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The Epistemological Function of Aristotelian Dialectic and Its Relationship to First Principles *

Aristoteles Diyalektiğinin Epistemolojik İşlevi ve İlk İlkelerle İlişkisi

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze, from an epistemological perspective, Aristotle's claim in *Topics* I.2 that dialectic is "a way leading to the first principles." Although Aristotle defines the dialectical method as a type of syllogism that derives its premises from *endoxa* (generally accepted opinions), he simultaneously assigns this method the function of reaching the foundations of the philosophical sciences. This creates a problem concerning how an investigation proceeding from *endoxa* can provide an epistemic transition to the certain and indemonstrable first principles upon which demonstration (*apodeixis*) is based. The article addresses this problem in two stages: First, the position of the concepts of *endoxa* and *phainomena* (phenomena), which constitute the subject matter of dialectic, is evaluated within Aristotle's epistemology. It is demonstrated that the concept of phenomenon carries a dual meaning, showing that *endoxa* are not limited to common beliefs but include the experience-based judgments of *tekhne* holders as well. Second, the functioning of the dialectical practice used in Aristotle's works is analyzed, arguing that its examinational (*eksetastike*) structure enables the attainment of a science's definitional principle through a systematic process of *diaporesis* (examination of both sides of a puzzle). The article does not attribute meanings to dialectic such as "proving" or "discovering" principles; rather, it concludes that dialectic functions as a method that establishes the necessity of these principles by organizing the internal debates of philosophical disciplines and the prevailing opinions on their subject matters within specific objectives.

Keywords: Dialectic, endoxa, phainomena, Aristotle, first principles.

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Introduction

One of the most significant problems in Aristotelian epistemology is the question of how first principles are known. Across all his works where this subject is discussed, the philosopher maintains a consistent judgment: first principles, being primary (*arkhe*) and immediate (*amesos*), are indemonstrable (*anapodeiktikon*) (Aristotle, 1995b, 71b20-21, 72a7-8, 72b18-22). As a consequence of this position, Aristotle frequently reiterates that demanding a demonstration of first principles would lead to circularity or infinite regress, thereby making knowledge impossible; thus, first principles must exist and be indemonstrable (Aristotle, 1995b, 72b5-25). Within this epistemological framework—which, from a foundationalist perspective, necessitates the existence of certain fundamental principles at the base of all knowledge that are more reliable than what is known, certain, and the initiators of the act of knowing—Aristotle's theory of first principles seems to present a flawless picture in its presentation. However, this perfection, specifically the "indemonstrability" thesis, also reveals certain vulnerabilities when faced with the question of where the logical and epistemic trust in these principles originates.

This indemonstrability thesis in the *Posterior Analytics* is also emphasized in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, Aristotle points to a distinction he meticulously applies in his methodological approach: in the process of grounding, two naturally different types of reasoning (*logos*) must be distinguished: those starting from first principles and those leading toward first principles (Aristotle, 2009, 1095a31-34). The first type of reasoning systematically explains things through first principles known in themselves, within the context of the cause-effect relationship (Aristotle, 1995b, 72a30-32, 76a19-20, 76b23-24, 1995a, 64b34-36). Demonstration begins with principles that are best known, immediate, non-mediated, and peculiar to a science; a demonstrative syllogism is one that necessarily draws a further conclusion from principles possessing these qualities (Aristotle, 2003, 100a25, 1995a, 24b18). On the other hand, the reasoning or method (*logos*) leading toward first principles is not understandable by tracing causes backward as in a demonstrative syllogism, because principles are the primary cause—the cause of all caused things. But how are these "given things" or principles to be known? For instance, how shall we find

definitions (*horismos*), which play a vital role in both demonstration and the syllogism? How are we to grasp these principles that are indemonstrable precisely because they lie at the foundation of demonstration?

The radical difference between reasoning from first principles and reasoning toward first principles -since the possibility of the latter depends on the existence of the former- rightfully legitimizes the question of how indemonstrable first principles can be known. In fact, the philosopher does not engage with this question in proportion to the magnitude of his claim. We encounter very little in the entire Aristotelian corpus regarding how first principles are known, and these accounts are largely simple, obscure, and difficult to relate to one another. While Aristotle provides a detailed account of demonstration, the first of the aforementioned types of reasoning, he says very little about the second beyond a few formal explanations.

There are three major explanations in Aristotelian thought regarding how principles are obtained. According to the most famous of these, accepted as the "official doctrine" in *Posterior Analytics* II.19, first principles are universal intelligibles starting from sensation (*aisthesis*) and grasped immediately by the *nous* with the help of induction (*epogoge*). The second explanation regarding the acquisition of principles at the foundation of knowledge is found in *Physics* I.1. Here, after stating the aim of all philosophical disciplines, not just the natural sciences, as the knowledge of first principles, Aristotle presents the method leading to this knowledge as "a way (*hodos*) from what is best known to us toward what is best known in itself and by nature." Many commentators argue that this expression, much like in *Posterior Analytics* II.19, refers to a way that begins with sensation and concludes with a noetic activity.[1] In contrast to these explanations focused on sensation, experience, and *nous*, Aristotle offers a striking third alternative in *Topics* I.2:

> Furthermore, [dialectic] is useful in connection with the first principles of each science (*peri ekasten epistemen arkhon*): for it is impossible to say anything about the principles peculiar to a science (*adunaton eipein ti peri auton*) based

[1] For an ideal representation of this view, see R. Bolton, who attempts to reconcile the famous passages on method in *Physics* I.1 with *Posterior Analytics* II.19 and aims to show that the idea of Aristotle resorting to the dialectical method in his theoretical inquiries is an illusion (Bolton, 1991, pp. 1–29).

> on those very principles, since they are prior to everything else; instead, it is necessary to deal with each of them through *endoxa*. This process is peculiar (*ousa*) to dialectic, and it is the task most appropriate to it. For through its examinational nature (*eksetastike*), it possesses the way (*hodon*)[2] to the principles of all methods of inquiry (*ton methodan arkhas*) (Aristotle, 1960, 101a25-b5).[3]

The use of dialectic as a *way leading to first principles* has had an inspiring effect on Aristotelian studies. *Topics* I.2, like the passages in the *Physics* and *Posterior Analytics*, does not offer an explicit methodological proposal. However, it maintains a distinct argument regarding the relationship of the dialectical method to first principles: (i) It is impossible to say anything about the principles peculiar to a science based on themselves because they precede all knowledge. (ii) [In this case] it is necessary to deal with each principle through *endoxa*. (iii) Thus, dialectic, by virtue of its examinational faculty, will provide a way to the principles of the sciences; indeed, this is its essential work. Although Aristotle's statements are quite clear, accepting his claim causes a fundamental problem for the philosopher's epistemology. The problem can be stated as follows: Can dialectic, as a method proceeding from *endoxa*, be considered to reach a level of knowledge higher than the knowledge that constitutes the ground of certainty? To answer this question, the explanations offered in *Posterior Analytics* II.19 and *Physics* I.1 regarding the acquisition of first principles will not be addressed here. The focus of this study will remain solely on the question of what it means in Aristotelian thought for dialectic to be "a way to first principles," as stated above as its essential work (*ousia*). To answer this, the argument in *Topics* I.2 will be taken into account to clarify the constitutive concepts of the dialectical method and determine the place of these concepts within the philosopher's epistemological scheme.

The Subject of the Dialectical Method: *Endoxa* and *Phainomena*

Aristotle claims that what distinguishes types of syllogisms is not their

[2] Smith provides a good example to understand the use of the word *hodon* in *Topics* I.2: "there is no passage from one to the other" (*ouk echei hodon eis allêla*) in *Metaphysics* I.4 1055a6-7. In this sense, *echei hodon* means having a way through itself. Therefore, the expression in the *Topics* means that "dialectic has a way," not that "dialectic includes the route" (Smith, 1993, p. 354).

[3] All directly quoted text has been revised by me, taking into account the original Greek sources.

logical form, but the quality of the premises that constitute the subject of reasoning (Castalli, 2020, p. 23). According to this understanding, there is a single account of the syllogism in the *Prior Analytics* that applies to both dialectic and demonstration. A syllogism (*sullogismos*) is "an argument (*logos*) in which (i) certain things having been laid down (*tethenton*), (ii) something different from what is stated (*keimenon*) (iii) results/follows of necessity (*ex anagkes sumbainei*) through those things laid down"(Aristotle, 1995c, 100a 25-26, 1995a, 24b17-20, 24b17-23). The prominent features of the syllogism, defined quite similarly in both the *Topics* and the *Prior Analytics*, can be listed as follows: (i) There are at least two premises laid down. (ii) The conclusion is different from the premises. (iii) The conclusion follows necessarily from the premises.[4] In *Topics* I.1, Aristotle states that demonstration and dialectic are subject to the same definition of syllogism, and the difference between them lies only in the premises used in the activity of syllogizing (Aristotle, 1995a, 24a25-28). While demonstrative syllogisms are constructed from true (*alethes*) and primary (*arkhe*) premises, dialectical syllogisms (*dialektikos sullogismos*) are those that draw conclusions from *endoxa* (Aristotle, 1995c, 100b17-18).

In Aristotelian thought, *endoxa* provides the answer to what dialectic is precisely concerned with as a type of syllogism. Therefore, the definition of dialectic as "reasoning proceeding from *endoxa*" is a description Aristotle repeats not only in the *Topics* but across many of his works. Following the order of the *Organon*, we can list some of these as follows:

> i. As we stated in the *Topics*, dialectic judges on the basis of phenomena and *endoxa* (*phainomenon kai endoxon*) (Aristotle, 1995a, 24b1-2).
>
> ii. According to opinion (*kata men oun doksan*) and clearly for the purpose of making a merely dialectical inference, one must only consider whether the syllogism consists of *endoxa* (Aristotle, 1995b, 81b18-23).
>
> iii. Toward the contradiction of a given thesis, dialectic syllogizes according to what is acceptable, namely, the *endoxa* (Aristotle, 1995d, 65b1-4).

The fact that *endoxa*, an ordinary Greek word, did not find a place in the philosophical vocabulary until Aristotle, combined with the possibility

[4] For different determinations of the basic characteristics a syllogism must have, based on the definitions in the *Topics* and *Prior Analytics*, see: (Striker, 2016, pp. 79–80). For a determination that specifically considers Islamic logicians (Thom, 2016, p. 293).

of its confusion with many other concepts the philosopher frequently uses in epistemological debates—such as *doksa*, *pistis*, and *eikos*—stands as an obstacle to understanding exactly what *endoxa* is. One of the best examples of this is the interpretation of *endoxa* as "probability" or "likelihood" in both classical and contemporary literature. Moving from a passage in the *Prior Analytics*, some commentators saw no harm in using "probability" and "plausibility" in the translation of *endoxa* (Le Blond, 1996, pp. 9–16).[5] However, Aristotle nowhere indicates that the meaning of probability is one of the possible meanings of the term *endoksos* in its philosophical use. Indeed, the philosopher possesses other concepts such as *eikos* and *pistis* for meanings like probability, likelihood, plausibility, or belief in general.[6] Perhaps being aware of this distinction, contemporary Aristotelian commentators prefer different translations and use "received opinions," "generally accepted opinions," or similar equivalents for *ta endoxa*.[7]

One reason for associating *endoxa* with meanings like probability or likelihood is the similarity between *doksa* and *endoxa*, which share a common root and express a mode of cognition inferior and insufficient compared to *episteme*. If the relationship between *doksa* and *endoxa* is not expressed correctly, there is a risk of serious misunderstanding. Although it is common in the Aristotelian tradition to associate dialectic with *doksa*, Aristotle positions *endoxa* as the opposite of neither *episteme* nor *doksa*; the concepts he uses for the opposite of *endoxa* are *adoksa* and *paradoksa*, and these differ significantly from the *doksa-episteme* opposition. As a dialectical thesis, *adoksa* is an "unacceptable thesis" because it leads to absurd consequences (Aristotle, 1995c, 160b17).[8]

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[5] For a critique of Le Blond's claims (Evans, 2010, pp. 78–80).

[6] Yet, this does not mean that *endoxa* is entirely unrelated to the meanings of probability and likelihood. As Barnes rightly points out, *ta endoxa* may mean probable, likely, or plausible, but even if so, it possesses these qualities accidentally rather than essentially (Barnes, 1980a, p. 498).

[7] In contemporary literature, there are perhaps more varied proposals for the translation of *endoxa* among Aristotle scholars than for any other concept. However, each of these translations appears not just as a different linguistic preference but as a manifestation of the diversity in ways of understanding Aristotle (Barnes, 1980b, p. 166, 1980a, pp. 499–502; Smith, 1993, pp. 335–345).

[8] Aristotle mostly describes *adoksa* as the opinions of children, fools, and the masses (*hoi polloi*). Similarly, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he states that *adoksa* are opinions that lack grounding or merely appeal to the senses and cannot survive critical examination (Aristoteles & Babür, 2015, 1214b28-1215a7). For the semantic differences between *endoxa*, *adoksa*, and *paradoksa*

As Aristotle redefined the prior history of the dialectical method in his *Topics*, he also assigned a new role to *endoxa* as the principle of reasoning. However, even in this case, he did not abandon loyalty to either the Greek etymology of *endoxa* or its usage prior to him. In his article examining how *endoxa* was used in many pre-Aristotelian texts, including Plato, Barnes states that in all the passages he examined, the word undeniably carries meanings such as "reputation," "fame," and "renown" (Barnes, 1980b, p. 499). Aristotle frequently uses *endoxa* in his books in these senses, independent of dialectic, in a way that creates no contradiction with previous texts and confirms these findings.[9]

What the philosopher actually did was to re-determine an ordinary Greek word when it came to dialectic, making it the fundamental principle of that method. However, in doing so—perhaps consciously—he preferred a concept related to *doksa*, despite the existence of many other Greek words that could mean the same things mentioned above. In the *Topics*, Aristotle did not mention that the propositions of dialectic are related to *doksa* in terms of their result or foundation; nonetheless, he constructed *endoxa* in a way that includes *doksa* by the very structure of the term (*endoksa*). The reason for this construction is not based on epistemological grounds as is often assumed; it simply stems from the fact that *doksa*, like *endoxa*, widely means fame, reputation, and prestige in its primary sense.[10]

If *endoxa* is not directly related to *doksa* as we have stated, what does it mean for the *endoxa* used by Aristotle in a dialectical investigation to be "famous" or "reputable"? What are the criteria for having a good reputation? Whose opinions and beliefs are considered reputable? More

(Baltussen, 2000, pp. 40–41).

[9] For example, in the *Rhetoric*, he states "to be *endoxa* is to be esteemed by all, or to possess any quality desired by all or the majority, the good or the wise" (Aristotle, 2015, 1361a25-28); for another such use of *endoxa* in the *Rhetoric*, see "The comparison should be made with famous persons; this will strengthen your case" (Aristotle, 2015, 1368a21). Also, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when speaking of virtuous behavior, he uses the word *endoxa* in accordance with the meaning of fame/renown, saying "Famous people or those of that sort must make magnificent expenditures." For places where *endoxa* is used in the sense of famous in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2009, 1122b32, 1127a21).

[10] There are many examples in Greek texts prior to Aristotle showing that *doksos*, like *endoxa*, was used as an adjective meaning reputation and fame (Buck & Petersen, 1944, pp. 739–740).

importantly, what kind of relationship can such propositions have with the philosophical use of dialectic as a way to first principles? Let us attempt to answer these questions starting from Book I of the *Topics*. Aristotle begins with the following determination:

> Demonstration (*apodeixis*) is when the reasoning proceeds from premises which are true and primary, or from premises the knowledge of which is derived from premises which are primary and true. Dialectic, on the other hand, is a syllogism that reasons from *endoxa*. Things are true and primary which derive their conviction (*pistis*) not through other things but through themselves (*auten*): for it is not necessary to ask the 'why' regarding the principles of science; each of these principles must be certain in itself. The opinions of all men, or of most of them, or of the wise—and among these, either of all, or of most, or of the most distinguished and famous—are *probable* (Aristotle, 1960, 100a25-30).

In *Topics* I.1, while distinguishing syllogisms according to the quality of their premises, we see that there are two main groups of premises and types of syllogisms named accordingly. These are syllogisms consisting of primary and true premises, and those consisting of *endoxa* (or things similar to *endoxa*). When Aristotle says in the *Topics* that the premises of demonstration (*apodeixis*) are primary (*arkhe*) and true (*alethe*), he provides the first clue as to how they differ from other premises: "convictions (*pistis*) are true and primary because they originate from themselves (*auten*)" (Aristotle, 1995c, 100b18). That is, the quality they possess under the category of belief both makes them necessary and distinguishes them from other categories of knowledge. The most fundamental feature of this quality is that the premises derive their truth from their own internal nature (Aristotle, 1995c, 100a30, 1995b, 76b24-15). For our subject, this means that groups of premises not characterized as "primary and true" must be evaluated in another category. In contrast, the epistemic quality of *endoxa*, expressed as the premise group of dialectic, is a quality attributed to it from the outside, independently of the object the premise concerns. However, this tells us nothing about the truth of *endoxa*; its main emphasis is that *endoxa* derives its truth or falsity not from its object, but from something external to the object.

Aristotle's second important explanation regarding *endoxa* concerns

which opinions are to be accepted as *endoxa*. Aristotle answers this question in the *Topics* as follows:

> These things [i.e., dialectical premises] are *endoxa* [according to] everyone, the majority, or the wise (*sofois*); and of these, either all, or the majority, or the most well-known and famous (Aristotle, 1960, 100b21-23).
>
> Dialectical premises are questions (*erotesis endoksos*) that are *endoxa* for everyone, or the majority, or the wise; and of these, either all, or most, or the famous—as long as they are not paradoxical (Aristotle, 1960, 104a8-11).

In these passages, Aristotle provides the criteria for why *endoxa* is considered reputable, famous, and reasonable. First, it should be noted that this list, showing which opinions are accepted as *endoxa*, has an order ranging from the many to the few. While the opinions of all people or the majority are included within the boundaries of *endoxa*, the views of a few wise men or philosophers are also contained in this list. An opinion that has received the approval of all people is mentioned in the same framework as views that have received the endorsement of most of these people or a few wise men with higher mental capacities. However, for now, we are not certain whether there is a graduation among these or whether Aristotle brings a degree of meaning to *endoxa* in terms of their validity. Even if we accept a graduation, it does not seem possible to think of the groups the philosopher mentions together without falling into contradiction. For example, in the passages above, Aristotle points to an apparent inconsistency by saying both that universal propositions agreed upon by everyone cannot constitute the subject of dialectic and that a question included within the boundaries of *endoxa* accepted by everyone should be used in dialectic (Aristotle, 1995c, 104a4-8, 104b3-5, 100b21, 104a9).

Aristotle must have realized that he had defined the framework of *endoxa* quite broadly, as he attempts to eliminate the mentioned inconsistency by drawing attention to the drawbacks of making every proposition the subject of dialectic. Therefore, he states that there are two conditions for making a dialectical premise a problem: first, those accepted as an obvious opinion by all or most people; second, he says that opinions not accepted by anyone cannot be used in dialectic. In *Topics* I.10-11, questions such as "Should we honor the gods? Should we love our parents?" are given as examples of propositions everyone agrees upon; and questions like "Is

snow white?" are given as examples of propositions no one would oppose. Aristotle thinks it is meaningless to turn such questions into a problem in dialectic because if they are of the first type, the questioner should be punished; if they are of the second type, they should simply be shown through the senses (Aristotle, 1995c, 104a4-8, 105a3-9). In other words, there is no need to construct any argument for such expressions. This is because the questions that are the propositions of dialectic concern subjects involving difficulty and debate, and questions to which everyone would clearly accept the answer do not belong to this class (Aristotle, 1995c, 104b12-17).

Following this framework regarding *endoxa*, we can proceed to the phenomena (*phainomena*), which Aristotle mentions in *Prior Analytics* I.1 as the second group of premises for dialectic. The Greek term *phainomenon* is derived from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning "to show itself." As a neutral present plural participle of the verb *phainesthai*, the word *phainomena* (singular *phainomenon*) carries meanings such as appearing things, appearances, that which shows itself, or manifestations. On the other hand, Aristotle employed *phainomena* in quite different ways without disrupting its connection to these fundamental meanings.

The inclusion of the concept of phenomena in discussions regarding its role in Aristotelian dialectic is—despite the philosopher's explicit references to phenomena as a group of dialectical premises—a relatively recent development. Had G.E.L. Owen not touched upon the natural-necessary relationship between *phainomena* and *endoxa* in his seminal article titled "Tithenai Phainomena," we might never have doubted the long-standing tradition of scientific interpretation regarding Aristotle's claim about phenomena. To be sure, Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his commentary on the *Meteorology*, noticed the ambiguity in Aristotle's use of the concept of phenomena. However, Owen did not merely discover the different uses of phenomena that others had somehow noticed but failed to emphasize at this level of importance; he also explained the philosophical problems that reasoning proceeding from these different phenomena would cause in the Aristotelian conception of method. Owen's claim is that phenomena encompass both perception-based observations and common beliefs (*endoxa*), and that these two different types of phenomena form the basis of two different methods. Aristotle's texts, which form the basis for Owen's

claim—treating some fundamental terms of the Aristotelian method, such as induction (*epagoge*) and impasse (*aporia*), in terms of these two research methods—are as follows:

The First Meaning of Phenomenon: Empirical Data	The Second Meaning of Phenomenon: Common Beliefs
In every field, the principles peculiar/special to a science (*idiai arkhas*) are the most numerous. Therefore, it is the job of experience (*empeirias*) to provide the principles of each field; for example, astronomical experience providing the principles (*arkhas*) of astronomical knowledge (*astrologikes epistemes*); once the phenomena (*phainomena*) are sufficiently grasped, the astronomical demonstration (*apodeixeis*) is known. This is the same efor other arts (*tekhne*) and sciences (*epistemen*). Therefore, our task after the phenomena regarding an object domain have been grasped will be simply to set forth the demonstrations. If those things found to be true in the objects of inquiry have not been omitted, we will be able to find and perform the demonstration of what is demonstrable, and make clear that what is indemonstrable is indeed so (Aristotle, 1995a, 46a17-27).	As in other cases, we must look at the phenomena (*phainomena*) and first review the difficulties (*diaporesantan*). In this way, ideally, we can prove the truth of all the opinions (*endoxa*) concerning the affections of the soul, or if not all, then most of them and the most important ones. For if the difficulties (*akrasia*) are resolved and the opinions (*endoxa*) stand their ground, it will have been sufficiently proven (Aristotle, 2009, 1145b3-8).

The first passage highlights two concepts regarding Aristotle's scientific method: experience and phenomenon. The meaning of *phainomena* in the *Prior Analytics*, upon which many commentators agree and which rests on a long tradition, is that it consists of sensory observation data obtained through experience (*empeiria*). The primary goal of a scientific investigation is to obtain the principles regarding the field under inquiry. In every field, the scientist or philosopher begins by collecting data through empirical observation; phenomena as "that which shows itself" are the source of this data. Subsequently, experience, which ensures we see them as recurring

things, forms the basis of empirical research along with recurring phenomena. Accordingly, most of the principles proper (*idiai*) to the sciences are derived from the *phainomena* obtained from the objects in the research field of that science through empirical experience (*empeiria*).

On the other hand, Aristotle uses the said concept in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a way that we cannot reconcile with the second meaning of phenomenon as empirical data. How do we understand that the meaning of phenomenon in the second passage differs from the first? First, we must recall that according to *Prior Analytics* 24b, dialectic judges on the basis of phenomena and *endoxa* (*phainomenon kai endoxon*). If we were to accept the phenomenon here, as in the first passage, as observation/empirical data (*observed facts*) -following Ross's translation-[11] we would not only fail to distinguish dialectic from demonstration but also render the *Topics*, whose purpose of writing was to examine dialectical syllogisms, entirely meaningless as a whole. Even Ross, who translates the phenomenon in both passages as observation data, would not accept such a fallacy. For to claim that this translation, made for the sake of attributing a holistic picture centered on the *Analytics* to Aristotle, also applies to the propositions of dialectic would mean reaching the indirect conclusion of bringing the *Topics* closer to the *Analytics*.

Even if we set aside the polemic regarding translation, it is quite difficult to accept the phenomenon in the second passage as observation data in terms of the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that he will examine "incontinence" (*akrasia*), one of the three kinds of states to be avoided. While explaining the method he will use for this investigation, he clearly transitions from *phenomenon* to *endoxa* and appears to use them interchangeably: "We must first set out the phenomena and the difficulties... if the difficulties are resolved and the *endoxa* [firmly] stand their ground, we will have proven it sufficiently." In fact, immediately following this passage (1145b20), as Aristotle concludes his preliminary examination, he uses the phrase "these, then, are the things said/opinions (*ta men oun legomena taut estin*)" to refer to the same elements as *phenomenon* and *endoxa*.

[11] "He speaks at first as if astronomy stood in the same relation to 'ta phainomena', the *observed facts* about the heavenly bodies"(Aristotle & Ross, 2001, p. 554).

After Aristotle concludes his preliminary inquiry into the phenomena and *endoxa* with what is said on the subject (*ta legomena*), he begins to set out the difficulties (*akrasia*). The first *akrasia* Aristotle examines is as follows: How can a person, while knowing that what they are doing is wrong, fail to exercise self-control? Some people do not accept the idea that one can act wrongly while knowing the action is wrong. Aristotle points to Socrates as the representative of this view. Socrates finds it strange that where knowledge (*episteme*) exists, something else should overpower knowledge and "drag it around like a slave." Therefore, Socrates opposed the concept of "incontinence" because it implicitly contains the idea of doing wrong despite knowing better (Plato & Taylor, 1991, 352b). Aristotle begins to resolve this difficulty precisely in accordance with the steps of the methodological idea in the second passage. However, before this analysis, he says: "Clearly this thesis [i.e., Socrates' thesis] contradicts the phenomena (*phainomenois*)" (Aristotle, 2009, 1145b29). We can infer that the *phenomenon* in this expression is not the same as the sensory-based observation data in the first passage, from the fact that Aristotle explains other difficulties we would encounter if we were to accept the Socratic claim. In fact, Aristotle's statement "this thesis contradicts the phenomena" reflects his concern about abandoning a specific usage of the expression "knowing the right thing and doing the wrong."

Everything we have said so far is of a nature to show that the concepts of *phenomenon* in the two passages do not have the exact same reference. However, there is another detail to which Owen first drew attention (Owen, 1961, pp. 242–243). Whenever Aristotle wishes to limit the concept of *phenomenon* to its meaning in the *Prior Analytics*, he uses the concept of *phenomenon* based on perception/sensation (*kata ten aisthesin*) to distinguish it from both *endoxa* and the concept of *phenomenon* in its second sense, which can be evaluated in the same category as *endoxa*. It is possible to see one of the clearest examples of this in his work *On the Heavens*: "They disregard *endoxa* and the phenomena based on sensation (*endoxon kai ton phainomenon kata ten aisthesin*)"; "The goal of natural knowledge is always primarily the phenomena based on sensation (*fusikes to phainomenon aei kurios kata ten aistesin*)" (Aristotle, 1995e, 303a22-23, 306a16-18).

Based on the second passage, we can say that in Aristotle's

philosophical Greek, the concept of *phenomenon* includes—in addition to being observation data of objects related to the research field of a particular science—the common opinions (*endoxa*) regarding the realm of being in which the sciences conduct their research, and what is expressed (*ta legomena*) about a certain subject. The contradiction or, if any, the parallelism between these meanings will yield significant results for the philosopher's philosophical method. For example, moving from this dual use of the phenomenon, Owen concludes that Aristotle possesses two methods. When phenomena are understood as observed facts as in the first passage, the method can be understood as "a starting point for finding a theory that explains these data" and will correspond to a Baconian scientific method in Owen's terms (Owen, 1961, p. 239). As we see in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when *phenomenon* is accepted as *endoxa* or widely held common conceptions regarding a subject, Aristotle's method will be accepted as a dialectical method used for the resolution of philosophical problems. That is, Owen's fundamental thesis—which would inspire those after him—is that the concept of *phainomena*, which Ross translated incorrectly for the sake of attributing a holistic picture to Aristotle,[12] has two different meanings, and both of these meanings have Aristotelian practice with two different methods.[13]

It seems safer, after these conceptual analyses, to reach the conclusion that Aristotle employed different methods based on the ambiguity in the use of phenomena. Indeed, we have seen that the contrast between the *Prior Analytics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* confirms this. However, the reasons upon which this mode of explanation—which rightfully makes room for dialectic in the philosopher's philosophical method—rests have either not been sufficiently questioned or have remained obscure. Can distinguishing the phenomenon in its second sense from the sensory-based phenomenon and determining it as a phenomenon based on *endoxa* be explained only by the relationship between phenomena and *endoxa*in these two

[12] While Ross translated "phainomena" as *observed facts* in both the *Prior Analytics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he preferred a more neutral expression like *apparent facts* in later versions of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. To compare the texts in question (Aristotle, 2009, p. 118) Cf. (Aristotle, 2001, p. 554).

[13] For the problems of the two-method understanding Owen proposed based on the dual use of the concept of phenomenon and the transformative effect of this claim in the literature (McLeod, 1995, pp. 1–18).

works? Or is it possible that this distinction, which could have very important consequences for the philosopher's philosophical method, relies on an ambiguity in the use of a concept, and that Aristotle expected the reader to notice this ambiguity?

Owen's analyses of the concept of phenomena undoubtedly created an inspiring effect regarding Aristotle's understanding of method and especially the necessity of approaching his classical interpretations with caution. Nonetheless, by accepting the distinction between scientific and dialectical methods and basing the difference between the two methods on experience, he could not transcend the boundaries of the standard interpretation of the concepts of *endoxa* and phenomena (Nussbaum, 2001, pp. 240–263). To cross these boundaries, we have *external* reasons, such as Aristotle's philosophical dialectic being a way to first principles or his methodological practices employing the concepts of the dialectical method. However, how can *endoxa* and phenomena, which lack direct empirical reality and derive their epistemic reality from an indirect relationship with their object, possess a truth that enables us to make inferences regarding the foundations of a science? This is indeed a reasonable question.

In any case, accepting phenomena as sensory-based observation data seems, at first glance, more consistent with Aristotle's general mode of explanation regarding method. This is because, in Aristotelian epistemology, no activity that does not proceed from experience has scientific reliability. In this case, Aristotle's emphases on dialectic regarding the foundations of a science are also considered negligible elements within the "Baconian portrait". However, interpretations aimed at showing that the idea of Aristotle resorting to the dialectical method in his theoretical investigations is an illusion rely on the assumption that *endoxa* are non-experiential and therefore merely common and ordinary opinions. If we can show that this is a false assumption, we will have sufficiently proven one of the *internal* reasons why dialectic is a method "leading to first principles."

After providing the most well-known definition of *endoxa* as the "opinions of everyone, the majority, or the wise," Aristotle makes an important but frequently neglected explanatory addition:[14] "It is also clear that all

[14] As far as I can see, Reeve is the only person who does not neglect this commentary Aristotle added to the definition of *endoxa* (Reeve, 1995, p. 35).

opinions expressed by the owners of a *tekhne*/experts (*kata tekhnai*) are dialectical premises. For people tend to accept the opinions of those who have investigated these subjects; for example, they will agree with the doctor on medical matters and with the geometer on geometry" (Aristotle, 1995c, 104a12-17). This commentary demonstrates that the opinions of artisans, scientists, and other experts—whether they have gained fame in their fields or not—are *endoxa*.

Possessing a *tekhne*, as Aristotle mentions in many places, means having expertise in a specific field of being. We find a good example of this in the *Metaphysics*: "*Tekhne* arises when, from many notions gained by experience, one universal judgment (*hypolepsis*) is formed about a class of objects" (Aristotle, 1995g, 981a6-8). Based on this, the reason why the opinions of *tekhne*-holders are used as premises of dialectic is that people who possess universal judgments about a specific subject or a specific kind of being possess experience. This shows that *endoxa* cannot be interpreted merely as common and ordinary opinions. In fact, the application of Aristotle's dialectical method is also proof of this. For example, when the moral intellectualism of Socrates -as a figure of the wise- concerning "incontinence" in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is used as a phenomenon, it is not considered an ordinary opinion, even though everyone except Socrates opposes this idea. Again in this discussion, when the majority or other wise men put forward the view of "knowing the right thing and doing the wrong" as a counter-thesis to this phenomenon, it should not be accepted as a common and ordinary view. However, both are included in the definition of *endoxa* and, by requirement of the dialectical method, occupy one side of the *aporia*. Therefore, whether widely shared or not, the opinions of *tekhne*-holders are *endoxa* because they have the weight of experience behind them: "(...) it is necessary to pay no less attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of experienced and elderly people or of the prudent (*phronesis*-holders) than to demonstrations. For they see rightly because experience has given them an eye" (Reeve, 1995, p. 37).

Dialectic as *Modus Operandi*

The fact that Aristotle assigns such a constitutive role to *endoxa* in the search for truth demonstrates that the relationship between dialectic and first principles is by no means accidental. This relationship is made

possible by the examinational faculty (*eksetastike*) of dialectic. The distinction the philosopher makes in *Topics* I.2 while explaining the utility of dialectic for the philosophical sciences clarifies the epistemic function of this faculty: examining both sides of a difficulty (*pros amfotera diaporesai*) enables one to grasp both the truth (*talethes*) and the falsehood (*pseudos*) from every angle.

The examinational nature of the dialectical syllogism radically distinguishes it from other types of syllogisms. Demonstration (*apodeixis*), by its very nature, is closed to objection and directed toward "internal speech" (speech in the soul), whereas dialectic focuses on "external speech" which is subject to objection at any moment (Aristotle, 1995b, 76b22-24). This external orientation necessitates that the dialectician approaches a problem not unilaterally, but by producing evidence for both sides of a contradiction. This provides the dialectician with a specific faculty that reveals not only the solution to a problem but also its weaknesses.

The ultimate goal of the examinational faculty is to establish the power to choose the truth and avoid falsehood by setting the consequences of two hypotheses side by side. In this context, the examinational faculty serves as a critical method that transforms *endoxa* from mere data into the definitional principles of a science through a process of systematic testing (*diaporesis*).

The most important indicator of this methodological understanding is that the philosopher employs this faculty not only in the theoretical narrative of the *Topics* (Books I and VIII) or in its application (Books II-VII), but also in his foundational works that conduct research in their own independent fields, such as the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *On the Soul*. Aristotle presents the functioning of this examination process in *Topics* VIII as an educational method. According to him, seeking arguments both for and against any thesis trains the individual in both questioning and answering simultaneously. If a designated interlocutor is unavailable, this process should transform into a "dialogue with oneself" (Aristotle, 1995c, 163a36-163b16). Aristotle states that a concrete interlocutor is not mandatory in dialectical inquiry; the soul's address to itself can also be evaluated within the boundaries of dialectic.

In this sense, we can say that the discussions carried out in the

aforementioned works are built upon this idea in principle. However, the dialectical inquiry—conceived as a stage where he determines the rules of the game—transforms in these books into a stage of the history of philosophy where the individual players are secondary. This stage is visible throughout the first book of *On the Soul*. Here, Aristotle passes the opinions of philosophers (*endoxa*) through the filter of his own syllogistic form, transforming them into principles from which all surrounding debates have been eliminated. In Book II of *De Anima*, the research is now carried out through an obtained principle: "Therefore, the soul (*psukhen*) is necessarily (*anankaion*) the actuality (*entelekheia*) of a natural body that has the power of life" (Aristotle, 2018, 412a17-20). By principle here, we mean the definition (*horismos*). Indeed, as we stated above, Aristotle's theory of demonstration ordains that the beginning of a scientific investigation must proceed from principles[15] in which the definition is also included. However, a critical question regarding his understanding of method reveals itself in the discussion the philosopher conducts on the soul: Did Aristotle obtain this principle (*horismos*), which he expresses as necessary, through the discussion he conducted starting from *endoxa*, or was the necessity of a principle that the philosopher already knew brought to a logical ground by moving from *endoxa*? For this, let us look at how the philosopher reached the said principle in general terms.

The first chapter of Book I of *De Anima*, just like the *Beta* book of the *Metaphysics*, begins by setting out the fundamental *aporias* contained in the research to be conducted: For example, is the soul a substance, or a quality, or a quantity? Is it one of the things that exist in potentiality (*dunamei*), or is it rather a kind of actuality (*entelekheia*)? These are presented as problems to be solved in the research. In addition, Aristotle says that the soul, which he mentions in the first part as one of the most difficult subjects to reach a conviction on, is a problem not only in terms of its conceptual structure but also in terms of how it should be examined methodologically. The philosopher expresses the uncertainty regarding the method as follows: "[The method of research regarding the soul]—will it be demonstration (*apodeixis*), or division (*diairesis*), or some other method (*alle methodos*)? Even if this method were clear, there are many problems and

[15] Regarding the definition being the principle of a syllogism (Aristotle, 1995b, 90b24-5).

room for error concerning what one should start from." However, right at the beginning of the second part, he seems to have decided on the method and what he should move from:

> In setting out the difficulties (*diapountas*) to be solved (*euporein*) regarding the soul (*peri phuskhes*), it is necessary to bring together the opinions (*doksas*) of those before us on this subject, so that we may adopt what they have right while being cautious/alert against what they have wrong (Aristotle, 2018, 403b20-24).

We can understand that this method is the dialectical method from his use of similar expressions while explaining the examinational nature of dialectic in *Topics* I.2: "(...) It is useful in the investigation of the philosophical sciences, because if we examine the difficulties on both sides (*pros amfotera diaporesai*), we will more easily perceive both the truth and the falsehood at every point". After Aristotle decides on the method, he conducts his research in accordance with this method. The first stage of the research regarding the soul consists of a collection of what was previously said (*endoxa*) about the soul and its division into certain types without any criticism (this is *diaporein*), in accordance with the passage where he expresses his method (Aristotle, 2018, 403b20-24). The first result Aristotle reaches starting from the views of certain philosophers is this: "We can say that everyone defines the soul by three things: movement (*kinesei*), sensation (*aistesei*), and being incorporeal (*a-somata*)" (Aristotle, 2018, 405b11-13). The subsequent process continues as follows: The impasses (*aporias*) of those who define the soul by one of these three notions are set forth. It is stated that the said impasses are impossible and not in accordance with reason (*adunato to logo*) (Aristotle, 2018, 409b26).

However, one point here is very important: While the philosopher carries out the negation of a claimed thesis, he simultaneously obtains strong evidence for the construction of his own thesis. In this sense, the results of the thesis whose impossibility is demonstrated turn into another piece of knowledge for Aristotle (Aristotle, 2018, 411a21-26). These results give birth to other impasses, and the same method is continued in order. Finally, the discussion conducted over *endoxa* concludes with a definition (*horismos*) where the negation itself ends (Aristotle, 2018, 412a17-20):

I. *Aporias* are set forth. (P)

II. *Endoxa* are collected for the solution of *aporias*. (Q)

III. *Endoxa* are investigated by the examinational faculty.

IV. The research concludes with the definition (*horismos/arkhe*). (X)

For the solution of P, all possible Q's related to the research object are collected. Dialectic examines the premise offered by the dialectician's interlocutor—who is now a role assumed by thinkers on the stage of the history of philosophy—examinationally (*eksetastikos*): While the interlocutor confirms Q, the dialectician confirms -Q. This is an "examination" for an examination investigates either the claim Q or the claim -Q. This is the *diaporesai* he mentions in the *Topics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *De Anima*. Let us suppose that X is a principle (*horismos*) or a hypothetical principle of a science. The dialectician will conduct their investigation as follows:

Q, -Q, ..., Qn, -Qn : X

Here, being an *endoxa* has two meanings: first, that it has been accepted by a person or a group; and second, that it has not yet been verified in terms of the criteria of a paradigm. For once it has passed through the filter of the paradigm, the said *endoxa* will serve as an element for the construction of the principle. While the dialectician conducts their investigation, they gain an insight into the truth or falsity of the principle. Because they follow this process, they understand/follow the way to the principles. They set forth a valid deductive argument starting from famous propositions (*endoxa*) related to the result Q, which is a principle. Their argument is not a demonstration in the sense of *apodeixis*. For Aristotle had said that the premises of demonstration are established from premises that are not *endoxa*, such as primary and true. In that case, the way to the principles of the sciences starting from *endoxa* is not demonstration, but rather the grounding of the necessity of a truth through the conceptions related to that truth. According to Aristotle, a research cannot be grounded without taking into account the discussions within the discipline in which the research is conducted and without settling accounts with these discussions. This is one of the fundamental tasks of *endoxa* in the philosopher's thought. However, the point to be kept in mind here is that the philosopher

does this with a purpose when determining the discussions within the discipline. *Endoxa* are the compilation of discussions within a discipline around the fundamental subjects of that discipline. The examinational faculty, on the other hand, serves to reveal the strong and weak sides of the *aporias* in a way that will construct the fundamental principle of this science. In this sense, Aristotelian dialectic involves settling accounts with the fundamental discussions within a discipline for the purpose of reaching the fundamental principles of that discipline.

Conclusion

When attempting to determine the place of dialectic and its relationship to first principles (*arkhai*) in Aristotelian thought, it is insufficient to rely solely on the sharp—and actually quite non-Aristotelian—distinction between *apodeixis* and dialectic, or between science and non-science. Throughout this study, we have observed that the true difference between these two methods lies in the quality of the premises that constitute the starting point of reasoning, rather than in their formal structure. First principles are the primary propositions that establish a discipline; as seen in the *Posterior Analytics*, they are the definitions (*horismos*) obtained from sensation and experience concerning the specific domain (*genos*) of that science.

In this epistemological schema, the sustaining force of scientific knowledge is undoubtedly its reliance on experiment; for Aristotle does not consider it possible for any proposition that does not bear the weight of experience (*empeiria*) to have contact with truth. However, in this article, within the context of the concepts of *endoxa*, *phainomena*, and *legomena*, we have argued that Aristotle maintains a much broader framework for the conception of "experience" than is typically assumed. From this broad perspective, Aristotle attempted to explain how things "appear"—not only through sensory data but also how they appear both in themselves and to others—within this same conception of experience.

Ultimately, by processing this rich field of experience that overflows the boundaries of a rigid scientistic schema, dialectic transforms into a "way" toward first principles through its examinational faculty (*eksetastike*). Dialectic does not prove principles; rather, it legitimizes them by placing them at the summit of agreed-upon and tested experiences. Thus,

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Aristotelian methodology does not present a rupture between sensory observation and dialectical examination, but rather a complementary continuity in the construction of truth.

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Öz: Bu makale, Aristoteles'in *Topikler* I.2'de diyalektiğe atadığı felsefi görevlerden birisi olan "ilk ilkelere giden bir yol" olma iddiasını epistemolojik açıdan çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Aristoteles, diyalektik yöntemi, öncüllerini *endoxa*lardan (yaygın olarak kabul edilen öncüller) alan bir kıyas türü olarak tanımlamasına rağmen aynı yönteme felsefi bilimlerin temellerine ulaşma işlevi de yüklemektedir. Bu durum, *endoxa*lardan ilerleyen bir araştırmanın nasıl olup da kanıtlamanın (*apodeixis*) üzerinde temellendiği kesin ve kanıtlanamaz ilk ilkelere epistemik geçiş sağlayabileceği problemini gündeme getirir. Makale, bu problemi iki aşamada ele almaktadır: İlk olarak diyalektiğin konusunu oluşturan *endoxa* ve *phainomena* (fenomen) kavramlarının Aristoteles epistemolojisindeki konumu değerlendirilir; fenomen kavramının ikili anlamı, *endoxa*ların yalnızca yaygın kanaatlerle sınırlı olmayıp *tekhne* sahiplerinin deneyimle temellendirilmiş yargılarını da içerdiği gösterilir. İkinci aşamada Aristoteles'in eserlerinde kullandığı diyalektik pratiğin işleyişi analiz edilerek onun tetkik edici (*eksetastike*) yapısının, farklı görüşlerin sistematik bir *diaporesis* (açmazların her iki yönünü de sorgulama) sürecinde sınanması yoluyla bir bilimin tanımsal ilkesine ulaşmayı mümkün kıldığı savunulur. Makale, Aristoteles'te diyalektiğe ilkeleri "kanıtladığı", onları "keşfettiği" gibi anlamlar yüklemez fakat diyalektiğin, felsefi disiplinlerin iç tartışmalarını, bu disiplinlerin konuları hakkındaki yaygın kanaatleri belirli amaçlar dahilinde düzenleyerek, bu ilkelerin zorunluluğunu temellendiren bir yöntem olarak işlediği sonucuna varır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diyalektik, endoksa, fenomen, aristoteles, ilk ilkeler.