a "dialectical method" of doing philosophy; he does not distinguish a type of dialectic that might be used in a philosophical investigation, nor does he speak of a "philosophical use of dialectic." All of these notions, as far as I can see, are simply not to be found in the Topics.

III

I now want to turn to the familiar passage at the beginning of Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* in Bk. VII of the *NE* in which he outlines the method of inquiry he will use in the subsequent investigation. This method has been carefully scrutinized in a number of recent discussions,²¹ and I will not offer a detailed examination. For my purposes, it will be enough, as in the case of dialectic in the Topics, to sketch the main features of the method.

Aristotle gives the fullest description of the method in NE VII 1, 22 but there are a few other passages in the ethical treatises that supply useful information, most notably in the discussions of happiness and friendship in Books I and VII of the EE respectively.²³ Although endoxa or "reputable opinions" seem to be a prominent feature of the method, Aristotle does not use the terms "dialectic" or "dialectical" in any of these passages. As we shall see, it is not at all clear that Aristotle would approve of characterizing the method as "dialectical" or labelling it as "the method of dialectic." It therefore seems prudent to follow Jonathan Barnes's lead, and to refer to it as the "method of endoxa."

The method instructs us to begin by gathering and setting out the various phainomena pertaining to the subject of inquiry. In the case of a science like astronomy the phainomena would be the observations of the movements of the heavenly bodies,²⁴ but in the case of acrasia the phainomena are the endoxa or the reputable opinions about it. In the next stage we bring out and discuss the conflicts among the endoxa and the various aporiai or difficulties that we encounter in thinking about the subject. In the final stage we attempt to solve the aporiai and, if possible, to show the truth "of all the endoxa...or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative."

The endoxa we begin with are often not clearly formulated, and one of the ways of solving the aporiai is to clarify the endoxa by making distinctions and substituting terminology which is more precise.²⁵ Conflicts among the endoxa may disappear once these are clarified and given more precise formulations. Using the same techniques we show in what ways the reputable opinions are true and in what ways they are not true. It is not always possible to "save" the endoxa in this way; sometimes we may simply have to reject some of the endoxa. Given that endoxa can be ranked in terms of their reputability, if we have to sacrifice some we should always sacrifice those which are relatively less reputable and preserve those which are most reputable or most "authoritative." Through the process of clarifying, sifting and pruning, we should try to maximize the degree of reputability within the set of accepted endoxa while preserving overall consistency.

One naturally wonders why Aristotle thinks that a satisfactory account of acrasia will justify, if not all, then most of the endoxa about it. There is an important assumption underlying the method which is made explicit in a few places. Consider the following methodological remarks at the beginning of EE I 6:

About all these matters we must seek conviction through arguments, using the phainomena as evidence and paradigms (marturiois kai paradeigmasi). It would be best that all men should agree with what we are going to say, but if not, then that all should in some way agree; and this they will do if they can be brought to shift their ground (hoper

metabibazomenoi poiesousin). For each individual has something to contribute to the truth, and with this as a starting-point we must give some sort of proof about these matters. For by advancing from sayings which are true but not clear he will arrive at sayings that are [both true and] clear, always exchanging the more familiar and confused statements for those which are more knowable.²⁶

All endoxa apparently contain some truth;²⁷ the endoxa need to be refined, more precisely expressed, so that their truth will be clear. This assumption is weakened somewhat in the NE VII in that Aristotle there implies that some of the endoxa may have to be rejected.²⁸ But still the goal is something approaching a consensus omnium. So an important assumption underlying the method of endoxa is that all or most endoxa about a given subject are at least partially true; this assumption explains the requirement that our account not only accord with but justify all or most of the endoxa.²⁹

IV

If we now compare the accounts I have given of dialectic in the Topics and the method of endoxa in the NE, we immediately notice a number of superficial contrasts but also, I think, some deeper and more substantial differences. The method of endoxa does not involve a rule-governed discussion between two individuals who take on the roles of questioner and answerer. The kind of inquiry envisioned by the method could be carried out by a group of several people, but it could just as easily be conducted by one person working alone. Further, while the business of setting out and solving aporiai is a prominent feature of the method of endoxa, it does not seem to play any essential role in the dialectical discussions described in the Topics.

We notice deeper dissimilarities between the two activities when we reflect on the kinds of arguments used and the role of endoxa. As we have seen, it is sometimes advisable for a dialectician to base his arguments on false premises and to argue for false conclusions. Arguments of this sort would seem to be completely out of place in the method of endoxa; if the aim is to show the truth contained in the endoxa, it is difficult to see how arguments from false premises or to false conclusions would ever be appropriate. Further, the role played by endoxa in the two activities seems quite different. The dialectician does not try to justify all or most of the endoxa about a given subject. His aim in a dialectical discussion is limited to defending or refuting a specific thesis. He must build his arguments on the strongest premises he can muster, i.e. on premises that are as endoxon as possible. The practitioner of the method of endoxa, on the other hand, is not bound by this requirement; Aristotle does not stipulate that when we attempt to reconcile and justify the endoxa we must argue from premises that are themselves endoxa.³⁰ In fact, his own arguments in the discussion of acrasia (and in the discussion of friendship in EE VII) rest on premises which are pretty clearly not endoxa.³¹ The roles played by endoxa in the two activities seem in

a way to be reversed. Though the conclusion the dialectician argues for need not be endoxon, the supporting premises must be as endoxon as possible. The practitioner of the method of endoxa, on the other hand, need not base his arguments on endoxa, but the views he supports or justifies must be as endoxon as possible.

In view of these substantial differences between the method of endoxa and dialectic as described in the Topics, it seems quite mistaken to say that the description of the method in NE VII 1 gives "a compact summary of the procedure" involved in dialectical discussions, or that "the account of the dialectical method in the Topics and its practice in the Ethics is close."³² If we want to continue to describe the method of endoxa as Aristotle's dialectical method, then we should at least be clear about the fact that this method does not correspond to the description of dialectic in the Topics.

The prominence of endoxa in the method of endoxa has naturally led people to look for connections between the method and what Aristotle says about dialectic in the Topics. However, I think it is more illuminating to compare the method with Aristotle's conception of what is involved in a scientific inquiry. As Owen has suggested,³³ Aristotle seems to have used the term phainomena as a variant for endoxa because he saw a parallel between the role of endoxa in a philosophical inquiry and that of perceptual phainomena in scientific investigations. In the investigation of some natural phenomenon like earthquakes or eclipses we have to begin with an extensive familiarity with the phainomena - the various observations that we and others have made in regard to these events. Aristotle typically criticizes theories of his predecessors for failure to account for some of the relevant phainomena, or for proposing hypotheses that directly conflict with some of the phainomena. In a well known passage in the De Caelo he says that the ultimate test of a scientific theory is how well it accounts for the perceptible phainomena.³⁴

In a similar way, in the investigation of acrasia we must begin with a good grasp of the relevant phainomena. Here, however, the phainomena consist chiefly if not exclusively of the endoxa or reputable opinions about acrasia.³⁵ The test of an explanation of acrasia, as of a scientific explanation, is how well it accounts for the phainomena; an adequate explanation must account for all or most of the relevant phainomena.³⁶ In both the scientific and the philosophical cases, the proposed explanations or theories are presumably suggested by the phainomena, but they are not based on the phainomena in the sense that they could be inferred from them. In other words, the arguments and explanations we give in accounting for the endoxa about acrasia are not based on those endoxa. Consider, for example, Aristotle's appeal to two sorts of premises in a practical syllogism as a way of distinguishing different senses in which a man might act against his knowledge of what he ought to do.³⁷ This is a bit of technical apparatus that comes, not from endoxa, but from Aristotle's own philosophical workshop.

It is sometimes thought that according to the "dialectical method", or the method of endoxa, the arguments we use to account for the endoxa should

themselves be based on endoxa.³⁸ Nothing like this is said in Aristotle's description of the method in NE VII; moreover, the view seems quite implausible if one looks at the actual arguments and explanations put forward by Aristotle in his discussion of acrasia. I believe the source of this view is the belief that there is a close connection between the method of endoxa and dialectic as described in the Topics; since the premises of dialectical argument must be endoxa, one infers that the same is true of arguments or explanations in the method of endoxa. I hope what I have said about the dissimilarities between dialectic and the method of endoxa, and about the close parallel between this method and Aristotle's conception of scientific explanation, will make us question the view that arguments conducted in accordance with the method must be based on endoxa.

V

If what I have argued thusfar is correct, we should not look to the Topics for illumination in regard to Aristotle's method in ethics. But what about the so-called method of endoxa? It is often claimed that this is the method Aristotle follows, not only in his discussion of acrasia, but throughout the ethical works. In particular, the discussion of happiness in NE I is thought to be "dialectical," and to be a clear example of the kind of inquiry described in VII 1. We begin with a setting out of the endoxa about happiness, views held by the many and the wise. Aristotle then argues for his own account, i.e. in his argument appealing to the human ergon. Finally, he returns to the endoxa, and tries to show that his definition can account for all or most of them.³⁹ There is no explicit reference to aporiae in the discussion, but bringing to light the conflicts between the different views about the nature of happiness would presumably exemplify this part of the method of endoxa.

There has been some dispute about whether the premises of the ergon argument, which leads to Aristotle's account of happiness, are regarded as endoxa. Those who have claimed that the premises are not endoxa have inferred that this part of the discussion at least is not dialectical.⁴⁰ Now it is true that if the premises of the ergon argument are not endoxa, the argument would not fit the description of dialectical arguments given in the Topics. But, as I noted earlier, it does not seem to be a requirement of the method of endoxa that the account given be based on endoxa. There is no mention of such a requirement in the description of the method, and it is pretty clear that parts at least of Aristotle's account of acrasia are not based on endoxa. So even if the premises of the ergon argument are not endoxa, this would not prevent the discussion of happiness from being a clear application of the method of endoxa.

Although the stages of the discussion of happiness correspond pretty closely to the stages of the method of endoxa, there are some fairly important discrepancies, as we shall see. In view of these discrepancies, I think it would be misleading to say that Aristotle is following the method in his examination of happiness.

A key requirement of the method is that one give an account of, or show the truth of, all or most of the endoxa about the subject under investigation. But Aristotle apparently does not think that he needs to do this in the case of happiness. At the beginning of I 8, after he has presented his definition of happiness, he tells us that we should consider it not only in the light of the foregoing argument but also in the light of the legomena, the things said about happiness.⁴¹ He then tries to show that his account is in accord with the various legomena or endoxa concerning happiness.

Aristotle is not concerned, however, to preserve and vindicate all or most of the relevant endoxa. His choice of views against which he will test his account is quite selective. There is no mention of the commonly held views that the good is pleasure or honor or wealth. These views are included in the initial survey of endoxa in chapters 4 and 5, and are rather brusquely dismissed as inadequate.⁴² Aristotle apparently believes that since these endoxa are not even partially true there is no need for him to show that his account of happiness is in accord with them.

It is also noteworthy that nowhere in Book I does Aristotle suggest that there is an element of truth in all of the endoxa, or that we must advance from views that are true but unclear to views that are both true and clear. There is a passage in chapter 8 that is sometimes taken as an endorsement of this optimistic evaluation of endoxa. After Aristotle has gone through a list of the views against which he will test his theory, he mentions that some of these views have been held by many people and men of old, others by a few distinguished individuals. He then says:

It is unlikely that either of these [groups] should be entirely mistaken; it is more likely that they are right about some one thing or even about most. (1098b 28-29)

Hardie interprets this passage as saying that the various endoxa about happiness are "likely to be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects."⁴³ But we should note, first of all, that Aristotle is not talking about all of the endoxa but only a select group. Secondly, he does not say that each view held by the two groups of individuals will be right in one or even most respects, but that these groups will be right in one or even most of the views that they hold.

It is understandable that Aristotle would have a more reserved attitude towards the endoxa about happiness, given his view that one's conception of the good is strongly influenced by one's character.⁴⁴ He believes that most men are radically mistaken about happiness, equating it with an apolaustic life, a life he characterizes as "suitable to beasts."⁴⁵ Once bad habits are ingrained in one's character, there is little hope that arguments will have any effect on that person's values. Only the fortunate minority who have had a good upbringing will be able to derive genuine profit from lectures on ethics.⁴⁶

What I am suggesting, then, is that Aristotle does not try to vindicate all or most of the endoxa about happiness because he believes that one's

values are a reflection of one's character and that most people are likely to be deeply mistaken in their conception of the good life. The views which he argues are in harmony with his account of happiness are pretty clearly the views of people who have had the "right" sort of upbringing.

For some identify happiness with virtue, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom, others with these, or one of these, accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure; while others include also external prosperity. (1098b 23-26)

There is therefore an important difference between the method Aristotle follows in his discussion of happiness and the method of endoxa outlined in Book VII.

VI

If we compare the discussions of happiness in the EE and the NE, and in particular the remarks about method, we see much closer connections between the Eudemian discussion and the method of endoxa. For instance, the term phainomena is used several times as a variant for endoxa, in the same way as in NE VII; in the Nicomachean discussion this term is never used - instead we find either doxai (1095a 29) or legomena (1098b 10). This is probably not an accident for the term phainomena used in this way occurs fairly frequently in the EE but it does not seem to be used in this way in the NE except in the passage on the method of endoxa. In the discussion of friendship in EE VII, for example, there are some prefatory remarks of a methodological nature in which ta phainomena is used interchangeably with ta dokounta, and the term crops up again and again in later chapters of the book. By contrast, the term phainomena does not occur at all in the Nicomachean discussion of friendship.⁴⁷

Earlier we cited a passage in EE I in which it is said that all of the endoxa about happiness are true in some way or in some respect, and that what is needed is to clarify these views so that we eventually arrive at statements that are both true and clear. The aim of the inquiry is thus the same as that of the method of endoxa: to preserve and vindicate most if not all of the reputable opinions. This difference between the Eudemian and Nicomachean discussions of happiness is related to the terminological difference I mentioned - the fact that phainomena is used in the EE but not in the NE. In the case of a scientific investigation, the phainomena we begin with often seem puzzling and appear to conflict with each other. We assume that a correct explanation will solve the puzzles and show that all the phainomena are "well founded" and do not conflict with each other. It may sometimes be necessary to question some of the phainomena, but an explanation that committed us to rejecting a significant portion of the phainomena would not be acceptable. As noted earlier, the method of endoxa involves the same view of the relationship between explanation and endoxa: a satisfactory explanation must account for all or most of the endoxa. Because of this parallel, I suggested that

Aristotle thought it appropriate to use the term phainomena as a variant for endoxa in his description of the method; it is a way of bringing out the similarity he sees between, e.g., an account of the motions of the planets and an account of acrasia.

We have seen that in the EE he believes that an account of the same sort - one that vindicates most if not all of the endoxa - can be given in the case of happiness, while in the NE he does not hold this view. In the NE it is enough if his account of happiness accords with a select group of endoxa - the beliefs of those who are likely to have sound views about the nature of the good life. Moreover, the relationship between these endoxa and his account of happiness seems to be understood in a different way. Instead of the account vindicating, or showing the truth of, the endoxa, he speaks of the endoxa "agreeing with", or "being in harmony with" (sunadei) his account. Because of these differences, there is no longer a close parallel between the endoxa about happiness and the phainomena in a scientific inquiry; and I would suggest that this is why Aristotle does not use the term phainomena in his discussion of happiness in the NE.

We might plausibly suppose that Aristotle, at the time of writing the EE and the common Bk. VII, saw close parallels between the methods involved in ethical and scientific inquiries, and that he used similar terminology to draw attention to these parallels. Later, when he wrote the NE, he came to believe that there were important differences between the two methods, and he changed his terminology accordingly. This seems a plausible hypothesis; but there may be other equally plausible ways of explaining the methodological differences between the two treatises. The important point is that these differences exist, and that the method Aristotle follows in the Nicomachean discussion of happiness is not the method of endoxa.

VIII

What I have tried to do so far is not to give an account of Aristotle's method in ethics but to clarify the phainomena that need to be considered in giving such an account. I first argued that it is a mistake to view the method of endoxa of Bk. VII of the Ethics as essentially the same as the method of dialectical discussion described in the Topics. I then tried to show that, although Aristotle seems to follow the method of endoxa in his treatment of happiness in the EE, he uses somewhat different procedures in the parallel discussion in the NE. In my concluding remarks I would like to discuss, in a general and tentative way, the question I mentioned at the beginning: What sort of rational justification of ethical first principles can be given, according to Aristotle?

I mentioned three different answers that have been given by commentators. Some claim that, according to Aristotle, we come to acquire a grasp of ethical principles through habituation, and they are not susceptible to any

form of rational justification. Others argue that, although moral first principles cannot be scientifically demonstrated, they can be justified through dialectical arguments, i.e. arguments based on endoxa. A third view contends that Aristotle bases his moral theory, not on endoxa, but on certain principles about human nature drawn from his psychology and metaphysics.

The thought behind the first view might be sketched along the following lines. Aristotle holds that we cannot deliberate about ends, and in particular about the ultimate end which is the first principle of ethics; we must simply assume this end as the starting point of our deliberations. It might be thought that, even though we cannot deliberate about the ultimate end, there is surely some other form of reasoning which could be used to justify one conception of the end over another. However, Aristotle says at one point that the first principle of ethics is not supported by reasoning or argument, but it is virtue, either natural or produced by habituation, that is responsible for our grasp of the end.⁴⁸

What this passage says more exactly is that there is no logos didaskalikos of first principles, either in the theoretical or in the practical sphere. This is surprising in that, in the case of the sciences, although Aristotle holds that it is not possible to demonstrate first principles - i.e. to give an apodeixis of them - in the well known passage at the beginning of the Topics he suggests that such principles can be reached through dialectical arguments. Perhaps we can alleviate the difficulty by noting that the expression logos didaskalikos has a special technical meaning in the Topics, and is contrasted with the expression logos dialektikos.⁴⁹ A logos didaskalikos is in effect a scientific demonstration, while a logos dialektikos is an argument based on endoxa. If logos didaskalikos is understood in this technical sense in the passage in the Ethics, then Aristotle will be making the not surprising claim that our grasp of ethical first principles is not based on scientific demonstration. This would leave open the possibility that, even though a person's good character is chiefly responsible for his or her grasp of the end, one might be able to justify that end by a kind of argument different from scientific demonstration.

This is surely what Aristotle intended to say, for he does offer an argument for his account of the ultimate end, viz. the argument appealing to the human ergon. So the question becomes: How should we characterize Aristotle's argument for his first principle, given that it cannot be a scientific demonstration (or logos didaskalikos)? It is sometimes thought that if an argument is not demonstrative, it must be dialectical; and therefore the argument for the definition of happiness must be dialectical.

I think it would be generally agreed that at least part of Aristotle's argument for his first principle is dialectical. The critical survey of opinions about the nature of happiness in chapter 5 can be seen as part of the overall argument insofar as it eliminates several competing conceptions of the good. It is generally agreed that the specific arguments employed in this critique are based on endoxa, and thus fit the description of dialectical arguments.

However, whether the argument appealing to the human ergon is dialectical is not so clear, and there is much disagreement among the commentators. Cooper believes that the premises are clearly introduced as endoxa, but Hardie and others have argued that they are derived from Aristotle's scientific works and therefore not endoxa.⁵⁰ Irwin has recently argued that, although the premises of the ergon argument are derived from the De Anima and Metaphysics, they are based on endoxa - non-ethical endoxa -, and so the argument can still be viewed as dialectical.⁵¹

Irwin believes that Aristotle needs to go, and does go, outside of ethics in order to find adequate support for his ethical first principle. However, there does not seem to be any indication in the text that principles from other disciplines are being appealed to. And further, we should bear in mind that Aristotle refers to the definition of happiness as a first principle, and says that because it is a first principle we must not ask for the 'why', the dihoti; showing the 'that', the hoti, is sufficient.⁵² In other words, since the account of happiness is a first principle, it is not possible to derive it from more fundamental principles. So the ergon argument is not an argument that shows the dihoti - that gives the ground or explanation of the truth of the conclusion. The premises of the argument cannot be prior to, and more knowable than, the conclusion.

In I 13 of the Posterior Analytics Aristotle distinguishes between syllogisms of the hoti and those of the dihoti, i.e. between those that show that the conclusion is true and those that show not only that it is true but why it is true.⁵³ This is clearly the distinction referred to in the passage following the ergon argument. We have a syllogism of the hoti when the middle term is not the cause (the aitia) of the conclusion's being true, but it is more familiar and better known to us; the conclusion, on the other hand, is better known or more knowable in itself.⁵⁴ Applying this to the ergon argument, Aristotle's point would be that the premises are more familiar and better known to us, but the conclusion is more knowable in itself. The argument would only provide a justification of the first principle in the weak sense that it would provide plausible grounds for someone who did not yet have an adequate grasp of the principle. Once one has a grasp of the definition as a first principle, one sees that it is not possible to justify it by deriving it from more fundamental truths. This seems to be the lesson we are to draw from Aristotle's comments on the ergon argument.

In the light of these results, the question whether the premises of the argument are endoxa does not seem so important. However, the fact that the hoti - dihoti distinction is used in connection with the argument may be an indication that Aristotle did not regard the premises as having the status of endoxa. For although a syllogism of the hoti is not an apodeixis or demonstration in the strict sense, it is nevertheless a kind of apodeixis.⁵⁵ The premises are, by assumption, known to be true, and the conclusion is validly inferred. Dialectical arguments, in which the premises are laid down not as truths but as endoxa, are always contrasted with apodeictic arguments.

These questions obviously need further inquiry. As I said at the outset,

my chief objective in this paper is the prior task of setting out and clarifying the data that we need to consider in giving an account of Aristotle's method in ethics. I have tried to show that these data or phainomena are more complex than is usually supposed. In particular, I have argued that it may be quite misleading to speak of the method of endoxa as the dialectical method, and that it is a mistake to think there are close parallels between this method and the concept of dialectic discussed in the Topics. It is often claimed that Aristotle follows the method of endoxa in his discussion of happiness in NE I; I suggested that although the procedures used by Aristotle in the EE seem to accord with the method, the procedures of the Nicomachean discussion are different in important ways. With a clearer grasp of the complexity of the phainomena, we should be in a better position to understand exactly what Aristotle's method in ethics is.

Notes

1. I would like to stress that this paper is a report of work in progress; suggestions and criticisms would be welcome.

2. This comes out most clearly in Topics VIII, passim, but see also II 5. In the introduction to his edition and translation of the Topics, Jacques Brunschwig gives an illuminating account of the rules and procedures involved in dialectical discussions; see Aristotè, Topiques, Livres I - IV (Paris, 1967), pp. xxii-xxx.

3. 104 a 3-8, 104b 1-17; 105a 3-9; cf. 116a 1-12.

4. See Brunschwig, op. cit., pp. xxviii-xxix.

5. Rules and guidelines for the questioner are given in VIII 1-4, for the answerer in VIII 5-11.

6. Cf. 159a 38-b 35, 161b 5-33; cf. Brunschwig, "Aristotle on Arguments without Winners or Losers", Wissenschaftskolleg Jahrbuch (1984/85), 31-40.

7. See, e.g. Top. 105b 30-31, 162b 31-33; cf. Anal. Prior 46a 8-10 65a 35, Anal. Post. 81b 18-23.

8. "Aristotle and the Methods of Ethics", Revue Internationale de Philosophie (1980), pp. 490-511.

9. 104a 8-12; cf. 100b 21-23. Robert Bolton has plausibly argued that the order in which Aristotle lists the different types of endoxa corresponds to their degree of reputability *see* ("The Epistemological Basis of Aristotelian Dialectic" (unpublished)) opinions held by virtually everyone are more reputable than those held by most people; opinions accepted by experts or "the wise" are reputable, but less reputable than opinions accepted by all or most people (cf. 104a 9-12). Aristotle speaks of opinions or premises as more and less reputable in VIII 5-6; cf. Soph. El. 183b 5-6.

10. See esp. Soph. El. 183b 5-6, Anal. Post. 81b 18-22.

11. 159a 38-b 35.

12. 161a 24-33; cf. Anal. Post. 81b 18-22.

13. 159a 25-36; cf. 161a 24-28, Soph. El. 165a 38b 11.

14. Soph. El. 165b 7-8, Top. 100b 23-101a 4.

15. Cf. 164b 8-15.

16. 159a 25-34, 161a 24-26.

17. 169b 25-27; cf. 171b 4-6, 172a 17-36.

18. 101a 34-36; notice that 101a 30-34 also concerns the usefulness of training in dialectic in contexts different from formal dialectical discussions.

19. 101a 36 - b4.
20. See, for example, 155b 7-16, 105b 30-31.
21. The best account is in Barnes, op. cit.; cf. also G.E.L. Owen, "Tithenai ta Phainomena", in Aristote et les problemes de methode, ed. S. Mansion (Louvain - Paris, 1961), 83-103; T. H. Irwin, "First Principles in Aristotle's Ethics," in Midwest Studies in Philosophy 3 (1978), 252-272, and "Aristotle's Methods of Ethics," in Studies in Aristotle, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Washington, D.C., 1981), 193-223; M. Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances," in Language and Logos, eds. Nussbaum and Schofield (Cambridge, 1982), 267-293.
22. 1145b 2-7.
23. 1216b 26-35, 1235b 13-18; cf. Phys. 211a 7-11.
24. See Anal. Pr. 46a 17-24.
25. EE 1216b 32-35, 1220a 15-18, 1235b 16-18.
26. 1216b 26-34; cf. NE 1138b 25-34.
27. Cf. Metaph. 993a 30-b 6, Rhet. 1355a 14-18.
28. Cf. Top. 162b 27-28.
29. For arguments that Aristotle's method involves giving an account or explanation of, e.g., acrasia (and not just solving various aporiai and harmonizing the endoxa), see Irwin, "Aristotle's Methods" (cited above, n. 21), 199.
30. Pace W.F.R. Hardie, Aristotle's Ethical Theory, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1980), 38, and Irwin, "First Principles" (cited above, n. 21), 260.
31. Cf. 1146b 35 - 1147a 10, 1147a 24-35, EE 1236a 16-31.
32. See Hardie, op. cit., 38-9, and Irwin, "First Principles," n. 19.
33. Op. cit., 90-1.
34. 306a 16-17.
35. Perhaps not exclusively; cf. 1145b 25-29. One would expect Aristotle to say that Socrates' view conflicts with the other phainomena, not with the phainomena, (since his view is one of the phainomena).
36. See the passages cited by Owen, op. cit., 90.
37. 1146b 35 - 1147a 10; consider also the appeal to the doctrine of "focal meaning" in the account of the phainomena concerning friendship: EE 1236a 16-30.

38. Cf. Irwin, "Aristotle's Methods", 201.

39. The first stage begins in I 4. The critique of the endoxa, which forms part of the argument for Aristotle's own account, is found in I 5-6; the positive argument for his account is given in chapter 7. Finally, the testing of his account against the endoxa is conducted in chapter 8.

40. See, e.g., L.H.G. Greenwood, Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Book VI (Cambridge, 1909), pp. 138ff., and Hardie, *op.cit.*, 39-40.

41. 1098b 9-11.

42. 1095b 19-30, 1096a 5-9.

43. *Op.cit.*, 38; Hardie follows Ross's translation. Irwin's translation (Indianapolis, 1985) is more accurate; see Grant's commentary, *ad.loc.*

44. See 1151a 15-19, 1140b 11-20, 1144b 31-36.

45. 1095b 19-20.

46. 1095a 2-11, 1095b 4-9.

47. 1235b 13-18; cf. 1235a 31, 123ba 25-26, 1236b 22. Aporia and lusis are found at 1235b 14, 18, 1235a 4, 1244b 21; 1235b 14, 1245b 14.

48. 1151a 15-19.

49. 161a 24-26, 165a 38 - b 4, 159a 25-30.

50. J. Cooper, Reason and Human Good in Aristotle (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 69-70; Hardie, *op.cit.*, 38-9.

51. "Aristotle's Methods", 208.

52. 1098a 34 - b 3; cf. Top. 100b 19-21.

53. 78a 22 - b 13.

54. 78a 26-30.

55. 78a 28-30, 35-37.