

THE PHENOMENON OF CHANCE IN ANCIENT GREEK THOUGHT

by

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This dissertation engages three facets of Greek philosophy: 1) the phenomenon of *tychē* (chance, fortune, happening, or luck) in Aristotle's *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Poetics*; 2) how *tychē* informs Socrates' own philosophical practice in the Platonic dialogues; and 3) how engaging *tychē* in these Greek texts challenges established interpretations of Greek thought in contemporary scholarship and discussion. I argue that the complex status of *tychē* in Aristotle's texts, when combined with its appearance in the Platonic dialogues and the framework of Greek myth and poetry (*poiēsis*), underscores the seriousness with which the Greeks consider the role of chance in human life. I claim that Aristotle's and Plato's texts offer important counterpoints to subsequent Western philosophers who deny the importance and existence of chance in human affairs and in the universe, dichotomously privileging reason over fortune (Boethius), necessity over chance (Spinoza), certainty over contingency (Descartes), and character over luck (Kant). My investigation of *tychē* unfolds in relation to a host of important Greek words and ideas that are engaged and transformed in Western

philosophical discourse: *anankē* (necessity), *aitia* (cause, or explanation), *automaton*, *logos* (speech), poietic possibility, and philosophy.

First, a close reading of *tychē* in the *Physics* shows that its emergence in Book II challenges the “four causes” as they are traditionally understood to be the foundation of the cosmos for Aristotle. Attentiveness to the language of strangeness (that which is *atopos*) and wonderment (*tō thaūma*) that couches Aristotle’s consideration of *tychē* unveils a dialogical character in Aristotle’s text. I also show how *tychē* hinges together the *Physics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Second, I argue that *tychē* illuminates the possibility of human good through an inquiry into human nature in the *Ethics*, exploring the tension that *tychē* is, paradoxically, a *necessity* as it is grounded in nature and yet relates to human beings in “being good” (*EN* 1179a20), ultimately returning to a deeper understanding of the relation between *physis* and *tychē*. Third, I argue that the *Poetics* also sustains an engagement with *tychē* insofar as *poiēsis* speaks to human possibility, turning to Heidegger and Kristeva to see how this is so.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Μαία, θεῶν μὲν δῶρα καὶ ἀχνύμενοί περ ἀνάγκη  
τέτλαμεν ἄνθρωποι· δὴ γὰρ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰσι.

(*Mother, though it is painful to us, we human beings by necessity  
must carry the gifts of the gods, for they are much stronger than we are.*)

-Homer's *Hymn To Demeter* (ll. 147-148)<sup>1</sup>

#### Section I

#### Aristotle's Triptych: The *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Poetics*

In Book X of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says,

[S]ome people think one becomes good [γίνεσθαι δ' ἀγαθὸς οἴονται] by nature [φύσει], others think it is by habit [ἔθει], and still others think it is by teaching [διδασχῆ]. As for what comes from nature, it is clear that it is not up to us that it is present [Τὸ μὲν οὖν τῆς φύσεως δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει], but by some divine explanation [διὰ τινος θείας αἰτίας] it belongs to those who are truly fortunate [τοῖς ὡς ἀληθῶς εὐτυχέσιν ὑπάρχει]. (*EN* 1179b20-23)

This statement exemplifies that which is most aporetic in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

the relationship between an ethical inquiry and nature as it crystallizes the tension at the base

of our human struggle to “become good.” That Aristotle concludes this text with a thought

that essentially *reopens* an inquiry into our human nature and our struggles with ethical

inquiries at all might seem at first surprising: Is it not Aristotle, above all other philosophers,

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<sup>1</sup> Translation mine. For Aristotle's *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Metaphysics*, I consult Joe Sach's admirable translations, adjusting them, when necessary, with my own; for Aristotle's *Poetics*, I consult Seth Benardete's translation. For the Platonic dialogues, I use the excellent translations of Eva Brann (et. al.), Seth Benardete, and Peter Kalkavage, amending them, when necessary, with my own translations. For readability's sake, I do not note my amendments to their translations, and I use the Loeb Classical Library for all the texts in Greek in this dissertation. All other texts (e.g., Herodotus, Pausanias, Homer) are my translations from the Greek.

who most systematically lays out, in this very work, a program for our ethical development, and thus our becoming virtuous? Why would he, at the end of such a text, return to an endoxic starting point by asking how it is that people normally think of becoming good (i.e., by nature, habit, or teaching), let alone puzzle his readers and students with statements about the slim possibilities of our *ever* “becoming good” in ways that are solely up to us? The conclusion of this text shows Aristotle’s response to such questions: the heart of an ethical inquiry demands a return to an inquiry into nature in order to understand our human place, should we be truly fortunate enough to be able to do so.

Not only does the *Nicomachean Ethics* recoil onto and gesture beyond itself in this way, but Aristotle’s other texts do as well. For the purposes of my investigation into the phenomenon of *tychē* (chance, fortune, luck) in Aristotle’s work, I concentrate mainly on the *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Poetics*. This trinity of texts calls us as readers to attend not to three completely isolated tasks; rather, they demand that we consider, for example, our own ethical comportment to the tasks at hand when making an inquiry into nature (as in the *Physics*), or into Greek tragedy (as in the *Poetics*). An instance of this thought appears in the *Physics*, which opens with Aristotle urging us to consider how it is that we situate ourselves in an inquiry into nature, saying that “it is necessary *to lead ourselves forward* in this way: from what is less clear by nature but clearer to us to what is clearer and better known by nature” (*Phys.* 184a20; my emphasis). In this text, an inquiry into nature involves how it is that we begin to lead or comport ourselves in such a task, aware, one might say, of our respective *ethoi* and *ēthoi* in making such an investigation. Considering how it is that *we lead ourselves* through a natural inquiry implicates not our shortcomings as human beings, but instead demands our attention to a host of issues not generally taken to fall under concern in the *Physics*: Aristotle’s reception and treatment of his predecessors concerning the origins

of the cosmos; his willingness to begin, as he does in the *Ethics*, from an endoxic starting point with what most people hold to be true; and a return to questions explicitly engaged in the *Ethics*, including the question of our agency and what, in the end, is up to us. In other words, our ability to read the *Physics* might depend on a prior or future attunement to the questions it raises, and how we hear Aristotle in this text has everything to do with who we are—or who we *think* we are.

Likewise, the *Poetics* demonstrates the horizon in which philosophizing is possible for the Greeks, which occurs in association with tragedy as an example of *poiēsis*. For the Greeks, tragedy erupts that which is simultaneously both beautiful and terrifying about (human) life, for it is through the witnessing of tragedy as a beautiful meter for acting and doing (*prattein*) that a person realizes the radical contingency of her lot. *How* one engages this realization, however, is not removed from one's comportment when reading the *Physics*, for as Aristotle tells us in his *Metaphysics*, the way one hears a lecture depends upon what one is accustomed to (one's *ethos*, *Meta.* 994b30-995a2). So when we encounter nature, or *physis*, in the *Poetics*, we ought not ignore it; rather we should do what we do in the *Physics*: seek to understand and uncover the place of nature in tragedy and life, or the place of tragedy and life in and *as* nature. Likewise, when Aristotle says that what's "possible is persuasive" (*Poetics* 1451b16-17), we must be open to how truly considering what's possible demands a return to *physis* as something *other* than a mere natural cause as physical generation or a static being; at this point we must ask about the possibility of nature itself, both in its generation and becoming. In the *Poetics* we thus witness the beautiful interplay of the possibilities of *poiēsis* and philosophy as they both ultimately concern what is possible for human life, through poetic reflection.

The concern I raise here comes close, I realize, to collapsing what are generally seen as three different kinds of inquiry, intended for three different purposes: the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerns human beings becoming good; the *Physics* investigates nature as it is regardless of our comportment to and in it; the *Poetics* really bears little on philosophy, for it investigates art and tragedy. However, each text, as we shall see, is excessive to itself in a way that paradoxically affirms the specific role that it plays in Aristotle's thinking. To put it else-wise, we might follow Hans-Georg Gadamer in "Image and Gesture," and say that it is through a confrontation with the Greeks that we recognize "this truth: we are always other and much more than we know ourselves to be, and what exceeds our knowledge is precisely our real being" (1986, 78). In other words, our own lives—insofar as we're not anathema to Greek thought but intimately bound to it—also demonstrate the interplay between excess and deficiency, or the whole and the part, as we are other and more than what we know ourselves to be.

In the space of these thoughts, both in-between and beyond them, we find *tychē*. For all intents and purposes, *tychē* has been a radically impossible consideration for philosophy, and has shown itself to be a common allergen to the history of Western philosophy. Hopscotching this history, we can see the following: In the beginning of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza relegates chance to mere superstition, or our human deficiency (but tendency nonetheless) to perceive the world with erroneous inaccuracies (1994, 6-10); in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that chance and fortune are merely concepts that illegally "run loose" in our minds (1996, 142); Boethius sees fortune as a "monstrous lady," an association with which nothing will be won or lost for a person (1999, 2-3); in his commentaries on Aristotle, Simplicius maintains that the Greeks themselves did not admit of *tychē* in any serious way (1997, 88-95). In fact, the list of philosophers who neglect *tychē*

includes nearly every major thinker since the Greeks, with the following few—albeit notable—relatively contemporary exceptions.

## Section II Contemporary Resources for Reading Aristotle

The exceptional philosophers who do engage chance, however, do so not in relation to the Greeks, as I shall do, but in relation to their “own” thinking: Nietzsche, Schelling, Derrida, and Kristeva among them. Against the current of a hyper-rationalized comportment to the world and subversive to dominantly paradigmatic thinking in their own times by taking on the tradition in many ways, these philosophers intimate important Greek concerns without calling on them directly: the relationship between chance and necessity, circumstance and agency, cause and explanation, and tragedy or myth and philosophy. In Schelling’s dialogue *Clara*, for example, we hear Clara’s provocative statement concerning the first of these relationships. She says, “The holiest necessity of my inner being is not a law for nature. In nature even divine necessity takes on the color and appearance of chance, and what was initially accidental operates with the irresistible force of a terrible necessity once present” (2002, 27). Here we encounter the slippage between chance and necessity, which, like veiled brides wedded to nature, assume each other’s guise in a way that suggests chance as operating as a pre-necessity in nature, removed from how Clara experiences herself. This idea hearkens straight back to the Greeks, particularly to Aristotle’s discussion of *tychē* and *automaton* in the second book of his *Physics*, after a sustained discussion of necessity (*anankē*). In this text Aristotle raises a similar concern to Clara’s, i.e., the perplexity that many experience when even thinking about *tychē* as a horizon (*horismenon*) in our lives regarding our human place (*Phys.* 196a4): Can we understand our lives as being beholden to chance, or must we acquiesce to necessity alone? How we experience our lives, according to

Aristotle, has everything to do with what we make of nature such that an inquiry into nature is also, as Clara notes, an inquiry into *our* nature as well.

Likewise, Nietzsche and Derrida seriously consider the place of chance in our lives as it destabilizes our attempts to make usual sense of ourselves and the world around us. For Nietzsche, as Joan Stambaugh notes, the role of chance (*Zufall*) takes the shape of a creative impulse in our lives. Stambaugh says that for Nietzsche, “[w]e have power not literally over the events that occur in our lives; what we do have power over, or at least the opportunity to develop such power, is our attitude, our stance in the face of what occurs” (1999, 95). That is, as Aristotle notes that things do appear to us without any discernible reason for happening in the way they do, Nietzsche says that how we respond to unforeseen events or occurrences is largely up to us, simultaneously admitting the relative epistemic uncertainty regarding human knowledge of nature and the necessity of what is. What matters, for Nietzsche, is how one comports oneself in an unstable world, becoming, as Antigone, a law unto oneself (*Ant. In.* 822), something that we see Clara saying in the previous paragraph: By recognizing the ways in which she is *not* bound, in any simple way at least, to a purely mechanical or deterministic view of nature, she experiences herself in excess *of* this nature. As a result, according to Stambaugh, Nietzsche “moves toward bringing chance and necessity far closer together than they are generally conceived” in “trying to distance necessity from an inexorable mechanism and chance from cruel, senseless randomness” (1999, 98); no teleology is required in order to embrace the impetus for a creative impulse in Nietzsche’s world.

Derrida too emphasizes the way a person comports oneself in the world regarding chance events in his long essay “Taking My Chances/*Mes Chances.*” According to Derrida, both the ways in which a person deals with unforeseen events and the ways in which a person



might experience her life as a matter of chance plays a prominent role is disrupting a static or determined view of the universe. Derrida says, for example, that “[o]ne can fall well or badly, have a lucky or unlucky break—but always by dint of not having foreseen—of not having seen in advance and ahead of oneself” (1984, 5). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we will see how the inability to see in advance of oneself yields a host of problems for Aristotle while also opening the possibility of ethical action itself in light of our inability to see in advance of ourselves. Against Spinoza, who blames this inability to foresee the future, as it were (i.e., our desire for good turns of fortune and our fear of bad things), on our misplaced reliance on fortune as superstition, Derrida maintains, similar to Nietzsche, the ways in which we come to understand ourselves in such moments: “*Oevres* [openings] befall us. They speak about or unveil that which befalls *in* its befalling upon us. They overpower us inasmuch as they explain themselves with that which falls from above. The *oeuvre* is vertical and slightly leaning” (1984, 17). In other words, a serious consideration of chance in our lives requires not only that we duplicitously disregard a teleological trajectory, but that we consider how it is that we, too, fall openly in our human experience; our receptivity to chance events and circumstances beyond our control thus forces us to ourselves fall *with* the experiences we normally consider beyond our control.

This “fall,” which resonates both with Nietzsche and Derrida, itself has a history, falling to us by way of the Latin word *cadere*, resounding in our word “cadence.” It describes both the experience of things beyond our control happening *to* us and how we articulate or take up these openings in our lives. For Julia Kristeva, we are, in our contemporary age, much like the mythical Narcissus, experiencing a vertigo of love with no object other than a mirage (1987, 104); we are contemporary wandering Narcissi in search of creativity, in search of ourselves and each other. This vertigo, however, also has a cadence:

As we shall see with Aristotle's *Poetics*, the way this cadence gets taken up in our lives is through experiencing the rhythm, or fall, of our very lives and their reflection in Greek *poiēsis*, both broadly construed as making and also narrowly as poetry. For the Greeks, *poiēsis* as poetry requires attention to the rhythm of speech and music in composing meters to speak to what is possible in human life, often taking shape in metered tragedy. Yet, Aristotle's *Poetics* also resonates with the ways that Heidegger and Kristeva also speak of poetry (or a work of art) and the life of a poetic subject respectively, calling our attention to the vivacity of Aristotle's text insofar as it points us beyond Greek tragedy to reconsider the demands of *poiēsis* as speaking to what's possible in human life. Thus, insofar as *tychē* resonates with what's possible at all or in the first place, we will see how this thought takes shape in *poiēsis* as an exemplary demonstration of this possibility.

### **Section III** **From Contemporary Thought Back to the Greeks**

It seems, at this point, that we're a long way from the Greeks: Why discuss these relatively contemporary thinkers in relation to Ancient "metaphysical" and "ethical" concerns? The response is deceptively simple: the philosophers I've just noted, when combined with some recent scholarship on both Plato and Aristotle, open a new way of speaking about the Greeks that confronts many of our preconceived ideas about them, prompting a return to the Greeks themselves to see how their thoughts take shape in light of fruitful scholarly and philosophical texts today. Moreover, the intertextual possibilities for reading the Greeks, as I shall explore, highlight the urgency with which attention should not be paid to each text as autonomous and unrelated entities but should always be, as the Greeks themselves consistently demonstrate, in conversation with one another. This is not to say, however, that each text fails to have its particular project and aims—and in fact my work

here will demonstrate the importance of each Aristotelian inquiry separately—but that we will be sensitive to the ways in which Aristotle’s texts inform each other in meaningful ways. To carve out in advance, in other words, and to determine the scopes and aims of each text by virtue of the ways that they’re taken up and appropriated in the history of Western philosophy conspires to commit an injustice to the texts themselves.

For these reasons, any sustained treatment of a surfacing idea in Greek thinking suggests that we weave, like Ariadne, a thread through many texts, aware nonetheless of the perils of doing so. The main difficulty I see when encountering Greek thought is the way in which we, as readers, are constantly confronted with the enormity of the whole of *everything* at each turn, and the ways in which we might be discouraged from saying much of anything at all regarding our Ancient predecessors. As Gadamer says in “Philosophy and Poetry,” “[t]he language of philosophy is a language that sublates itself, saying nothing and turning towards the whole at one and the same time” (1986, 138). Insofar as the Greeks in my view embody the whole of philosophy in the first place, the task of philosophical discourse, especially about something as strange as chance, threatens to slip away into nothingness, while pointing beyond its own capacities. However, perhaps the best way to proceed is to heed Hermocrates’ proclamation to Socrates in the *Timaeus* that Socrates’ interlocutors won’t be lacking in heart in offering their feast of the *logos* to him (*Tim.* 20c3), and Socrates’ advice to Theaetetus throughout the dialogue of the same name to have courage when taking up philosophical tasks.

Rather than mere pep talks from Socrates to his interlocutors, these exchanges point to a telling moment in the Platonic dialogues as much as in Aristotle’s own texts: the necessity of beginning where one is, even if this place is often, as the Greek poets knew, *in medias res*, or, like Dante saw, in the middle of life itself. The repetition of this theme in

Aristotle's *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* in particular points to the ways in which inquiries into nature and into the human good implicate each other; we must begin where we are, and in so doing, give an account of ourselves in the process. Thus it is that *tychē* plays such a pivotal role in Aristotle's texts, for it disrupts how it is that we ordinarily understand ourselves, or tend to want to give a precise account both of nature and our human place in and with it.

#### **Section IV** **Tychē's Role in Greek Thought**

What is *tychē*? *Tychē* loosely means "chance," "fortune," "happening," or "luck," and its family of related words includes *automaton*, *kata symbebēkos*, *eudaimonia* and *kairos*, among others. In order to make some sense of the role of chance in Greek thought, I begin my reading of Aristotle with his lengthy discussion of *tychē* and *automaton* in Book II. 4-6 in the *Physics*, noting the strange place of *tychē* in this text: *Tychē* appears just after Aristotle's discussion of the ways in which things come to be in II.1-3 (the "four causes"). After naming these ways, Aristotle says first that there indeed may be another way that things come to be in addition to these "four causes," and that this way might be by *tychē*. However, chance is *not* a cause, according to Aristotle, at least not in any usual sense of the word; it is not the fifth "lost cause." The strangeness of Aristotle's discussion, however, is underscored by his observation that we do see many things happening on account of *tychē* and *automaton*, and that they have everything to do with human flourishing and the place of human life in nature.

Extremely difficult, however, is to think of *tychē* in this text as something other than a cause, or being responsible for anything coming into being or happening at all. So if *tychē* is not a cause, then what is it? We do see many things happening on account of *tychē*, according to Aristotle, and it happens all too often, according to him, that the ancient wise

people either left everything up to chance or regarded nothing as being from fortune. It is right, Aristotle says, to wonder at how this is the case (*Phys.* 196a)—i.e., at how it is possible for the wise to have an “all or nothing” account of chance, for, according to Aristotle, it may occupy a different kind of place entirely.

How we read this part of the *Physics* (Bk. II. 4-6) bears upon how we think about Aristotle in the Greek tradition, and how we read this section will help us understand the phenomenon of chance as it also configures itself throughout the Platonic-Socratic corpus as a moment in which something as simple as a chance happening can determine the very character of the dialogue to take place, or, in one particularly dramatic instance, the very death of Socrates. Recall the beginning of the *Phaedo* on this point, when Phaedo explains to Echecrates that Socrates’ extended stay in prison before his death is a matter of *tychē*. Recall also the beginning of the *Theaetetus* wherein the dialogue is couched in a series of chance occurrences that shape the space of the dialogue and open the possibility of dialogue at all. Recall Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* wherein he speaks of the paradoxical necessity of chance and the benefits of good fortune in human life, suggesting that, since it is altogether too difficult—if not impossible—to investigate matters as they are *haplos* (“simply” or “to themselves”), we must investigate things as they are *to us*, which we know from the *Physics* involves engaging *tychē* as a phenomenon, for chance is disclosed in what appears to us in our horizon of experience and life.

To put it another way: *Tychē* occasions, and makes possible the possibility of our lives *as* occasions, or as infinite potentialities. If one simply hears *tychē* as a figure in control of our lives as Lady Philosophy does in Boethius’ prison cell or as King Lear does in deeming chance an “arrogant whore,” or if *tychē* becomes a matter of mere predestination as in an orthodox Presbyterian belief, then *tychē* cannot resound in the circumstances wherein

we happen to find, as it were, ourselves. It is precisely in the moment of breaking from *superstitious* fates—in front of whom we have no say or control—and the giving back to ourselves the very possibility of our lives that takes its hold when considering *tychē* for the Greeks.

In shorthand, while *tychē* may be spoken of as momentary, or sudden, it is perhaps better articulated as a sustained phenomenon enveloped in philosophy, or even in the possibility of a philosophical life, i.e., one that affords the space for thinking and seeking self-knowledge. There is, truly, a suddenness to *tychē*: things happen to or befall you and to me. However, our lives, too, are indeed happenings, and the question of nature does involve the Aristotelian distinction between things that are to themselves and things that are to us (things that are *haplos* and things that appear to us).

The phenomenon of *tychē* is thus doubled: On one hand, it appears to us as a phenomenon, interrupting an otherwise determined or thought-to-be-determined path (like Lucretius' *clinamen*); on the other hand, it urges us to consider (as I prompted this introduction with thoughts from Aristotle about becoming good) what it means to be truly fortunate, which might even mean to be philosophical, as we'll see Socrates suggest in the *Greater Hippias* and elsewhere.

### **Section V**

#### **Getting There From Here: Ways to Consider The Phenomenon of *Tychē***

The only way to proceed through explaining how the above concerns about *tychē* work in the Greek texts is carefully. Close exegetical work through a host of Greek terms and philosophical questions in Aristotle (and, to a lesser extent, the Platonic dialogues) demonstrates the following three conclusions about the phenomenon of chance in Greek thought:

1. *Tychē* is neither an afterthought nor a fleeting concern for the Greeks, but receives sustained treatment from them in a way that commands our attention in three ways:
  - a.) It disrupts a deterministic view of the universe in the *Physics*; b.) It opens us to the possibility of a good life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; c.) It plays an important role in the *Poetics* as it demands an encounter with what's possible in human life.
2. Careful consideration of *tychē* demonstrates the necessity of reading the Greek texts such that each text illuminates both the whole and the parts of Greek thinking. This idea holds not only for Aristotle's texts individually, but also for the Platonic-Socratic dialogues, which autonomously speak the whole of everything, as I noted earlier that the Greeks always seem, at least, to do. In other words, we will see how each of Aristotle's texts speak to other necessary conversations *beyond* what is taken to be the scope of the text itself (e.g., that an inquiry into nature demands that we consider our ethical compartments in such an inquiry) while thus affirming the horizons *of* each text.<sup>2</sup>
3. Rather than enter a "Plato versus Aristotle" discussion so common in scholarship for the last fifteen hundred years, I advocate reading them not as participating in a *gigontomachia*, but a *gigontophilia*, if I may.<sup>3</sup> I submit, moreover, that considering the character of Socrates as an exemplary demonstration of Aristotelian thought is viable not only because Aristotle so often seems to have Socrates very much on his mind, which he surely does, but more because the strangeness of Socrates himself

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<sup>2</sup> Or, to put it in the form of a question as Nietzsche does in *The Gay Science*, "What good is a book that does not even carry us beyond all books?" (1974, 215)

<sup>3</sup> To provocatively overstate and oversimplify the case, we may say, as Emerson does in "Circles," that "[a] wise man will see that Aristotle Platonizes" (2001, 177).

demands, at base, that we ultimately consider the relationship between chance and a philosophical life.

In light of these and other conclusions not only about the role of *tychē* itself in Greek thought but also about the ways of proceeding *to* that thought (for it certainly doesn't stand alone, surgically removed from its contexts), I offer ultimately that we should view *tychē* as primarily as phenomenon for the Greeks. I take the word "phenomenon" quite literally from its Greek predecessor, *phainomenon*, which means, simply, "that which shows itself." Thus, one sense of the title of this dissertation, *The Phenomenon of Chance in Ancient Greek Thought*, is just to consider the ways in which *tychē* shows itself in Aristotle's texts, paying attention to how it appears in them, and why it appears when and how it does. Circumscribed within such a horizon, *tychē* appears to us, as I have noted, as a destabilizing force in Aristotle's thinking, commanding that we reconsider not only how *tychē* appears, but also the context in which such an appearance arises. In other words, one cannot speak of *tychē* as a phenomenon alone; rather, its self-showing, if not depends on, then is at least co-existent or determinate with, a host of other Greek tasks outlined in this introduction, from how to read Aristotle's texts as belonging together to considering what each text offers singly regarding *tychē*. In this sense, then, *tychē* as a phenomenon emphasizes the stem of the word: *phainō-* means "to bring to light," and is connected with the very word for light, *phōs*. This dissertation, then, is on one hand nothing other than an attempt to bring to light of a Greek idea that has mainly remained dormant since the Greeks. The task of bringing *tychē* to light, then, or awakening it from its historical slumber, orients my dissertation through and through.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Two problems might arise in this formulation: First, I don't mean to claim here that *tychē* is necessarily something, like *ousia* or even *hypokaimenon*. In fact, while it might seem more philosophically fruitful to



However, another seemingly more ordinary sense of the word “phenomenon” also informs my thinking about chance. In the ways in which we would contemporarily speak of something as phenomenal in the sense of extraordinary or eventful, as in witnessing a phenomenal sunset or participating in an extraordinary event, *tychē* too appears to us in this way. While overstating *tychē* as an unusual or exceptional occurrence raises red flags in the history of philosophy (for it is these ways of categorizing *tychē* that lead philosophers and literary characters alike to distrust *tychē* as something that seems either superstitious or malicious regarding human needs and nature), we can benefit from such a discussion by testing basic ways in which we encounter the world, over-determined and desensitized by, I suggest, a teleological and deterministic view of the cosmos that often fails to consider what is possible, not only for our human nature, but for and in nature itself. In other words, while a consideration of *tychē* as extraordinary or an unusual event helps us think about its strange place in Greek thought, a more compelling way to think of *tychē* in this phenomenal sense concerns the very basic composition of the cosmos and our orientation to it, which is, simply put, phenomenal, in ways we often hardly realize. We may stretch ourselves to this thought, then: The ways in which we engage *tychē* as a phenomenon for the Greeks have everything to do with how we take up the universe and our lives, letting what’s visible come to light in them.

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consider ways in which *tychē* itself allows for things to come to light—itsself being nothing—for my purposes here, its neglect in contemporary scholarship on the Greeks and by and large in the history of philosophy lead me to bring *tychē* itself to the fore of our Greek discussion. Second, I also don’t mean that *tychē* can be “simply” brought to light, as if by examining it for the Greeks will yield ultimately clarity. Rather, *tychē* is fundamentally obscure and possibly opaque, emerging from the background or the darkness just long enough for us to glimpse it before retreating once again to its shadows; it always reminds us *of* the shadows.

## Section VI Outline of Chapters

The first two chapters focus on Aristotle's *Physics*, the second two on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the final on the *Poetics*. This trajectory is surely not the only way to consider Aristotle's thinking about *tychē*, but hopefully it is compelling for a consideration of *tychē* in Aristotle: Beginning in the first chapter with a consideration of how one finds oneself on the natural road in making an inquiry into nature (*physis*), we will see not only how *tychē* arises as a source of wonder for Aristotle in an investigation into nature, but also how one must be attuned to receive a discourse concerning nature. That is, in many ways, Aristotle's *Physics* serves as the basis for all subsequent investigations into the nature of beings, for in this text Aristotle encourages us to take ourselves up in an inquiry that always demands that we interrogate the nature of our inquiry. Thus, in Aristotle's *Physics*, we will attend to a double-gesture implicit throughout Aristotle's thinking about *tychē*: Not only will we see why *tychē* emerges as an impasse (*aporia*) for Aristotle's thinking about nature, but we will also see how this thinking urges us to attend to the character of *tychē* in human life.

In order to see how this is so, in the first chapter I argue that many traditional and contemporary ways of reading Aristotle's *Physics* fail to attend to this double-gesture by overlooking the movement of Aristotle's text insofar as it proceeds dialectically and phenomenologically. That is, many Aristotelian scholars, as we shall see, tend to fault Aristotle for not completing a systematic treatise on the nature of nature, thereby dismissing the ways in which Aristotle encounters philosophical matters as they present themselves for consideration, looking instead for a doctrine of the essence of beings, e.g., or a teleological system that explains the cosmos. Yet Aristotle's *Physics* urges us to do otherwise. Consider, for example, how Aristotle says that nature is neither what his materialist predecessors have

claimed it is (i.e., sheer matter/material [or wood], *hylē*) nor what mathematicians would make of it (i.e., pure form, *eidos*), but instead is both (*Phys.* 193a30-31, 193b19, 194a13). Regarding his materialist predecessors, Aristotle says that nature is not simply that *from which* something comes into being, but instead is the movement *to which* something becomes what it is (*Phys.* 193b19). In this way, Aristotle says, nature is indeed an *eidos*, insofar as *physis* is on the way to becoming what it is, taking shape in a certain way according to its nature. However, the conclusion that Aristotle draws from such thinking regarding his predecessors is not that nature is simply a “from which” or a “to which;” rather, insofar as one attends to things that come into being, one must attend also to the ways in which one speaks of such things, mindful that the ways that things show themselves to us speaks to the ways in which we are already engaged in an inquiry of the matter at hand (*Phys.* 193a29-32).<sup>5</sup>

This last point—i.e., attending to the ways in which one is comported to receive a speech (*logos*) concerning nature—speaks to what one might call “ethical” facets of Aristotle’s *Physics*, for in this text Aristotle constantly solicits our attention in this way, urging us to consider how we find ourselves on the natural road. Thus, in the *Physics*, we see that while Aristotle attends to ways in which one may speak of nature as such, we also see that he calls us to attend to how it is that one makes an inquiry into it, rather than positing nature as an object for a subject; we are already claimed by the matter at hand, and thus we have a responsibility in the *Physics* to attend to the ways in which we find ourselves making such an inquiry. For this reason, in the first chapter I also argue that rethinking the

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<sup>5</sup> This point is extremely difficult, but helpful here might be Aristotle’s statement amidst his discussion of *hylē* and *eidos* that “[t]he nature spoken of as coming into being is a road into nature” (*Phys.* 193b14-15). That is, the relationship between *genēsis* (coming into being, or generation) and how we speak (*legomenē*) about nature does not yield a complete definition of nature insofar as it speaks to nature as nothing other than the process of generation and destruction; rather, considering the ways in which we speak of things coming into being is one way—one road (*hodos*)—through which we articulate how nature shows itself to us, or is already disclosed in some way through our speaking of it.

relationship between “cause” (*aitia*) and “speech” (or, as many scholars would have it, “reason,” *logos*) demands that we think of *aitia* not as a cause simply removed from our inquiry, but instead as Aristotle does, which is as a kind of explanation with attention to offering the *best* explanation for a given event or matter. Such an imperative demands receptivity to Aristotle’s text that looks beyond a causal chain of events in order to speak of nature, opening the door for Aristotle’s consideration of *tychē* in Bk. II, a discussion that simply cannot happen if one thinks of causes in either a purely materialist or mathematical way (i.e., as pure matter or form). Rather, by emphasizing the said-character and presence of the *logos*, as Aristotle does, and by paying attention to how it is that philosophical matters open to him (as we shall see, e.g., with wonder and attention to strangeness, or mindful of wise predecessors and endoxic starting points), Aristotle offers a kind of phenomenology of *tychē*, if not of nature.

Now, how can this last statement be the case, and what does it mean? Regarding the *Physics*, what it means is that Aristotle articulates the manifold ways in which beings show themselves to us, but not as beings completely severed from the ways in which we receive, experience, or speak of them; rather, the *logos* that Aristotle offers us in the *Physics* is one that challenges the ways in which one might want to give an account of nature or human life that is primarily scientific or wholly removed from the question and task of understanding what something means, or what it would look like to give the best account of an experience or event. In light of this way of reading the *Physics*, in the second chapter I suggest that Aristotle, like Socrates in the *Phaedo*, turns to the *logos* in the *Physics* in order to make an inquiry into nature in the first place. Given that nature is said in many ways, and that whatever one might say about nature is disclosed through the manners in which we speak of it, we also see how we are already situated in and through the natural road in such an inquiry.

While a vicious circularity threatens here (i.e., to read the *Physics* we must first consider our ethical or human comportment in and to nature, but considering our attunement is predicated on a prior understanding of nature), the point of my emphasizing in the first chapter the relationship between *aitia* and *logos* in light of the natural road at the beginning of the *Physics* is to situate how Aristotle speaks of *tychē*, *automaton*, and that which is *kata symbebēkos* (incidental) in the second chapter, a task that is untenable if one does not attend to the method of Aristotle's proceeding such that *tychē* solicits the language of wonder, culminating in a formidable *aporia* (impasse) concerning the ways in which his predecessors' accounts of it fail to say much at all of it. Hence the relationship between *aitia* and *logos* is pivotal in Aristotle's *Physics* concerning chance, for *tychē* (and also *kata symbebēkos*) is one way in which things appear to us and speak to our human nature, but never as an *aitia* removed from a *logos*. Rather, I argue, to speak of *aitiai* is primarily to offer an explanation, and doing so remains tied—if not at times identical with—a *logos* that one might give of nature or anything else.

Thus, when Aristotle speaks of *tychē* in Bk. II of the *Physics*, he does so insofar as *tychē* pertains to that which appears to us in an inquiry into nature, and he says that *tychē* appears to us as *paralogou*, not without an account or reason (which would be *alogou*), but as challenging a *logos* that we might otherwise want to give concerning it and its place in a natural inquiry. *Para-* can mean “go against,” resonating with *paradoxa*, which means “against commonly held opinion.” Here an opening emerges for philosophical thought, for if *tychē* were simply *alogou*, then it couldn't be spoken of at all. Yet, Aristotle speaks of it as a phenomenon that shows us something about ourselves in the *Physics*, and he does so, as I show in chapter two, by way of explicitly articulating the character of our inquiry in terms of thinking (*dianoia*) and choice (*proairēsis*). *Tychē* thus pertains to the character of human

life, not opposed to nature, but emergent from it. Yet Aristotle does not elaborate fully in this text the ways in which *tychē* speaks to our human place in nature; thus I turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the third and fourth chapters in order to flesh out how *tychē* speaks to the character and place of human beings.

Aristotle's provocation that *tychē* is one way in which things appears to us in an inquiry into nature compels us to further investigate what *tychē* is such that it bridges an inquiry into nature and speaks to the character of human life. To this end, in the third chapter, I show how *tychē* formulates Aristotle's thinking about human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), suggesting that the ultimate kinship between the two speaks to the ways in which life is disclosed in excess of a solitary individual, requiring a fundamental relationality of oneself to others, the gods, or even one's own life. That is, insofar as *tychē* speaks to that which befalls us, like external goods (*ta ekta*) as we shall see in the third chapter, or an opportune moment (*kairos*) as we shall see in the fourth, it also demands that we respond to the gifts of *tychē*, mindful of the radical contingency of human life. Yet however it is that a person responds to *tychē* or its host of related words is ultimately particular in ways that speak to the character of human life as being bound to the task of flourishing in the first place. As a result, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can be seen as an attempt to grapple with this particularity and contingency in ways that speak less to a normative program for ethical development than it does to an imperative to return to the nature of human life itself.

While I wish not to overstate this last point, it is by considering *tychē* and its association with *eudaimonia*, *theos* (the gods), the power of a continuous life, and the circumstances (*kairoî*) in which we find ourselves that Aristotle speaks to the nature of human beings, situating what's possible for us according to our nature. We will see Aristotle in the *Ethics* calling us outside or beyond ourselves, in many ways narrowing human agency

by virtue of the nature that we are. Yet this narrowing of human agency is duplicitously said. On one hand, Aristotle paints a picture of human life that is subordinate to external goods, the gods and other people, a life that seems squeezed by these competing concerns. On the other hand, however, through recognizing ways in which life itself emerges from these relationships in order to speak to the place of human beings in the cosmos and world, we see Aristotle explode this picture of human life through thinking about what's possible for it, or for us.

In the third chapter I also show how *tychē* appears near the beginning of the *Ethics* as an endoxic starting point for Aristotle's inquiry into human flourishing. By reformulating the Greek word for flourishing (*eudaimonia*) to its etymological origins and philosophical significance in the context of the *Ethics*, I suggest that Aristotle sees *tychē* and flourishing not as diametrically opposed, but as speaking to the ways in which human life solicits beyond itself, as I've said throughout this introduction. By pursuing this line of thought, I also: trace how *eudaimonia* requires external goods, but note that these goods require a person putting them to work in her life; see how the relationship between *tychē* and *theos* speaks to the possibility of human excellence or virtue (*arête*) as something divine or in excess to a solitary individual, returning an individual to herself and to the world; argue that those who are fortunate pass their lives most continuously in ways that speak to the *energeia* (being-at-work) of a human life. By the end of the third chapter, then, we will see how an inquiry into nature in the *Physics* helps us ground an inquiry into human nature in the *Ethics*. Attending to the ways in which we find ourselves also on the natural road in the *Ethics*, particularly concerning what human nature discloses about itself and thereby also about nature, Aristotle suggests that we *already* find ourselves situated in an ethical inquiry insofar as we want to flourish in the first place.

In the fourth chapter I turn to the importance of *kairos* (circumstance, or moment) in relation to *tychē*, for insofar as *tychē* pertains to that which can be otherwise, particularly regarding human life and action, *kairos* designates both the particular circumstances in which a person acts and the force of possibility concerning philosophical questioning; both speak to what's possible for human life. Whether one thinks of *kairos* as an opportune moment for acting or as that which occasions the act of questioning, at base we will see how human possibility emerges through our being claimed by the circumstances in which we happen to find ourselves. Such possibility is utterly transformative, and suggests the untimely circumstances of philosophizing. To demonstrate how this is so, I turn to Heidegger, who, in speaking of the kairological character of human life, shows how beings declare the force of possibility in themselves being this possibility. In other words, insofar as the *Ethics* pertains to beings that can be otherwise (i.e., human beings), and insofar as we must grapple with the contingency of our lives, we speak not to a timidity required in action in order to ward off danger, but to the ways in which we ourselves, by virtue of the beings that we are, declare what's possible through our very being; such a comportment requires courage. As one always acts in a given circumstance and never simply (*haplos*), so also does one engage in philosophical inquiry—i.e., according to the matters and questions that present themselves to a person, claiming her in ways that speak to the receptivity required to engage in philosophical discourses, both about nature and human action. Thus at the end of the fourth chapter I return to the relationship between Aristotle's *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and suggest that the relationship between *tychē* and *physis* requires the priority of an open comportment in and to the world, given that *tychē*, like *physis*, speaks to ways in which beings show themselves to us in their (and our) possibilities. Short of a completely systematized treatise concerning the nature of the world and the correct ethical path for



human action, Aristotle describes for us instead the many ways in which beings show themselves to us, should we be fortunate enough to receive them.

In the fifth chapter I turn to a particular facet of human life as it relates to *tychē*, i.e., *poiēsis*. While a return to the *Physics* would also be beneficial to the paths of thinking laid out here, the *Poetics* gives us a way to consider *poiēsis* carefully as it relates to Aristotle's thinking in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. We are poetical beings, Aristotle tells us in the *Ethics*, for in light of the ways in which a human being is more than the sum of her parts and requires something more than herself in order to flourish, the "end" (*telos*) of this life too exceeds her, and even her own knowledge (as we heard Gadamer say). However, another way of rendering *poiēsis*—broadly as "making," and more narrowly as "poetry"—also finds a kinship with *tychē*: *Poiēsis*, in having its end outside of itself (as opposed to *praxis* [action], where the end is in the action, or the thing done), speaks not to necessity (and thus is not epistemic), but to what's possible. Moving away from *epistemē* (and also possibly *sophia*, "wisdom") as knowledge that can't be otherwise, we turn our attention to the activity of *poiēsis* insofar as it, like *tychē*, pertains to that which can be otherwise.

Since *poiēsis* and *tychē* pertain to that which can be otherwise, and since we are or can be poetical beings, in chapter five I engage Aristotle in four main ways: First, I discuss the ways in which a poet (or maker) is more philosophical than a historian because a poet speaks persuasively of what might be or come to pass, as opposed to a historian, who speaks merely of what has happened. Second, I work through the continuous strife at the heart of *poiēsis*, doing so through the interplay between earth and world in Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" in order to see how Heidegger speaks of the place of being through its emergence in art, which subsequently helps us understand the nature of *poiēsis* as it requires activity and passivity. Third, I turn to Kristeva's account of poetry as a practice of the

speaking subject, demonstrated through the interplay and tension between the symbolic and semiotic aspects of one's life, likening them to Heidegger's "earth" and "world" in order to see how rhythm—in the act of speaking, but also in poetry—challenges our tendencies to posit a unified subject. Thus, from Heidegger and Kristeva we see how *poiēsis* speaks to poetry or art itself (in Heidegger) and also to the speaking subject herself (in Kristeva).

Yet the aim of *poiēsis*, Aristotle tells us, is beauty (*to kalōn*, *Poet.* 1447a8). But what is this beauty to which *poiēsis* aspires, and how is such beauty known? Aristotle says, regarding tragedy (his exemplary demonstration of *poiēsis*), that "after undergoing many changes, tragedy stopped when it attained its own nature" (*Poet.* 1449a16). As we will see in chapter four, in the *Ethics* Aristotle says that what is disclosed by *tychē* can make life both beautiful and poetical (*EN* 1100b22-29); *tychē* thus hinges together not only the *Physics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* through disclosing ways in which nature shows itself to us, but also to one possible way of considering the character of human life as itself poetical as having its end elsewhere, and moreover to the activity of *poiēsis* as it too points beyond itself, calling human life back to itself and the world in the process. Regarding what it means for something to "attain its own nature" in light of the necessarily excessive character of *poiēsis*, though, seems strange, but by the end of the fifth chapter we will see how Aristotle and Kristeva speak of a shared concern, which is the necessity of *poiēsis* in human life as that which destabilizes an otherwise static sense of self and truly allows catharsis—repetition, mimesis, abjection, and action—to happen. For Kristeva, the ultimate recourse for such an experience when thinking about how a subject comes into being is literature and its mimesis of the speaking subject; for Aristotle, it's tragedy. Both are poetry.

A few more thoughts about the more implicit thematic elements and issues of this dissertation, elucidated by way of Gadamer: "[E]verything we see stands there before us and

addresses us directly as if it showed us ourselves,” he says in “The Relevance of the Beautiful” (1986, 11). This statement rings most true regarding the Greeks, who demonstrate time and again the manifold ways in which life comes to be disclosed to us—e.g., through experience, philosophical inquiry, tragedy, action—as long as we attend to nothing short of everything, or as long as we can see what we can see. On one hand, such a task is of course daunting, for how could one ever attend to everything, and could one be assured that such attention would in fact yield a complete picture of human life, nature, and all that they concern? Probably not. On the other hand, however, the Greeks draw from whatever sources they can in order to see what they see; nothing—not the poets, myth, experience, tragedy, common opinion, or wise predecessors—is out of bounds for philosophizing or inquiring about their world. Free from contemporary philosophical terminology and attentive to the horizons that present themselves for examination, the Platonic dialogues and Aristotle describe a rich world in which a philosopher can turn to poetry, tragedy, or myth in attending to the character of human life and nature. Such a comportment highlights the urgency for philosophical dialogue for the Greeks, for nothing is too small, fanciful, or ordinary to be abandoned; all is fair game and worth their attention.

The Greeks’ sensitivity in this way informs my thinking about *tychē* in the pages that follow, particularly regarding Socrates’ philosophical practice as characterized by *tychē* and the mythic horizon of chance that concludes my work here. As himself embodying a kind of mythic status in the history of Western philosophy (as he might have also for Aristotle in his time), Socrates demonstrates one way in which we can understand Aristotle’s thinking about what it means to be truly fortunate. This thinking is particular (i.e., certainly Socrates is utterly unique) but also shows us something about the nature of philosophizing and about life itself. “There is something in our experience of the beautiful that arrests us and compels us

to dwell upon the individual appearance itself,” Gadamer says (1986, 16); as we shall see, Socratic strangeness is one such manifestation of this kind of beauty, calling us to attend once again to the character of a poetical life. Thus, Socrates shares an affinity with myth, or tragedy: Particular yet transcendent, emergent from an untimely place, Socrates (like tragedy and myth) forces us to see what we see that shows us ourselves.

But perhaps enough or too much has been said already. In the spirit of the Greeks, then, let us make a new beginning.

## CHAPTER II

### *TYCHĒ* AND THE INQUIRY INTO NATURE IN ARISTOTLE'S *PHYSICS*

And there is virtue surely in the position of one who takes nothing for granted, and is always ready to discuss the universe.

-Virginia Woolf (1989, 256)

Understanding begins [...] when something addresses us.

-Hans-Georg Gadamer (2003, 299)

In his *Novum Organum*, Francis Bacon says that Aristotle “affords us a single instance” of “natural philosophy” that is “little more than useless and disputatious” (I. 53). Yet, according to Martin Heidegger, Aristotle’s *Physics* is the “fundamental book of Western philosophy, never sufficiently thought through” (1998, 185). Certainly, both of these statements cannot hold: If Aristotle’s *Physics* is the mysterious keystone of Western philosophy, as Heidegger says that it is, then an examination of it would give us insight to Aristotle as a thinker of nature, as the very title of his work—*Physics*—suggests. However, this does not mean that Aristotle’s insights thus fulfill the desire of modern philosophers to wrangle a determinate system of philosophy (or better, epistemic *certainty* regarding nature) from his works, leading Bacon to conclude that Aristotle does not, in fact, have anything to offer philosophers regarding the question of nature.

It is the case, paradoxically enough, that Aristotle’s *Physics* both serves as a cornerstone (if not a keystone) to subsequent philosophers *because* of its diligent investigation of nature, *and* that Heidegger’s proclamation that we have yet to understand the *Physics* holds true, or at least requires serious attention. In light of the dilemma concerning

the status of Aristotle's *Physics* in the history of philosophy and questions concerning how to read Aristotle in the first place, an upsurge in contemporary Aristotle scholarship reveals new investigations into the complexity of Aristotle's thought both in the *Physics* and elsewhere, especially regarding the ways in which one might read Aristotle promisingly as a non-doctrinal thinker. As Christopher Long notes, "every attempt to render Aristotle's thought consistent and complete fails to do justice to the dynamic nature of his thinking, to the elasticity of his mind, and to his willingness to risk failure rather than to establish certainty by stealth" (2004, 5). I take this to mean that a return to Aristotle marks a return to *inquiry*, not to *certainty*, for as we shall see Aristotle's own text support, sensitivity toward Aristotle's method in the *Physics* reveals deep *aporiai* that resist certain dogmatic syntheses. This pivotal assertion stands against, for example, Werner Jaeger's influential assessment of Aristotle as wanting "to purge the philosophical consciousness of its mythical and metaphorical elements and to work out the strictly scientific foundation of a metaphysical view of the world that he took over in its main outlines from Plato" (1962, 377). Here, Aristotle becomes the totalizing figure of philosophy in seeing through, with some significant changes, Plato's "own" project, a statement that becomes problematic in my consideration not only of Aristotle's *Physics* but the entirety of Aristotle's work, less for its commentary on the relationship between Plato and Aristotle than for its reductive account of Aristotle as wanting to work out a "strictly scientific foundation of a metaphysical view;" Aristotle's own texts urge us to pause at such compulsively totalizing statements.

To this end, J. L. Ackrill explains that Aristotle is often wrongly assessed as a doctrinal thinker because "he does aim at developing a systematic and comprehensive philosophy, and at reaching final and correct conclusions about the questions examined," and also because his works have always been studied *as if* they hold doctrines (1981, 1). In

tension here is Aristotle's intension regarding his own work: If one maintains that Aristotle has the aims that Ackrill notes, but that such an authorial desire resists doctrines that readers might discern, then Aristotle seems to fall to pieces, unable to complete his own aims in light of a tradition that has already decided what Aristotle's own goals in his writings are. Yet, even if one is to grant Aristotle as a primarily scientific thinker, as Jaako Hintikka does, "[w]hat is still being missed [in Aristotle scholarship] is the problem-driven character of Aristotle's thought" (1996, 83), a character that demands our attention, regardless of what we decide about Aristotle's "scientific" thought.

But what does this "problem-driven character" of Aristotle's thinking entail, and how does it manifest itself in Aristotle's texts? What would it mean to read Aristotle non-doxtrinally, surrendering our modern impulses to categorize Aristotle as a philosopher who begins a systematic investigation into nature that only subsequent philosophers (perhaps like Bacon) finish, or even try to refute? This chapter investigates Aristotle as a philosopher for whom *inquiry*, not certainty, holds the greatest insight in the *Physics*. This claim entails that we pay close attention to questions that arise in Aristotle's texts concerning the nature of *tychē* and the ways in which it arises *as* a question for Aristotle. To this end, I follow Gadamer, who says that "[t]he essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (1989, 299). Aristotle, I think, engages in such questioning, prioritizing questions over systematic philosophizing such that the *character* of philosophy itself comes to live in the questions that we ask and seek to understand within a given horizon, like in an inquiry into nature. As Gadamer also notes, "[t]he horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. [...] '[T]o have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but also being able to see beyond it" (1989, 302). To have a horizon, then, is to be always in the process of engaging such boundaries *as*

boundaries, mindful of the activity of marking and unmarking what one can see or understand. Gadamer continues, “A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition” (1989, 302). What it means to “have” a horizon is fundamentally active: We must strive to articulate what we can see in such a horizon in order to demarcate or mark out the subject-matter of our inquiry, mindful that doing so necessarily excludes important matters for consideration, which, if we are attentive, we can glimpse or stand in relation to; the possibility of seeing beyond a given horizon tempts us through and through. We must remain mindful, thus, and interrogate our place in this horizon, as we ourselves help determine its character and participate in its activity.

The priority of the question and the character of our horizons reverberates in a certain sense also with Emerson, who pushes the possible limitations of our horizons in “Circles” by saying, “[t]he eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end” (2001, 174). Since, for Emerson, “[t]he key to every man is his thought,” the life of this person is “a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end” (2001, 175). This interplay between a human being and her horizon, between a person and her life, depends on “the force of truth of the individual soul” (2001, 175). One way to hear Gadamer and Emerson together is to consider, then, the character of our inquiries such that we always remain open both to the universe and to ourselves as possibilities, allowing new horizons to destabilize an otherwise determined sense of self and nature.

With these thoughts on the nature of horizon in mind, in this chapter I show that the character of Aristotle’s dynamic and elastic mind illuminates problems that Aristotle



encounters in his own thinking, forcing him to begin, like Timaeus in his eponymous dialogue, over and over again in order to make an inquiry into nature, continually inhabiting various horizons, from the nature of chance and necessity, e.g., to how it is that they belong together in a discussion of *physis*. Because of the emphasis I place on inquiry in Aristotle, attempts to systematize Aristotle's thinking in accord with absolute certainty (such that we can deduce a programmatic Aristotelian treatise on ethical practice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, e.g., or a conception of the "four causes" that settles Aristotle's discussion about generation and destruction in the *Physics*) prohibit reading Aristotle fruitfully as he encounters *aporiai* (impasses) in his own thinking.

In order to demonstrate the consequences of such a reading, this and the next chapter engage seven main facets of Aristotle's thinking in the *Physics*:

- 1) the contemporary landscape of reading Aristotle, with attention to how the question of *tychē* arises within Aristotle's *Physics*;
- 2) a close examination of necessity (*anankē*) in nature (*physis*) at the beginning of the text, regarding both the "natural road" and our orientation on/in it;
- 3) the relationship between cause (*aitia*) and *logos*, insofar as it frames Aristotle's sustained consideration of *tychē* after his discussion of the "four causes;"
- 4) Aristotle's relationship to his predecessors' thinking about the place of *tychē*, and Aristotle's own wonder at the strange place of *tychē* in previous thought and in our experiences;
- 5) the relationship between *tychē* and *automaton*;
- 6) the role of *kata symbebēkos*;
- 7) the paradoxical necessity of chance in the *Physics*.

Through an examination of the key phrases and terms above, I demonstrate that Aristotle's discussion of chance (*tychē*) in Book II of the *Physics* disrupts a traditionally understood coherent system of philosophy in Aristotle's thinking in light its problematic status in the text. Reading the text attentively in this way, I suggest that *tychē* plays a central role in Aristotle's thinking, one that is marginalized, as we shall see, by readers of Aristotle who pursue a totalizing account of his thought. Finally, I show that overlooking the status of *tychē* in Aristotle falls in line with a traditional thematic in the history of philosophy that dichotomizes necessity, reason, and even philosophy itself over and against *tychē*, even as a phenomenon in our lives. However, chance itself disrupts this philosophical trajectory, and it is through a close look at Aristotle's thinking about *tychē*, when combined with two instances of Socrates' relationship to *tychē* in the Platonic dialogues, that demonstrates the significance of this idea in Greek philosophy.

### **Section I** **The Contemporary Aristotelian Landscape**

"The plain fact is," Joseph Owens tells us,

that despite Greek optimism, the human mind does not have any intuitive grasp of specific substantial forms in natural things. [...] The stupendous success of the qualitative and quantitative procedures in the natural sciences since the sixteenth-century stands out in vivid contrast to the sterility of a method that sought first the final cause, identified it with the formal cause, and then tried to use the form as a blueprint for understanding the details of natural things (1981, 140).

The optimism of which Owens speaks here points to the desire of philosophy to provide a blueprint that would apply to knowledge of natural things, subsuming these things under a heading of "formal cause" which would then serve as an over-arching map for scientific knowledge (*epistemē*) in Aristotle's philosophy. This optimism hinges on a teleological view of nature in which nature itself acts purposively, not as it is endowed with intelligence or *nous*, but purposively insofar as nature acts *like* a mind for a purpose, something which,

according to Owens, is “accepted merely as a fact” for Aristotle, “on the ground of immediate observation and deduction” (1981, 145). Noting that the term “teleology” is a modern one, fixed in meaning by contemporary use to “denote the study of final causes in nature” (1981, 136), when we use the term regarding nature, “it assumes that purposive activity is present and asks how the activity is to be identified and described” (1981, 136). This process of describing purposive activity according to Owens is what Aristotle undertakes in his *Physics* and elsewhere in order to achieve epistemic knowledge, which is the achievement of philosophy in understanding nature in its regularity, purposiveness, and necessity.

To this end, Jonathan Barnes says that “[t]he second condition in Aristotle’s account of knowledge is that what is known must be the case of necessity: if you know something, that thing *cannot* be otherwise” (1982, 35). Thus, according to Barnes, knowledge is always of what is necessary, and a standard view of *epistemē* for the Greeks accords with such an understanding: *Epistemē* pertains to universal knowledge, or what must hold in all cases in all times. We might say that the achievement of *epistemē*, then, provides the blueprint that Owens notes underlies and directs Aristotle’s philosophical desire: The achievement of *epistemē* is, in many ways, the achievement of philosophy itself insofar as universal knowledge becomes the necessary category for understanding the particulars within nature, or anything that comes to be. Accordingly, Barnes says, “Aristotle, like Plato before him, was primarily concerned with a special type of knowledge—with what we may call scientific understanding; and it is plausible to claim that scientific understanding involves knowledge of causes” (1982, 34). For both Owens and Barnes, the Greeks ambitiously and primarily pursue scientific understanding, an understanding that then can be corrected by subsequent

philosophers and scientists because a measure of correctness, as that which necessarily is true, emerges as the pinnacle of scientific-philosophical thought.

But, here's the rub: If we accept Owens' and Barnes' general accounts of Aristotle as they pertain to *epistemē* as necessarily universal thought, and if we accept an over-arching teleology available to us from the sixteenth-century onward, applying it retrospectively to Aristotle, then we must see Aristotle as little other than a worthy but ultimately failed philosopher who couldn't satisfy his own goals for philosophical thinking, i.e., the systemization of philosophical thought understood as pure *epistemē*. Thus, we might be tempted to "correct" Aristotle's flaws, thank him for beginning a sustained treatment of philosophical insights regarding the necessity of nature and how we come to know this necessity methodologically, and move on to those who fulfill Aristotle's project. "The result," according to Owens, "is that the Aristotelian teleology of nature, in spite of its many penetrating and still useful insights, lacks the completion that might give it overall appeal today. Though humanistic to the extent that it directs all other terrestrial things to man's service, it leaves man himself far too much a thing in nature" (1981, 146); Aristotle's view belittles the (perhaps Cartesian?) power of the human mind in remaining distinctly separated from nature, a nature which, according to Owens, "in strict philosophical use was limited to things that undergo sensibly perceptible motion" (1981, 136). For Owens, then, Aristotelian teleology "extends outside the individual agent, and destines the individual to be sacrificed for a higher good, as a somewhat more accessible foundation in substantial nature" (1981, 145); even human beings abide an epistemic blueprint.

This picture of Aristotle privileges the role of epistemic knowledge over and against all other ways of knowing or of philosophical inquiry, and thus, on their own admission, Owens and Barnes must give accounts of moments in Aristotle's texts that threaten to disrupt

a coherent picture of systematic philosophizing to a certain end. Noting that “for Aristotle as well as for Plato, general philosophical views hold only roughly and for the most part” (1981, 146), Owens urges us toward the consequences for thinking of nature in such a view: Nature becomes that which holds always or for the most part such that anything happening in other ways, like *tychē*, is said to happen against nature or necessity, falling thusly outside the scope of epistemic knowledge by virtue of its irregularity—nature pertains to what is necessary, not what is possible. As a result, insofar as Aristotle is concerned with certain knowledge, such considerations lay outside a general blueprint for understanding, one that depends solely on the necessary regularity of nature, or at least of the necessity entailed in the certainty of knowledge itself.

Yet, how does such a reading hold in light of, e.g., aporetic moments in Aristotle’s texts that seem to destabilize a thoroughly logical deductive movement of philosophy, and how might Aristotle’s diverse texts hang together in light of such a systematic emphasis on the necessity of scientific knowledge? Responding to these questions demands that we come to terms with possible ways of reading Aristotle such that we might seriously consider *tychē* in the *Physics*, for on Owens’ and Barnes’ view, no consideration of *tychē* is really necessary, for all that’s necessary is necessity itself and the ability of knowledge to think the necessity of what is. We can see already, from the thoughts sketched out in this section, how *tychē* needn’t be a concern for the two of them and other Aristotelian scholars: In a teleological view of nature, what happens, happens always or for the most part, and understanding this regularity is the best that philosophy can do insofar as it pertains to regularity approaching universality—the goal of philosophical thought. As I have noted, according to Barnes, knowledge is always of what’s necessary, for to know something is to know that it can’t be otherwise.

In light of these stakes and before turning to *tychē* specifically in order to see how it challenges the viewpoints laid out here, we should consider how thinkers who affirm this reading of Aristotle might respond to challenges that Aristotle's texts themselves present. These challenges resemble those presented by the Platonic dialogues, which, to my mind, are currently enjoying a renaissance of fruitful thinking about, e.g., the performative, literary, and dramatic character of the dialogues over and against a debatable reading of Plato as a Platonist who holds doctrines, for instance, of the forms. While such a discussion about the Platonic texts sadly exceeds the boundaries of this dissertation, they do provide a context for ways in which attentiveness to the manner in which Aristotle proceeds in the *Physics* and elsewhere threatens to tumble *epistemē* from its lofty pedestal as the sole giver of knowledge from an Aristotelian perspective.

Gareth Matthews notes, "Characteristically in his writings Aristotle gives the impression of being totally in command. Although he thinks it vitally important to identify the perplexities associates with a topic of investigation, he makes clear that he expects to be able to resolve those perplexities [*aporiai*] before he quits the topic" (1999, 134). Because Aristotle is in such command, the *aporiai* (impasses, or "perplexities" to Matthews) he encounters in his thinking, unlike those characterized by Socrates, does not denote a state of puzzlement at all: "Aristotle's idea that we begin our inquiry by running through the perplexities (*diaporesai*) is the idea of listing problems, difficulties, or puzzles, rather than the idea of re-experiencing states of bafflement" (1999, 130). In other words, Aristotle lays out "puzzles" so that he can resolve them, expecting that he will resolve them, and in fact, doing so.

One longer passage from Barnes clarifies the ways in which one must read Aristotle, if one has decided what Aristotle's aims of his own philosophical thought must be characterized as the pursuit solely of scientific knowledge:

It is undeniable that many of Aristotle's treatises are, in large part, aporetic in style—they do discuss problems, and discuss them piecemeal. It is also undeniable that the treatises contain little or nothing in the way of axiomatized development. It is right to stress those points. But it is wrong to infer that Aristotle was not at bottom a systematic thinker. [...] There are so many hints and intimations of systematization in the treatises that the solution of *aporiai* cannot be regarded as the be-all and end-all of Aristotle's scientific and philosophical enquiries; and—a point worth underlining—even the piecemeal discussions of individual problems are given an intellectual unity by the common conceptual framework within which they are examined and answered. Systematisation is not achieved in the treatises; but it is an idea, ever present in the background. (1982, 38)

Such a (truly) thoughtful statement leads Barnes to conclude, "Aristotle does not ever, in his treatises, boast of having completed any branch of knowledge. His achievement, great though it was, inevitably fell short of his idea; and the Aristotelian system was designed with the ideal in mind" (1982, 39). In other words, if we consider the role of *aporiai* in Aristotle's texts, which we must undeniably do if for no other reason than we are confronted with them time and again throughout most of Aristotle's texts, then we must do so with an aim toward understanding how they move Aristotle's main argument along, *not* as they present themselves as disruptive matters for thought to be encountered along the way. That is, we must overlook these impasses, even if or as they encourage us to confront difficult philosophical questions when and how they arise. Aristotle, insofar as he is in "control" of his writings, thus uses *aporiai* to treat individual problems in light of a greater, unified whole, a whole that is epistemic by nature as that toward which we ultimately aim in our philosophical pursuits.

However, here I urge us to make a full stop before acquiescing to such a reading of Aristotle: Given the breadth and depth of the *aporiai* that Aristotle encounters, it seems to

me that we ought to pay attention to them not solely because they belong to a greater, more general, whole, but instead as they open philosophically rich considerations for Aristotle in their own right. Rather than speak of Aristotle “in control” of his writings, then, I urge an attentive reader to pay attention to how Aristotle follows philosophical questions themselves, regardless of the “control” that Aristotle commands in his texts. In this way, Aristotle is like Socrates, ready and willing to follow the *logos* wherever it may lead, even if it does not fit neatly into an over-arching blueprint of his choosing.<sup>6</sup>

By considering how representative scholars approach reading Aristotle, I have now laid the groundwork for turning our attention to *tychē* as it disrupts a coherent picture of Aristotle as a fundamentally doctrinal thinker. Such a discussion reveals the stakes of *tychē* in Aristotle’s *Physics*, for if one considers it, like Aristotle does, as a deep *aporia* that is worth bringing one to a full stop in a consideration of *physis*, then we must also reevaluate the strength of contemporary scholarship to follow Aristotle through these *aporiai*, not in light of an over-arching ideal, but instead as it presents itself for a matter of philosophical thought as well. We must, in other words, encounter *tychē* as Aristotle does: With wonder and attention to strangeness.

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<sup>6</sup> My claim that Aristotle genuinely encounters *aporiai* in (his own) thought such that he wonders at the ideas he faces strikes me as more contentious than I originally thought. In a recent discussion with Myles Burnyeat, an Oxford and Cambridge Greek scholar and former chair of the Aristotelian Society (2005-2006), I asked him what he makes of moments in Aristotle’s work where Aristotle seems to be doing something other than purely “systematic philosophy” that ends with certain epistemic knowledge, with me suggesting that Aristotle often pauses to confront the *aporiai* in his own thinking, and that the way in which Aristotle proceeds has everything to do with “what” Aristotle says. Professor Burnyeat countered my claim by saying that Aristotle possesses a “divine intellect” that few can acquire, and thus that Aristotle’s “method” is not philosophically interesting, for it serves merely as propaedeutic to his “real” insights. In other words, Aristotle does not encounter *aporiai* as true *aporiai* to struggle with and pursue, but instead as “puzzles” to demonstrate for others why a given proposition or view cannot hold, laid out to demonstrate the errors that common people experience on their way to knowledge. (February 27, 2008; quotation marks denote actual words exchanged.)



In light of the representative ways to read Aristotle in general as illuminated by Owens and Barnes, we can briefly note traditional ways that *tychē* and its related words (*automaton*, *kata symbebēkos*) are configured in the *Physics* in accord with such a reading. In the *Physics*, we see Aristotle being challenged and confronted by *tychē* in laying out his inquiry into nature, and the appearance of *tychē* in the *Physics* is where we can clearly see Aristotelian commentators and scholars fracture in their thinking about *tychē* in the *Physics* and elsewhere. If scholars pay any attention to Aristotle's thinking about chance at all (which is rare), they generally fall into two camps: some subsume chance under teleology or determinism, arguing that nature or mind, insofar as they are purposive, deny the phenomenon of chance as chance, even in Aristotle (cf. e.g., Simplicius 1997, Bolotin 1997, Magruder 1969, Boeri 1995); others try to save room for rationality in light of mischievous chance, citing Aristotle in saying that happiness can not simply be fortune because this would completely misalign the role of rationality as we experience it as acting agents in the world (e.g., Nussbaum 2001, Charlton 1985). However, there are some (read: few) who maintain an openness to chance that deeply engages the phenomenon as it shows itself in the *Physics* and elsewhere in the Greeks. This latter group (e.g., Massie 2003, Baracchi 2003, Burger 1988, and Long 2004) is interested in reading Aristotle as dialogical within his own texts, and thus the possibility of chance playing an important role in the *Physics* remains open in such a reading. Although these scholars do not all speak of chance explicitly, the way that they are interested in reading Aristotle along the lines that I have outlined here promises to give us insight into the Aristotle's legacy and ways of reading him now.

Yet, a predominantly representative way of reading Aristotle on *tychē* is presented by W. Charlton, who says that *Physics* II.4-6 (Aristotle's most sustained treatment of chance in this text) presents "a fairly straightforward treatise on chance" and "presents no difficulties"

in reading Aristotle. For Charlton, ascribing things to chance is our human mistake in thinking that something does not act for some end when it actually does. The problem, according to Charlton, lies with us finding things remarkable when we shouldn't; when we expect something to happen and it appears to happen in a remarkable way that we did not think it could, we ought to see that it secretly does admit of a purpose, even if we are too dimwitted to see it. In these passages in the *Physics*, according to Charlton, Aristotle is "careless" and "questionable;" he "ought to know better" than to claim that chance is something that it is not, but he "is not very careful" in this section when writing about chance (1985, 105-108). Elsewhere scholars display displeasure on Aristotle's own tensions on the nature of causes in relation to the question of fortune or chance. As Dominic Scott says, "[u]nfortunately, [Aristotle's] treatment of this issue has proved extremely perplexing" (2000, 211). And this kind of reading is not without its friends, for thinking about chance and fortune in the first place is often at odds with any kind of philosophical inquiry.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, in attempts to render chance or fortune either obsolete or subsumable into a purely logical framework, James Magruder, for example, says that "chance and fortune are not causes in the primary sense for Aristotle, but are considered as 'incidental

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<sup>7</sup> Consider, for example, how Spinoza casts fortune as superstition in the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, wherein he says that "if men could manage all their affairs by a certain plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would never be in the grip of superstition." But, since "all men by nature are liable to superstition," this superstition takes the following form: "[I]f, while they [people] are tormented by fear, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think that it portends either a fortunate or unfortunate outcome, and for that reason they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even though it may deceive them a hundred times" (1998, 6-7). In other words, since people cannot see in advance the consequences of their affairs, we naturally give over to superstition, which is how we normally consider fortune; this is folly for us.

This lineage continues through Kant, who also disparages fortune and chance as blind and unworthy of a reasonable investigation, saying in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that fortune and chance are merely concepts which "run loose" without legality (1996, 142); we have no right to consider them. In his *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant also says that a good will cannot be impacted by ill fortune, i.e., that one's character surpasses the events that happen to happen to it, and that the ability of the will to bring about a certain end is not prone in any way to chance. Rather, a good will "would sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself" (1989, sec. I.3).

causes'...[t]hat may be put under a main heading, namely that chance and fortune do not meet the logical requirements for the middle term (expressing the cause or reason) in a demonstrative syllogism; hence, there can be no scientific knowledge of a chance event" (1969, 80). Continuing the picture of Aristotle we get from Barnes and Owens, there can be no scientific knowledge of a chance event because chance stands in contrast to the regular necessity of nature and knowledge; knowledge pertains to what is known with certainty, and that which is known by certainty pertains to the essence of a thing. Thus *tychē* and *automaton* are subsumable into Aristotle's greater schema, an ideal that, while remaining unsatisfied, is omnipresent nonetheless.

As if thinking about chance specifically in Aristotle weren't scarce and problematic enough, the role of chance in philosophy is often disparaged and has been since the Greeks. Representative of the way in which fortune and chance are predominantly instantiated in philosophy, Boethius' conversation with Lady Philosophy sheds light on what a rigorous interrogation of chance must entail, especially given the problems that we've discovered when thinking about necessity in nature. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy diagnoses Boethius' sorry state of imprisonment against Boethius' own lamentation of his bad fortune, saying that Boethius' emphasis on his misfortune masks the true state of affairs: he chooses not to admit his place (and thus fails to take responsibility for his actions) in a well-governed universe designed by reason, which is the proper source of philosophy and understanding. In order to investigate Boethius' mistaken assessment of his situation, Lady Philosophy asks him a series of seductive questions in order to persuade him to reason's side. Boethius finally admits that the course of the world is guided by reason, and that chance, standing in strict opposition to reason, could never be the cause or effect of anything the

creator superintends. Delighted to hear this, Lady Philosophy, in the spirit of diagnosing an illness to bring about health, thus says to him:

But thanks be to the source of health, for nature has not wholly forsaken you; your true conviction of the government of the world provides us with the nourishment to restore you to health, for you to believe that the universe is guided by divine reason, and is not subject to random chance (1999, 20).

Thus the restoration of Boethius back to his healthy self concerns the way in which he is to take himself up as one person in a well-ordered universe, and the consolation that comes from this in knowing that his exile, imprisonment, and eventual death have a reason or a cause comforts him in light of the unfortunate situation in which he first thought himself. After all, if the whims of fickle fortune rule over people's lives then, precisely speaking, we can make no sense of fortune or chance, if they do exceed the thinkable, and especially if they stand in opposition to philosophy.

But what is fortune, such that it stands contrary to reasonable thinking in this way, and what is chance, such that superstition quickly lends itself to its side? The kind of thinking of which Lady Philosophy is wary is something that the Greeks know well, yet Aristotle's discussion of chance in the *Physics* and elsewhere, and Phaedo's admission of *tychē* mentioned before in the *Phaedo*—especially when considered in light of Socrates' admission in the *Greater Hippias* that his own philosophical practice might be a matter of *tychē*—demonstrate a serious engagement with it, one which is subsequently ignored.

The first thing to note in the *Physics* II.4 regarding *tychē* is the intensified and powerful language that Aristotle uses to describe *tychē* and the problems that it causes in his thinking. Three words—*aporia* (impasse), *atopos* (strange, or out-of-place), and *thaumazein* (to wonder)—while not being utterly unique to this passage (in fact, they illuminate the text at its most decisive moments), slip by unnoticed to interpreters of Aristotle who insist on

reading Aristotle doctrinally. The fact is that, because of the language that Aristotle uses here, and because of the way in which he proceeds in his inquiry, Aristotle himself must wonder at the appearance of *tychē* in his discussion of nature. That this discussion occurs just after Aristotle names the four ways that things come-into-being is significant: What about Aristotle's own account of the "four causes" is somehow unsatisfying in how we understand the world?

In laying a philosophically fruitful foundation for his discussion, we can note that, loosely said, *automaton* stands in opposition to the workings of the heavens, but *tychē* might play a role among human concerns insofar as human beings are firstly situated in nature as well as in an inquiry into it. To this end, we might note that the *Physics* itself is a puzzling work: Neither simply a scientific investigation into the nature of the cosmos (for there are too many demands put on the reader to be such a doctrine) nor a traditionally understood "first philosophy" *qua* metaphysical text, the *Physics* maintains the tension at play in this section of the work between *tychē* and *automaton* insofar as Aristotle seriously grapples with both, both seem superstitious (or at least anti-scientific) to our minds, and both lead to deeper *aporiai* that must be undergone or suffered without coming to a definite—i.e., certain or dogmatic—conclusion.

The key to understanding Aristotle on this point lies in resisting Lady Philosophy's enchantment of Boethius and in remembering Heidegger's assessment of modern philosophy's insistence on certainty. For Aristotle, *tychē* most certainly sustains a fundamental relationship to life. As we will importantly see, *aitiai* and *logoi* are both explanations of events as we stand in relation to them, and thus our inquiry into nature is characterized by the comportment that we have both to it and to ourselves. It may seem strange to read the *Physics* as anything other than an inquiry into non-human nature, but I

submit that Aristotle is doing just this, especially in these passages on *tychē*. When describing ways that things happen or come to be, for example, Aristotle says that “of things that happen, some happen for the sake of something and some not (and of the former, some in accordance with choice [*kata proairesis*], some not in accordance with choice, but both are among things for the sake of something), so that it is clear that even among things apart from what is necessary or for the most part, there are some to which it is possible that being for the sake of something belongs” (*Phys.* 196b20). In introducing choice—a particularly human concern, as becomes evident especially in his *Nicomachean Ethics*—Aristotle explicitly links *tychē* with the ability to deliberate and make choices. *Tychē*, according to Aristotle, is concerned with human actions, and thus shows itself in the *praxis* of human life (*Phys.* 197b3), insofar as we deliberate and make choices for ourselves. As such, *tychē* is indefinite or unbounded (*ahoriston*, *Phys.* 197a25), necessarily *paralogou* (*Phys.* 197a19), and bears upon our human place in the cosmos. Aristotle says that “thinking and *tychē* concern the same thing, for there is no choice without thinking” (*Phys.* 197b10), differentiating between *tychē* and *automaton* insofar as the first relates to human beings and the latter to inanimate and non-human beings in nature, who stand in no relation to *tychē* on account of their lack of deliberation and ability to make choices. This is significant because it occurs after Aristotle notes that our inability to see in advance and ahead of ourselves the consequences resulting from our choices and actions, dramatically impacting how we make an inquiry into our human nature, for making choices and thinking bear upon our human orientations to the world and to ourselves.

As I mentioned before, Socrates himself instantiates the significance of *tychē* in Greek thought, for it is he who characterizes his philosophical practice in terms of *tychē*, which leads him, like Aristotle in his *Physics*, to an *aporia*. At the end of the *Greater*

*Hippias*, a text to which I return in the next chapter, Hippias asks Socrates what good the arguments that they just had about the beautiful (*tō kalōn*) amount to. His suggestion is that their conversation (and, by implication, Socratic philosophical practice) amounts to nothing but foolish and idle chatter. To this assessment, Socrates replies,

My dear Hippias, you are blessed because you know the things a man ought to practice, and have, as you say, practiced them satisfactorily. But I, as it seems, am possessed by some crazy *tychē* (*daimonia tis tychē*), so that I am always wandering and perplexed, and, exhibiting my perplexity (*aporia*) to you wise men, am in turn reviled by you in speech (*logos*) whenever I exhibit it. (*Gr. Hip.* 304C)

Socrates' own *logos* here concerning his philosophical practice accounts for the dramatic difference between his manner of inquiry versus that of Hippias, whose insistence on definite explanations and categorizable accounts of beauty betrays the kind of philosophical inquiry that couches Socrates' understanding of his philosophical practice. Particularly striking in Socrates' account is how Socrates acknowledges that his relationship to *tychē* stands in opposition to other kinds of *logoi* that his interlocutors might offer, linking his philosophical practice through *tychē* to *aporiai* that he experiences.

This is not unlike Aristotle's own encounter with *tychē*, as I have begun to sketch out here and as we shall continue to see in this and the following chapter, for the *aporiai* that Aristotle encounters in his inquiry into nature in the *Physics* couch his philosophical investigations. Neither simply in opposition to necessity, reason, and certainty, the role of *tychē* in Greek thinking points to a peculiarly Greek phenomenon: the relationship between *tychē* and philosophy. If Socrates explains that the character of his inquiry is determined by how he understands himself in relation to *tychē*, then we might ask how this bears upon how we might otherwise think of the Greeks, as Bacon does, in being misguided philosophers who simply fall short of real philosophical insight concerning the nature of the cosmos and of our human role of it. Socrates' admission recalls Phaedo's strange *logos* that Socrates' extended

stay in prison is aided by *tychē*, something which Lady Philosophy's insistence on reason and order cannot admit.

The implications of this sort of thinking are many and varied: If we take *tychē* seriously for the Greeks, then we must read them in light of the *aporiai* that they experience when trying to order their thoughts in relation to *tychē* as a phenomenon in human life. To say this dramatically, we might pose a question as follows: What is the difference between Boethius' stay in prison and Socrates'? How we respond to this question determines the character of our own inquiry into nature and points to how we stand on the natural road in Aristotle's account of *physis*.

## Section II Necessity and the Natural Road

The first mention of necessity (*anankē*) in Aristotle's *Physics* occurs in the very beginning of the text when Aristotle says that "it is necessary to lead ourselves forward in this way: from what is *less* clear by nature but clearer *to us* to what is clearer and better known by nature" (*Phys.* 184a18-20). This, he says, is the "natural road" (*pephukē hodos*) we must follow if we wish to become acquainted with (*gnorizein*, *Phys.* 184a) and have knowledge (*epistemē*, *Phys.* 184a10) of nature, especially pertaining to its various origins (*archai*, *Phys.* 184a15).<sup>8</sup> It is through our acquaintance with the *archai* and *aitiai* that understanding about nature *comes to us* (*ginoskein*, *Phys.* 184a5); i.e., through the way in which we *already* are oriented to the task at hand we will come to understand something

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<sup>8</sup> While outside the scope of the discussion here, it is important to note the differences, from a Greek perspective, between *gnorizein* and *epistemē*, i.e., what it means to be familiar with or recognize something as opposed to having epistemic knowledge about that thing. Perhaps the best reference for this distinction and the force of it lies in Plato's *Theaetetus*, at the beginning of which Socrates *recognizes* Theaetetus when he walks toward Socrates and his teacher, Theodorus, who fails to recognize his own student (*Theae.* 144C). Theaetetus is familiar to Socrates in some way, whereas Theodorus' insistence on *epistemē* and geometry as the two primary, if not only, ways of knowing.



about nature itself. This “nature itself,” however, is importantly not a static entity that stands before human life like an object to a subject;<sup>9</sup> rather, it is the play between the two—nature and human nature—that emphasizes the importance of the in-between for an investigation into nature: Neither divorced simply from nature itself nor capable of determining the whole of it, the ways in which we already find ourselves on the natural road determines the character of our investigation into nature, or into what is.<sup>10</sup>

Putting it plainly, for Aristotle, *that nature is*, would be ridiculous to try to show (*Phys.* 193a3); hence, an inquiry into nature demands that we comport ourselves to how it is already disclosed to us, as we emerge *from physis* and are tied *to* it. The stakes, for Aristotle, are high, for we could not only come to understand the many ways in which *physis* is articulated in or as beings, but also the ways in which understanding these things are possible

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<sup>9</sup> Echoing these sentiments, Russell Winslow, in a very recent book, says about the *Physics* that “Aristotle’s method of discovery betrays a structure that cannot be described as either empirical or conceptual; indeed we must unhinge ourselves from these oppositional categories if we are to think what I believe is the very exciting, if curious, structure of revealing what something is (*ti esti* or *to ti en einai*) in Aristotle’s world—whether physical, metaphysical or ethical” (2007, 20). This point contrasts, for example, Otfried Hoffé’s assertion that “what Aristotle himself puts into practice [is] an interest in the richness of the particular that can only be investigated empirically” (2003, 28). Whereas Hoffé urges readers to emphasize the empirical commitments that he sees Aristotle holding, Winslow also urges us to consider how Aristotle’s texts demonstrate a “way of thinking about rational disclosure that breaks down the dualistic oppositional paradigm of the knowing subject and its object,” which is “a necessary step in order to see the access to truth through the dialogical” (2007, 8). While Winslow’s ultimate goal is to demonstrate how *logos*, as a twofold structure, binds to—and, in a certain way, “is”—*physis* (2007, 23), we share a same concern about bringing modern philosophical dichotomies to Aristotle’s texts, preferring instead to let the texts speak for themselves as much as possible.

<sup>10</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle puts the situation this way, when speaking about how one ought to receive any given *logos* and be attuned to different ways of speaking: “[I]t is absurd to be searching at the same time for knowledge (*epistemē*) and for the direction to knowledge; and it is not possible to get either of the two easily” (*Meta.* 995a12-15). That is, in order to search for a given aim, one must be in some sense acquainted already with the desired end; one cannot ask both the “what” of a situation and for a way to understand what is at stake in it; one cannot ask for a definition of a nonsense word; one cannot ask for directions to an undetermined place. This point becomes important when we turn to the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, wherein Aristotle speaks quite cryptically about the possibilities of becoming good at all or in the first place. His discussion there hinges, in large part, on how it is that we are predisposed or habituated in certain ways *in advance of ourselves*, demanding a kind of uncanny self-knowledge or trust in things beyond our control.

for us, if we follow Aristotle or lead ourselves down the natural road. Such a movement down the natural road, however, demands *already* an engagement with *physis*, such that we might say that nature is already on the road to it. In other words, in resisting a subject-object dichotomy foreign to Aristotle, we might say that it is *physis* itself that allows both for our inquiry into it inasmuch as *physis* denotes what's possible for, or is in, such an inquiry. This tripartite structure of *physis*, then, follows a Heideggerian hermeneutic circle, which demands, as he does when considering art, that we enter *into* this circle, aware that our understanding of *physis* hinges on our ability to maintain the horizon of *physis* as our inquiry into it demands.

On one hand, Aristotle's comments on the *pephukē hodos* fall in line with a typically Greek comportment in philosophical investigation from that which is familiar to that which is unfamiliar, as when Socrates' inquiries lead from *endoxa*, what is commonly or familiarly said to be true, to *paradoxa*, that which goes against and/or deepens that which is commonly held to be true. In this sense, Aristotle might simply be pointing out that it is impossible to do other than this in his inquiry, for what would it mean to proceed from that which is absolutely unclear and unfamiliar to us to that which is clear and familiar? Such an inquiry would likely be absurd, akin to knowing the deepest mysteries of life without ever having been born. However, this passage deepens the question of necessity by considering what it might mean for something to be clear to us *without* being clear to nature and how it is that we can—let alone *must*—move from that which is clear or familiar to us to that which is clear by nature and *not* to us.

Just two sentences after this first mention of necessity in the *Physics*, Aristotle reformulates the necessity of our procedure as follows: “[I]t is necessary to proceed from what is general to what is particular, for it is the whole (*katholou*) that is better known by

perceiving (*aisthēsis*)” (*Phys.* 184a28-29). Here, Aristotle again discusses a necessary procedure that investigators of nature must follow in order to reach some kind of understanding of nature.<sup>11</sup> The necessary movement from the whole to the particulars resonates with other passages in Aristotle, wherein he speaks about the impossible necessity of apprehending the whole of something before examining its parts, an impossibility that clearly highlights the difficulty of speaking at all of nature. In the same way, Aristotle says that no one is completely capable of knowing or speaking the whole of truth (*alēthēia*), but neither does anyone completely miss it (*Meta.* 993b); thus, we always stand in relation to the entirety of the thing in question, though none of us is capable of the entirety of truth itself. The same thinking follows for Aristotle on this point, for it would seem odd to say that we as human beings are simply removed from the whole of nature, as it would seem odd to say that we are completely capable of knowing it in its (or our) entirety. Thus we find ourselves already in relation to something that exceeds our knowledge or capabilities by virtue of the human nature that we are.

To this end, what’s most striking about the first two mentions of *anankē* in these opening passages of the *Physics* is that they determine the character of our *own* investigation in the *Physics*—that is, the way in which we undertake and understand the road before us in our investigation of nature—and thus we can put many questions about our inquiry into nature to Aristotle: To whom (or what) does one appeal in following the *pephukē hodos*, and how does Aristotle speak with such certainty about his method? Is it truly *necessary* to “lead ourselves forward” in the way he proceeds to outline to us, both from what is clear to us to

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<sup>11</sup> We might say, tentatively, that the way to understand this passage is in relation to the one just discussed insofar as this first discussion in the opening lines of the *Physics* aptly characterizes the ways in which an investigation into nature must engage the *archai*, *aitiai*, and *stoicheia* (elements) of a given task but also see those elements to be “of” something excessive to that which underlies them (*Phys.* 184a), but which appear nonetheless in and through our method (literally, *meta-hodos*, or through-road).

what is clear to itself and from what is according to the whole to what is according to its parts? And is it the case that there is only one method one can undertake or abide in order to make an inquiry into nature? These questions strike at the heart of what it means for something to be necessary, both with and without qualification, i.e., both in relation to something or someone else (e.g., a given context or series of events) and what it means for something to be necessary *haplos* (simply, or to itself), a word that he uses, e.g., when speaking about the relationship of nature to itself.

Aristotle's insistence on the necessity of our method from things that are clear *to us* to things that are clear *haplos* is peculiar in light of what he next says. After discussing the kind of inquiry in which we should find ourselves when making an investigation into nature, Aristotle seems to abandon the natural road almost immediately, speaking not about things that are clear and familiar to us as we might expect him to do, nor about how it is that we perceive the whole of nature, but instead about the necessity of *archai* themselves being one or more than one (*Phys.* 184b15), which is the third appearance of *anankē* in the text. Might Aristotle anticipate too much in laying down this claim about the *archai* of things?

According to the first sentence of this inquiry, Aristotle notes that it is possible, through our acquaintance with various *aitiai* (causes or explanations), *archai*, and *stoicheia* (elements) to come to an understanding of nature. Following this thought, it is through the delimitation of the *archai* of nature that one can become familiar with nature, Aristotle suggests, but this method may be inappropriate to human beings: it is not the natural road that he has said we should follow. He thus contrasts this method of inquiry—i.e., that of an inquiry just into the sources of nature—to the inquiry already discussed, i.e., an inquiry down the natural road from that which is *adēlos* (unclear) to us to that which is clear in itself. In other words, if we are to follow the natural road—as Aristotle says that we must, by necessity—then this will

not take the shape of zeroing in on the ways that *archai* are meant immediately; rather, it seems as though we must proceed, on Aristotle's terms, from something familiar before making claims about how *archai* are meant, what and how many they are, and how they impact or determine our inquiry into nature.

And so we must ask why Aristotle, like Alice, does not take his own advice. At issue here is the status of a natural inquiry, whether this inquiry is necessary for us or not, and, we might suggest, whether the inquiry itself into nature is, like the *archai* already at play, one or many. One way of responding to this question is to say that what it means to make an inquiry into nature *is* to make an inquiry into the underlying *archai* of nature, and thus the positing of different *archai* is necessary at the beginning of our investigation. Another response might be that the *archai* themselves are matters for inquiry and, as such, have yet to be determined and thus might culminate in being a way to understand nature, if what Aristotle says regarding proceeding from the general to the particular holds true. Yet another response regarding the status of a necessary inquiry into the *archai* of nature would suggest that what it means to investigate an *archē* in the first place is to both assume it as prior to one's investigation *and* to seek it through the investigation into nature. Thus, the status of *archai* in Aristotle's inquiry might be both as that which precedes the inquiry at hand *and* as that which eludes us through our investigation into the nature of things. Thinking about *archai* in this last twofold sense is consonant with how we might fruitfully think *anankē* on our natural road as that which precedes us in our inquiry *and* as that which stands before us a matter for thought. This double nature becomes most evident in Book II of the *Physics*, when Aristotle turns his attention explicitly to *anankē* itself.

If we must, by necessity, proceed in our inquiry into nature the way that Aristotle says that we must, then we might wonder whether necessity itself is a *cause* of our

investigation or if necessity is the *end* or *goal* of it. If it is the case that nature is simply that which happens by necessity, and any other way of things coming-to-be would be impossible (and hence unnatural), then nature is simply the way things happen such that no other way would be possible. This line of thinking leads to conclusions that Aristotle is a fundamentally teleological philosopher for whom nature is ultimately purposive and determinately causal. However, to read Aristotle as *only* saying this—or as saying this unproblematically—is to overlook the complexity of Aristotle’s thought. Consider Aristotle’s discussion in Book II, wherein he says,

One must say, first, why nature (*physis*) is among the causes (*tou aition*) for the sake of something (*hou heneka*), then, about the necessary (*tou anankaion*), how it holds a place among natural things (*tois physikois*). For everybody traces things back to this cause, inasmuch as, since the hot and the cold and each thing of this kind are by nature a certain way, these things are and come into being out of necessity (*ex anankēs*). Here is an impasse: what prevents nature from doing things not for the sake of anything, nor because they are best (*beltion*), but just as Zeus rains, not in order that the grain might grow, but out of necessity? (*Phys.* 198b10-17)

To tease out a strand of these complicated ideas, let us follow Aristotle’s thinking here as it emerges from within the context of necessity as we have just discussed it, i.e., regarding the human place on the natural road of an inquiry into nature, and let us do so in light of Aristotle’s insistence, throughout this text, that nature is for the sake of something. Why is it the case that, in an inquiry into nature, we must begin our inquiry again, saying first why nature is among the causes for the sake of something and is not itself that for the sake of which things happen or come to be? This question seems to sidestep an inquiry into nature for a different, more overarching goal of situating nature itself in light of something else (e.g., intelligence, mind, *nous*). This “something else,” then, might become the guide of our inquiry, rendering the *Physics* a “metaphysics” and our inquiry into nature an inquiry into efficient causality as a mean to an altogether different end.

If we remember, however, that the *Physics* begins with an investigation into the *archai* and *aitiai* of nature as nature appears to us in order to see how it appears to itself, then we can situate ourselves in a natural inquiry here in light of the ways in which we ourselves must, by necessity, proceed down the natural road from that which is clear to that which is unclear. How we understand ourselves on this road has everything to do with the character of our inquiry: Are we investigating causes as they precede us and determine the character of our investigation? Are we investigating causes that are decidedly removed from human interests and concerns? Or do we seek causes themselves as the ends of our discussion? There is a way in which one can hear Aristotle as questioning those who say that everything happens by necessity in nature, and thus he investigates possible objectors in the passage above as offering an “impasse” (*aporia*) that pauses Aristotle in his thought. If it is the case that everything that happens, happens by necessity, and that necessity itself, when aligned with nature, is the cause of all that comes to be, then it seems that any kind of human inquiry would be rendered moot in light of a deterministic view of the cosmos. However, such is not Aristotle’s understanding. To the contrary, Aristotle says that nature is *among* the causes of things that happen, that things appear to us differently than they do to themselves (which becomes utterly decisive in Aristotle’s discussion of chance), and that it is possible that the cosmos does not operate by some grand design, or even for what is best.

To read Aristotle as holding open possibilities in his thinking such that he even comes to impasses (like Socrates does throughout the Platonic dialogues) is to decide that Aristotle is fundamentally an inquirer. We can see that necessity is not just that which happens by nature (because necessity itself can be a matter for inquiry), that the causes of nature as well as of our investigation are many and varied, and that Aristotle’s insistence upon moving from that which is clear to us to that which is clear *haplos* is not itself clear.

The deepening of Aristotle's inquiry into nature thus demands that we take into account how we are situated on the natural road in order to see what kind of inquiry it is in which we find ourselves, for the character of our comportment determines the horizons of understanding.

Overlooked in this section is what the word *aitia* means and how it significantly bears upon Aristotle's *Physics*. In this word that we encounter another paradox in Aristotle's thought: How is it that an *aitia* both precedes us and stands before us as a matter of inquiry, not unlike the status of necessity in Aristotle as I have discussed it? In the next section, I suggest that *aitia* has been much maligned in readings of Aristotle, and a close look at this important word unveils a significant link between it and the *logos* as it pertains to a natural inquiry: What does it mean to discover a "cause" in nature, and how might we think of causation in Aristotle at all? How we answer this question bears upon how we think of necessity in Aristotle and, more importantly perhaps, how *tychē* in Aristotle stands on the natural road, tapping her foot, patiently waiting to disrupt our inquiry.

### **Section III** ***Aitia* and *Logos*: Two Explanations**

The decisive relationship between *aitia* and *logos* in Aristotle's *Physics* is simultaneously obvious and opaque. On one hand, as Aristotle instructs us throughout his corpus, we acknowledge at separate times that both *aitiai* and *logoi* are explanations or accounts of some sort, and that our acquaintance with certain kinds of *logoi* and with various *aitiai* are necessary for our understanding. Remember, for example, that the very beginning of the *Physics*, wherein Aristotle notes that our acquaintance with *aitiai* are required for understanding anything at all (*Phys.* 184a10), lays the foundation for an inquiry into *physis* (nature), and consider also that Aristotle often, like Socrates, praises things that are *eulogos* (well-said), as is the case in this same text when he praises those who say that all things must



depend on original contraries.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, *aitia*—generally translated narrowly yet vaguely as “cause,” sometimes more generously and fruitfully as “explanation”—presents itself in the narrow translation as an account that is *primarily* “scientific” more than it is *primarily* explanatory (consider, e.g., how Aristotle’s so-called “four causes” are largely taken by subsequent thinkers to be physical accounts or mechanical manifestations of how things come to be).<sup>13</sup> Cause, in this sense, does not necessarily entail an explanation—or even require the “cause” to be the reason *why* something else happens—but instead is subsumable under the dubious heading of scientific necessity, which, on its own terms, is not a *why* but a *what*—a *fact*—in a chain of events.

This narrow definition of cause is readily opposable to, say, Socratic philosophical practice and Socrates’ attempt to wrangle the best *logos* from his interlocutors (both living and dead) and from himself, i.e., his attempt to give the best account of meaningful physical and other things. Yet I submit that both *aitia* and *logos*, in their richest senses, lay claim to being able to give explanations or accounts of how things come to be and happen,<sup>14</sup> and that how we consider the relation between these two words for Aristotle fundamentally determines the manner in which we read his *Physics* as either the scientific pursuit of

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<sup>12</sup> See *Phys.* I.5 throughout, especially on the relation between *archai* and *logos* (*Phys.* 188b).

<sup>13</sup> Many scholars from different philosophical camps now recognize the importance of a sensitive translation for this word, though there is disagreement about which translation might be best. Richard Sorabji, e.g., notes that “Aristotle’s so-called four causes are best thought of as four modes of explanation” (1980, 40); J.L. Ackrill notes that the four causes “might better be called a doctrine of the four ‘because’s’, and that “[m]uch unjustified criticism of Aristotle’s doctrine would have been avoided if the word ‘cause’ had not been used in translations. [...] [T]he four so-called ‘causes’ are *types of explanatory factor*” (1981, 36). Pascal Massie notes that thinking *aitia* in its juridical sense also allows us to think of it as an accusation or charge, thus furthering the notion of *aitia* as something other than merely a scientific cause in a chain of events (2003, 15). One could imagine, I suppose, a scientist being able to demonstrate that *x* is the cause of *y* without needing to say how or why the priority of *x* is the case, maintaining just *that* it is the case. However, to read Aristotle in this way is to assume that he is primarily a modern scientist, which he is not.

<sup>14</sup> Whether these accounts actually happen or not is another matter.

certainty, or as being engaged primarily in an *inquiry* concerning nature with an emphasis on the overlooked role of the *logos*. Thus, by taking a close look at the links between *aitia* and *logos* in the *Physics* we can begin to see what it means to give an account of something coming-to-be at all or in the first place. In so doing, I will illustrate the power of this relationship in a small section from the *Phaedo* in order to ask ourselves how and why it is that Socrates ends up spending as much time as he does in prison.

*Aitia* is better translated as “explanation” than as “cause,” and the sense of “explanation” at work here derives from the primarily juridical sense of the word in which it was first employed in the Greek. Following the juridical sense, *aitia* means something like “to be responsible” in a crime, and then is used in judgment: a criminal is accused or asked to be and then is or is not held responsible for her actions. In this sense, we may say that the crimes in question are or are not caused by the defendant; however, to use that word without the sense of *responsibility entailing explanation*, the cause of the crime may result in simply finding a stricken match in a house fire to be “responsible” while a truer account of the crime lays in being able, in the first place, to give an account of the action as it comes to be and is executed (and thus, in what sense it results in what we call a “crime” at all). In translating *aitia* as “cause” or “explanation” or “account,” we are asking, at base, for what or who is responsible for a given event, if such an account can be given, such that *we* may know what or who is responsible for certain *erga* (deeds) and *logoi* (speeches) and whether or not such explanations and inquiries are truly significant.

In the *Physics*, the difference between *aitia* as a cause in the ordinary physicalist sense and its force as “explanation” culminates in the beginning of Book II, wherein Aristotle schematizes the different ways in which things come into being. His first distinction concerns things that come into being by nature (i.e., things that have their sources of motion

and rest in themselves) or by *technē* (productive knowledge, skill, or craft), wherein the source of motion and rest lies outside the thing itself; a house does not make itself any more than it grows out of the ground or falls out of the sky.<sup>15</sup> While the distinction between *physis* and *technē* here is important and worthwhile in its own right, for my purposes, it serves mainly to frame Aristotle's discussion of how things come into being such that both a human being and a table can be said to have or participate in a kind of nature, in addition to delimiting how we might usually consider the *Physics* to be primarily, if not only, a scientific enterprise. In fact, Aristotle calls us to consider in this very text the many ways in which *physis* is said, from *ousiai* that have their source of motion within themselves (i.e., what we might normally call "natural" beings) to things that have their source of motion or cause of being in another, like things from *technē*. "[I]f *technē* imitates nature," Aristotle says, "and if it belongs to the same knowledge to know the form and the material to some extent [...], it would also be part of the study of nature to pay attention to both natures" (*Phys.* 194a12-27). In other words, the horizon of the *Physics* demands not only that we consider things that come to be by nature removed from our participation or hand in it, but also that we consider, as Aristotle does here, how things come to be in other ways, which are not contrary to nature, but participate in whatever it is that we might mean by "nature." Again, the emphasis here is not on some inquiry divorced from our human place, but instead is on the ways in which we give accounts of nature itself, insofar as we already participate in the movement of *physis*. *Aitiai*, thus, do not give themselves freely to us, but are also the aims of our inquiry, concerning all of the ways in which things come into being.

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<sup>15</sup> I will return at the end of this manuscript to a very important third way in which things come into being, which is by *poiēsis*, wherein the end or aim of a thing is excessive to that very thing insofar as its end is in another, as is the case with poetry and Greek tragedy.

The *Phaedo* provides a striking instance of the dramatic intensity of this question, so let us turn to it now.

Socrates notes that in his youth Anaxagoras failed him in his search for *aitiai* detailing why anything comes to be or perishes (*Phae.* 97B). Most absurd, Socrates says, is the explanation (*aitia*) that Anaxagoras would probably give for him being in prison, i.e., that it is through the mechanics of bones and sinews that Socrates finds himself in his cell at the end of his life. This sort of explanation, according to Socrates, is not a true one (*alētheos aitios*, *Phae.* 98E). A true explanation, by which Socrates does not mean one that is just correct and verifiable, but one which, in its disclosure, strives to the best possible explanation consonant with the way we have outlined the word from its juridical sense, would need to take into account, among other possible “causes,” the judgment of his fellow Athenians and Socrates’ own choice to accept, in some way, his punishment (*Phae.* 98E). Without explanations including these elements, a mere physical account of causes is “too absurd” (*atopos*, or “out-of-place,” *Phae.* 99A) to sufficiently account for Socrates’ prison presence, let alone how anything else might come to happen. Keeping in mind that Socrates and his interlocutors, through the *logos*, seek the *aitia* of generation and destruction—“no trivial thing” (95E), he says—Socrates advises the following:

[I]f somebody should want to discover the *aitia* concerning each thing—in what way it comes into being or perishes or *is*—he’d have to discover this concerning it: in what way it’s best for it either to be or to undergo or do anything whatsoever. Now by this account [*logos*], it befits a human being, in this matter and in all others, to look to nothing but what’s most excellent and best (*Phae.* 97D).

In detailing to his interlocutors the questions that would need to be raised concerning that which is most excellent (*tō aristōn*) and best (*tō beltistōn*), Socrates alerts us that no physical account will suffice for a proper explanation concerning both the situation in which he finds himself and how anything at all comes to be. It is always a question, for Socrates, and not a

matter-of-fact, what the “best” or “most excellent” account might look like,<sup>16</sup> and in this passage we see that the best explanation would be the one that is most truly revealing to the thing in question, recognizing that the task of our best *logos* must take up and follow the best *aitiai*, which will not qualitatively be a series of physical events but instead has much to do with how we stand in light of such *logoi*.<sup>17</sup>

So how is it, then, that Socrates ends up in jail? If we follow Socrates’ half-bared *logos* on this point here, we may conclude that it is through the judgment of the Athenians, when coupled with his acceptance of their punishment, that he finds himself in jail. But this doesn’t seem to go far enough in its explanation: Oughtn’t we consider the reasons for which Socrates is brought up on charges as well? And shouldn’t we inquire into the healthiness of his person such that, at such an old age, he even is alive? And if we consider these things, shouldn’t we also consider a whole host of others that might help us understand the cause of Socrates’ being in prison, and mustn’t we ultimately give a *logos* of Socrates’ life itself?

Socrates’ response to these questions is (as we might know) to turn to the *logos* and make a second sailing (*deuteron ploun*, *Phae.* 99D), fed up with an inquiry into beings (*onta*) that, in short, fails to consider the being in question in favor of an infinite regress to the mechanics of “what” causes something to happen. In other words, in turning to the *logos*, Socrates abandons not an account of how things come to be (which is the matter of the discussion at hand, with his situation being just one—albeit very important—example), but

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<sup>16</sup> We might even ellide both *aitia* and *logos* here, and say that it is always a question for Socrates, regardless of the kind of account, what it means for something of its kind to be the best. Hence his inquiry into both *aitia* and *logos* on this matter.

<sup>17</sup> We might take this further and suggest that no *logos* can be pursued at all which merely deals with these kinds of supposed explanations. As John Rist points out, there is no naked argument in philosophy (1996, 362), for “truth has as much to do with the character of our premises as with the precision with which the relationships between them are worked out” (1996, 360). Thus it is that an explanation or account will both attend to the character of the matter at hand (including its pursuit-worthiness) and will, I submit, attend to our philosophical character as well.

instead enriches what it means to give an account and understanding of beings in their happening at all. Thus, in turning from beings and becoming as *objects*, which Socrates' account of Anaxagoras would do (i.e., in presenting them as decidable objects of inquiry, which can eventually—and scientifically—be settled), Socrates reminds us that the “cause” of generation and destruction, as well as the cause of his own situation, *already implicates us* insofar as we are claimed in our inquiry as part of the matter at hand, not opposed to it.

To this end, our current obsession with causes in their correctness and certainty might be as Heidegger suggests: Since the Greeks, our philosophical insistence on certainty prevails and thus reinforces what I translate to be the mistake of *aitia* as “cause.” Heidegger says that added to the mistaken notion of absolute certainty is the following: “[T]his development stems, not from science’s attempts to procure its distinctive manner of access to its subject matter, but instead from an idea that existence fabricates for itself, to a certain extent from an intelligence that has gone crazy” (2005, 33). In reading the Greeks we must attend to Socrates’ insistence on turning to the *logos* as an attentiveness to being insofar as we take up the question of our being in any inquiry, suggested by his recollection of his prior obsession with Anaxagoras. A failure to do so results in an unnatural divide between the “object” for inquiry and our own state of being, as if our inquiry could exist without the significance of the matter at hand.

These passages from the *Phaedo* help us deepen the inquiry into the intimate relationship between *aitia* and *logos* in Book II wherein Aristotle speaks of the “four causes,” and let us remember the Socratic warning to us about amputating *aitia* from *logos*.

At the end of *Physics* II.2, just before turning to the so-called “four causes,” Aristotle says that it is the work of first philosophy to mark out the ways in which human beings beget human beings from the way in which the sun begets human beings, for the two ways of

begetting here are certainly not the same (*Phys.* 194b15ff). To say that the sun simply begets a human being is like saying that Socrates is in jail because of his bones and sinews: this is an incomplete and insufficient explanation of *how* something significant significantly comes to be. Reminding us that his inquiry is for the sake of understanding (*Phys.* 194b18), Aristotle turns his attention to examining the *aitiai* necessary for an inquiry into nature in its manifold senses. Like Socrates, Aristotle emphasizes that we must examine various *aitiai* to understand generation and destruction, as well as to understand “every natural change” (*tēs phusikēs metabolēs*, *Phys.* 194b14-16). Can this be accomplished, if at all, through a divorce between the cause as an object over and against our inquiry? No, says Aristotle. In fact, in the second sense of *aitia* that Aristotle notes, *aitia* reveals itself as “the form or pattern (*paradeigma*), and this is the gathering in speech of the beings (*ti ēn einai*), or again the kinds of this [...] and the parts that are in its articulation (*logos*)” (*Phys.* 194b25-30). Here the link between *aitia* and *logos* becomes explicit: By forming *aitia* as *paradeigma* and *paradeigma* as *logos*, we might say that this trinity reinforces the many ways in which *physis* itself is meant in Aristotle’s inquiry, for it is here that we see Aristotle’s resistance to simple mechanical accounts of nature without a significant *logos*. Differently put, Aristotle here emphasizes the very explanatory nature at the heart of *aitia* when it significantly *is* the *logos* at stake in our inquiry.

Let us not forget what we examined with our inquiry regarding the *Phaedo* and how it is that we can speak both of *aitia* and *logos* as accounts that are responsible in various ways, from being responsible for an event to being responsible *in* the *logos* to each other and to our philosophical inquiry into nature. After briefly outlining the three other ways in which *aitia* is said (i.e., the “that out of which something comes into being,” the “that from which the first beginning of change or rest is,” and the “that for the sake of which” [*Phys.* 194b30-

35]), Aristotle turns his attention to the ways in which we speak of a thing being responsible for an event and how we stand in relation to this responsibility: “[T]he present thing is responsible for this result, and we sometimes blame it, when it is absent, for the opposite result, as the absence of the pilot for the ship’s overturning, whose presence was the cause (*aitia*) of its keeping safe” (*Phys.* 195a12-16). Our countenance regarding a given event is not neutral, but instead is judged *by us* to be responsible for events that take place. Now certainly we may be mistaken in our accounts, but such is the task of the *logos* regarding the ways in which *aitiai* are meant, for Aristotle, like Socrates, makes many new beginnings, which is to be expected given that Aristotle notes time and again that *aitia* itself is said in many ways (cf. *Phys.* 195a5, *Phys.* 195a30). I take Aristotle, in these moments, to be really emphasizing the *said* character of events such that we ourselves, in our inquiry, must already stand engaged with the way things come to be and perish. An important foundation for all philosophical inquiry in Aristotle, i.e., is the willingness to take up vigorously the ways in which *aitiai* are said, especially if an *aitia* is, in one sense, fundamentally a *logos* and *paradeigma*, and if it is responsible and blameworthy in other respects. *Aitiai*, then, are possibly said in as many ways as the *logos* itself is and are not relegated even to being just four in number or kind in Aristotle (*Phys.* 195a5; *Phys.* 195b12).

Something now must be said about the ways in which *logos* appears in the *Physics*, for it is true that I’ve provided many possible translations for it: account, speech, reason, that which is said, explanation, and word among them. Is this problematic? On one hand, certainly, for if *aitia* is meant in many ways in Aristotle, *logos* is meant in at least as many, and the debate over how to translate *logos* is long and fervent in Greek scholarship, especially concerning the Platonic dialogues. However, my point in reminding us of the many ways in which *logos* is meant in Aristotle is to bring to the fore an oft-overlooked



emphasis on the *logos* in Aristotle that, in my reading, links together with *aitia* to serve as the *responsibility* of serious philosophical inquiry. If *aitia* is merely cause divorced from the *logos*, as seems to be the case with our most scientific Ancient thinker, then we may need not ask the place of philosophical inquiry at all in nature; we need only get out our micro- and telescopes and get to work. However, if it is the case that, as Aristotle says, “each thing is meant (*legetai*) when it is fully at work (*entelecheia*), more than when it is potentially” (*Phys.* 193b8), then the gathering of the *logos*, especially in relation to slippery *aitiai*, takes a prominent place in Aristotle’s thinking, something which is generally reserved these days for Plato scholars.

Returning, finally, to the sense of *aitia* as responsible explanation and its place in Aristotle’s *Physics* as one of being an account-giver, much like the *logos* generally is, let us reconsider the move that Socrates makes when he abandons his study under Anaxagoras. Does Socrates simply turn from an inquiry into *aitia* to the naked *logos*? No. This would be simply exchanging one empty pursuit for a vacuous equal whereby *logos* itself might just translate into argument, whereby the *worth* of the matter at hand and the challenge of discerning the best *logos* need not be considered. Per the question we asked at the beginning of this section—namely, how it is that Socrates ends up in jail—we might answer according to Socrates’ own advice to his interlocutors when asked if they can do anything for him. He responds that the best thing they can do is “to live, as it were, in the footsteps of the things said now and in the time before” (*Phae.* 115B), and we might pontificate that Socrates takes his own sincere advice, doing exactly this—living in the footsteps of the *logos*—and that this *aitia* might serve as that which is responsible for Socrates’ stay in jail. However, if we deem even this explanation insufficient, perhaps it is time to take seriously Phaedo’s overlooked *logos* in the beginning of his dialogue concerning why Socrates ended up in jail for so long

(and thus why we have the *Phaedo* in the first place): “A bit of chance [*tychē*] came to his aid, Echebrates,” he says (*Phae.* 58A).

**CHAPTER III**

**THE STRANGE AND WONDERFUL PLACE OF *TYCHĒ* AND *AUTOMATON* IN**

**ARISTOTLE'S *PHYSICS* II. 4-6**

The aim of philosophies used to be to explain the world.  
-Kristeva (1984, 178)

In the last chapter we saw how contemporary Aristotelian scholars who pursue a totalizing and systematic account of Aristotle's thought fall short in thinking about the place of *tychē* in the *Physics*. In offering an alternative way of reading Aristotle that tries to reorient our philosophical attention to what I see as Aristotle's commitments to aporetic moments in his thinking as well as to normally rigidified words, like *logos* and *aitia*, I have tried to lay the groundwork for Aristotle's explicit turn to *tychē* and *automaton*, to which we shall also turn in this chapter as well. In order to have a discussion about how these words appear in the text, however, it was necessary to lead ourselves down the natural road in order to determine what is asked of us in making an inquiry into nature. Thus the work of the last chapter: To speak of *tychē* requires a particular kind of mindfulness and attunement, which, if we're careful, we can already see appearing in Aristotle's discussions of *anankē*, *physis*, and the way that things show themselves to us.

This chapter is devoted to continuing the discussion of Aristotle's *Physics* by turning to Aristotle's most sustained consideration of *tychē* in *Physics* II. 4-6. While this consideration is difficult, as we shall see, it would be nearly impossible to have without the framework of the last chapter in learning how to navigate Aristotle's inquiry into nature.

Beginning with how one is always situated within a given horizon, we will see how Aristotle wonders at his predecessors' thinking about chance in order to see how it informs Aristotle's own thought regarding the strangeness of *tychē* and *automaton*. Doing so will allow us to see the important role of *kata symbebēkos* as it elucidates that which pertains to human life regarding how one makes an inquiry into nature. After laying out these ideas, I conclude that *tychē*, on the heels of and in relation to *kata symbebēkos*, speaks to what's possible for human life insofar as it signifies that which pertains to *dianoia* (thinking) and *proairesis* (choice). Such a discussion culminates in a demand that we turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to articulate the ways in which *tychē* speaks most fundamentally to human nature, as I shall do in the next chapter.

### **Section I** **Aristotle and His Predecessors**

Like Socrates' remembrance of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo*, Aristotle too engages his predecessors by examining the ways in which they have contributed to various *logoi* and *aitiai* concerning how things come to be in light of our investigations into them.<sup>18</sup> Most noteworthy about the beginning of Aristotle's sustained discussion of *tychē* in Bk. II. 4-6 of the *Physics*—arising, not unimportantly, just after his discussion of the “four causes”—are two things: the attentiveness with which Aristotle engages his predecessors on thinking about chance, and the way in which Aristotle himself speaks about *tychē* as it is related to wonder (*thaumazein*) and strangeness (*atopos*). These two discussions are interwoven in

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Aristotle begins his *Peri Psychē* (*On the Soul*) with an extended discussion of how previous thinkers have considered material aspects of *psychē*; likewise, the *Nicomachean Ethics* engages Heraclitus and Plato, among others; the *Poetics* opens with thinking the difference between Homer and Empedocles. Since Aristotle says that “it is right to feel gratitude not only to those whose opinions one shares, but even to those whose pronouncements were more superficial, for they too contributed something, since before us they exercised an energetic habit of thinking” (*Meta.* 993b11-14), we can see how paying attention to things previously said can not only inform our “own” thinking, but help us recognize how it is that “we have inherited certain opinions from certain people” but are also “responsible for bringing them [the opinions] about” (*Meta.* 993b19).

Aristotle's work, and I will treat them side-by-side in order to examine how it is that Aristotle's engagement with his predecessors informs his own thinking while giving him pause to consider the role of chance in our lives. Seeing how Aristotle's thoughts on those who come before him inform his own discussion of *tychē* in relation to the place it plays in his text illuminates the possibly uncanny, or strange, ways in which he speaks of *tychē*, and why he is compelled to do so.

Aristotle begins his discussion of *tychē* in Bk. II by saying that "many things are said to be and to come about through *tychē* or through *automaton* [randomness]" (*Phys.* 195b30). Given that Aristotle has discussed the possibilities of *aitiai* relating to an inquiry into nature in the text up to this point, Aristotle wonders if *tychē* and *automaton* can rightly be said to be among the ways in which things come into being, or can be *aitiai* at all (*Phys.* 195b32-35). Important in this opening line is the way in which Aristotle not only suggests the possibility of *tychē* as an *aitia*, but also the way in which *what is said* impacts the ways in which human beings think of the character of a cause. As I said in the last section, the relationship between *aitia* and *logos* is only dichotomous if we read *aitia* as a purely physicalist cause, unrelated to the ways in which we speak of things coming into being and the ways in which we seek to explain phenomena that appear to us. So Aristotle's endoxic starting point concerning *tychē* engages the ways in which many things are attributed to *tychē* or *automaton*, recalling the ways in which we must begin with what appears to us as outlined in the beginning of the *Physics*. Thus it is that Aristotle considers *tychē* and its related word, *automaton*, to be *aitiai* in the ways in which I've sketched, and we must ask, as Aristotle does, about the relationship between *tychē* and *aitia*: Is, or can, *tychē* be said to be responsible for things that happen in the world, and (how) can it determine how things appear to us? Is *tychē*, Aristotle wonders, among the ways in which things come to be?

In order to ask and respond to this question, Aristotle begins by saying that the main problem when speaking about *tychē* culminates in a formidable *aporia*: People simply do not know how to respond to *tychē*. The fundamental mistake, Aristotle says, is that people either attribute *everything* to *tychē* or nothing at all to it; for Aristotle, a third way of understanding *tychē* might be possible and even necessary. Those who fail to consider *tychē* do so because they demand a “definite cause” for all events, a certain *aitia* that would then give a full *logos* for events as they happen (*Phys.* 196a3). These people mark out boundaries in advance we might say, for what is possible and what is not possible in nature, limiting what an “acceptable” cause might be or look like; they make a horizon or demarcate boundaries (“definite” is *horismenon*) in a way that possibly precludes fruitful thinking about strange things.

Aristotle’s example to demonstrate this point is clear. For those who say that nothing at all comes from or is related to *tychē*, an unexpected encounter with a friend in the marketplace is caused by a person going to the market in the first place; the encounter is secondary to the primary cause of the event. Since the market-goer did not intend to find or see her friend, the *aitia* of finding this friend lies in going to the market; finding her friend is *kata symbebēkos*, or “incidental” (a word that will become quite important in the next section). At best, we might say, finding one’s friend is a nice surprise (*Phys.* 196a3-5). For this market-goer, then, “there is always something to take as the cause” (*Phys.* 197a7), but *not tychē*, for to speak of *tychē* as a cause would be most strange (*atopon*) indeed (*Phys.* 196a8).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The reasons for which *tychē* as *aitia* seems strange, though, may not be because *tychē* must function as some sort of fifth *aitia*, a lost cause that then explains the universe. As we will see in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is skeptical of what we “attribute” to *tychē*, saying that “what is greatest and most beautiful to be left to *tychē* would be too dischordant” (*EN* 1099b25). However, we are not yet in a

Regarding this example, Aristotle seems unsatisfied both with the market-goer who wants to attribute nothing to *tychē* or consider it in any way as he does with those who would attribute the surprise-find at the marketplace to *tychē*. For Aristotle, neither approach suffices as explanatory for how it is that we engage the world. It is after this example that Aristotle affirms the strange and wonderful place of *tychē* amidst commonly held opinions and those who have preceded him: “it would seem strange [*atopon*], and truly so [*alēthōs*],” for *tychē* to be anything at all (*Phys.* 196a6-8). Yet those who dismiss *tychē*, as many have done and continue to do, are “to be wondered at” (*thaumaston*). Before turning to the relationship between *tychē* and wonder, a brief look at strangeness in two Socratic instances might help us speak to the strange role of *tychē* in the *Physics*.

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates says that he is unaccustomed to the courtroom, for he has never been on trial; he is *a-topos* (“out-of-place,” “strange,” “uncanny,” or maybe even “absurd”), a stranger. His presence in the courtroom is *prima facie* obviously strange by virtue of his inexperience in such a setting, such that from his perspective, he is out-of-place according to himself, given the ways in which he has lived thus far. Socrates makes this point known to the men of Athens, saying that “I am simply a stranger” (*zenos*, *Apo.* 17D) in the courtroom, both as someone who has not been on trial before and according to customary ways of speaking in such a situation. Thus Socrates appears strange in at least two ways: 1) Socrates’ trial is strange to himself, disrupting his usual philosophical practices; 2) Socrates appears out-of-place to the men of Athens, who are not accustomed to Socrates’ manner of speaking as he does throughout the trial any more than they’re truly accustomed to Socrates’

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position to fully examine such a statement, if for no other reason than we don’t know *with whom* such a statement resonates, and why.

philosophical practice in Athens. Socrates, thus, recognizes his own strangeness in the courtroom as he recognizes the strange ways that he *appears* to others.

Secondly, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that it would not be *atopos* for him to reject the truth of the *mythos* concerning Boreas and Orithuia (that Phaedrus asks him to speak to), as many previous thinkers have done before (*Phaedr.* 229C); he could simply dismiss, as many wise men have, the power of the *mythos* and its suggestive seduction/abduction possibilities. He does not do such a thing, however, and instead speculates as to what an investigation into the truth of the *mythos* might entail (e.g., weaving stories about chimeras and pegasuses [*Phaedr.* 229E]) before returning to the question of his own nature, to which he responds mythically, wondering whether his nature accords with Typhon, a terrifying mythical beast, or whether it is gentler and somehow more divine (*Phaedr.* 230A). While the exchange between Phaedrus and Socrates concerning the status of the Boreas and Orithuia *mythos* is complicated, what's important to note for our purposes are the ways in which Socrates again notes the strangeness both of his predecessors' response to the myth and to the ways in which others fail to respond to the myth's "truth," whatever sort of strange truth it is that might emerge.

These two examples not only point to the ways in which Socrates emphasizes the importance of that which is *atopos*, but also the ways in which, if one wishes to speak *truly*, that which is strange must show itself and be part of a conversation. Thus, when Aristotle says that it would seem truly strange for *tychē* to *be* anything, we must consider the place of *tychē* in his thought, as Socrates urges us to do in relation to the truth of his defense and in relation to the *mythos* in the *Phaedrus*. For the Greeks, strangeness is often accompanied by wonder, for as Socrates does in the *Greater Hippias*, Aristotle too wonders at the strange place of *tychē* in previous thought as well as in his inquiry into nature.



Aristotle says, “many things both come about and are from *tychē* and *automaton*” (*Phys.* 196a13); subsequently, we must wonder at those who fail to attribute anything at all to either *tychē* or *automaton*. Yet, Aristotle notes that some of his predecessors have done precisely this: In spite of making use of *tychē* as Empedocles does, for example, *tychē* is left aside as a mere nothing in a largely elemental worldview (*Phys.* 196a20). Furthermore, *tychē* can never be a cause in the ways that his predecessors desire, for even though some have said that parts of animals come to be by *tychē* (*Phys.* 196b22), such a view also renders *tychē* a nothing by overlooking different ways in which things can be said to be responsible for physical beings in the world.

In addition to those who attribute nothing to *tychē*, Aristotle also considers those who have attributed or do attribute *everything* to *tychē* in a way that *tychē* becomes responsible for the very generation of the cosmos. Rather than simply dismissing such a view, however, Aristotle says that “this itself is in fact mightily worth wondering at” (*kai mala touto thaumasmai axion*, *Phys.* 196a30).<sup>20</sup> Those who hold this view, however, do not offer a Lucretian cosmology falling out of a chance principle, like the clinamen, to create the whole of nature; rather, even “the heavens and the most divine of visible things have come from *automaton*” (*Phys.* 196a35) for these people. These predecessors do not attribute the *genēsis* of beings to *tychē* in a certain sense—i.e., human beings beget human beings and don’t come to be by chance—but in another sense, *automaton* is attributed to that which is exemplary or

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth pointing out that the verb *thaumazo-*, can be linked to wonder not just as perplexity, or something to overcome in order to reach true knowledge, but also to something beautiful, or *kalos*. In fact, one might wonder *most* at a phenomenal beauty, be it in nature or in speech, and thus wondering maintains possible connections not only to things that are beautiful and amaze us, but also to things that are well-said (*eulogos*), as Aristotle might be suggesting his predecessors are to be wondered at *and* admired for their fine but strange speaking about the cosmos.

divine in its appearance to us; we might say that *automaton*, like *tychē*, is that which is fundamentally *atopos*, given the ways in which we generally offer accounts of the universe.

Remarkable to this point is Aristotle's language after considering the ways in which *tychē* or *automaton* is said to be responsible for nothing or for the whole of the cosmos as his predecessors have, and more remarkable still is the intensity of the language of strangeness at the end of Bk. II. 4, before he turns to his lengthy discussion of *tychē*, *automaton*, and *ananke*, as we shall do in a moment. Aristotle says, in relation to those who attribute *everything* to *tychē*:

[I]f this is the way things are, this itself is worth bringing one to a stop, and it would have been good for something to have been said about it (*kai kalōs exei lexthēnai ti peri autou*). Regarding what is said about these and other things, what is said is strange (*pros gar tō kai allōs atopon einai to legomenon*), and it is stranger still (*eti atopōteron*) to say these things when one sees nothing in the heavens happening by chance (*to legein tauta horōntas en men tō ouranō*), but many things falling out by fortune among the things not assigned to fortune, though it would surely seem that the opposite would happen (*en de tois ouk apo tychēs polla sumbainonta apo tychēs. Kaitoi eikos ge ēn tounantion gignesthai*). (*Phys.* 196b)

Among many important points in this passage, first we can note the relationship between the way things are or might be and the duty a philosopher has to speak about things in how they appear to us. In the first line, Aristotle notes that *if* what his predecessors have asserted is true, then a *logos* ought to have been investigated or taken up to explain how it is that one is led to conclude that the cosmos is determined by *tychē*. Recalling the beginning of the *Physics* and how it is that I've urged us to consider Aristotle as a thinker for whom inquiry holds the greatest sway, and remembering too the ways in which we are *already situated* on a natural road in our inquiring process, we can see how Aristotle *himself* wonders at the *logoi* his predecessors have and have failed to offer regarding the generation of the cosmos. The point here is that, in this first sentence, Aristotle so marvels at his predecessors' vision of the universe that he suggests coming to a full stop and investigating what they could possibly

have meant by attributing either everything or nothing to *tychē* or *automaton*. The relationship between the matter for inquiry, then—*physis*—and the way in which we engage in such an inquiry is clear: To offer or assert a claim about the nature of the cosmos is insufficient, in Aristotle's understanding, for articulating what's at stake in the matter for inquiry in the first place. In other words, we can see Aristotle pointing us to a kind of comportment and responsibility one has in making an inquiry into nature, a comportment that resounds mightily with the character of a philosophical inquiry in the first place (as we shall see in the *Nicomachean Ethics*).

In the rest of this passage, Aristotle relies on both *atopos* and its intensification, *atopoteron*, in order to drive home both the strangeness of his predecessors in not offering *logoi* that explain their assertions about *tychē* and *automaton*, and as a way, I think, of bringing *tychē* and *automaton* to the fore of our discussion, thus finding a place in nature. As I have intimated, that which is strange is not simply or merely out of place such that it is simply divorced or removed from a given subject matter; rather, that which is strange, as Socrates is, belongs very much to the discussion at hand in possibly determining the place-character of the discussion insofar as it significantly creates horizons for all possible thought. Socrates' strangeness, for example, does not simply denote an anathematic relationship between Socrates and Athens; rather, it is Socrates himself who helps determine the character of Athens itself, the very place and home that, on one hand, loves him, and on the other hand, puts him to death. Likewise, in this passage from Aristotle, *tychē* and *automaton* are indeed strangers, but only because, as Aristotle notes, his predecessors failed to pay sufficient attention to the ways in which they operate phenomenally in our lives and in an inquiry into *physis*; it is not a matter of simply not-belonging in such a discussion.

To put it another way, what is a stranger, if not a reminder of how something can disrupt another thing that supposedly has its own integrity, or how can something appear in a strange way, even in a city? If *tychē* is a stranger in a discussion of *physis*, as Aristotle suggests, then it is a stranger in many ways: It disrupts what we normally consider to be a natural inquiry, filled with either a given purposiveness in nature (call it divine intellect, or mere teleology); it challenges physicalist views of the cosmos, given that many things, according to Aristotle, appear to us to be from *tychē* or *automaton*; it reaffirms predetermined boundaries for inquiry, forcing any discussion of *tychē* to appear, on the face of it, as outside the boundaries, and in, at best, another horizon from the perspective of one who is not a stranger, or from the perspective is what is not strange. *Tychē* thus belongs and doesn't belong in an inquiry into nature. It belongs insofar as *tychē* is one way in which things appear to us in nature (and thus has a kind of home in the *Physics*); yet, as strange, it asks that we interrogate the character of our inquiry, attending to ethical (or human) dimensions of this line of thinking, particularly regarding, as we shall see in the next chapters, human choice and thinking. Perhaps because of the suggestive blurring of the distinctions between nature and ethics when considering the strangeness of *tychē*, Aristotle notes that the problem with his predecessors is that none of them *wondered* at the place of it in *physis* at all, and their failure to wonder amounts to their unwillingness to offer a *logos* of *tychē*; thus they neither speak nor speak well about it at all.

Noteworthy to this end is Aristotle's own strangeness when encountering *tychē* and *automaton*, for if it is the case that his predecessors have failed in their accounts of these phenomena, and if Aristotle truly wonders, as he says he does, why no one has adequately given an account of these things before, then Aristotle's comments on *tychē* and *automaton*, to which we shall now turn, offer the first sustained *logos* of them in (Western) philosophy

(disregarding Socrates' own suggestive words throughout the dialogues). Many medieval Aristotelian commentators, from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Simplicius, have picked up on Aristotle's discussion of chance in Bk. II, but they do so, as we shall next see in the case of Simplicius, with an eye for an overarching divine cause organizing and guiding the cosmos; thus, *tychē* and *automaton* remain inherently subordinate to, e.g., divine *nous* or a purposively teleological view of nature. *That* these commentators sustain their own discourses on chance, however, remains strange, regardless of their conclusions about it, given that Western philosophy overall remains silent on the role of *tychē* in nature (or in ethics, or in metaphysics).

**Section II**  
***Tychē and Automaton in Physics II. 4-6***

“[Neither] [*tychē*] nor [*automaton*] could be the causes of anything that comes-to-be,” Simplicius writes in his commentary on Book II of the *Physics*, for “of all things that come-to-be the causes are determined” (1997, 88). As a result, determined causes underlie all things said to occur by chance, whether we admit that this is the case or not: “Anything that leads to a paradoxical conclusion is itself paradoxical, so that it would seem paradoxical for [*tychē*] and [*automaton*] to be the cause of any one of the things that come-to-be” (1997, 88). For Simplicius, the paradox lies in *tychē* or *automaton* being the cause of anything that comes-to-be because the very nature of *tychē* and *automaton* ultimately stands contrary to a teleological system guided by design, or *nous* (mind), which in the end determines the workings of the cosmos and the coming-into-being of everything in it. Thus it is that, for Simplicius, when we speak of the “reality of [*tychē*]” (1997, 88), what we are really talking about is an event that happens without our input or choosing, like unintentionally shooting (as Dick Cheney might have it) or spearing (as Simplicius has it) your friend (and your

friend's subsequent death) when your intended target was a nearby animal. What happens in this situation, according to Simplicius, is that we speak of this incident as being one of *tychē*, for we can't discern any reason for the event any more than we would ever say that a person meant to kill his friend. So, from our point-of-view, the incident occurred without our choosing and without a discernable reason, and hence we (mistakenly) attribute its cause or explanation (*aitia*) to *tychē*.

Interestingly, Simplicius' thinking in his commentary maintains that *tychē* does play a role in the cosmos concerning how it is that we human beings orient ourselves, even if we mistakenly attribute *tychē* to be a cause or explanation for things that happen to us and to each other. In light of Simplicius' insistence on a teleological system in Aristotle, it is the case, nonetheless, that *tychē* emerges as a *particularly human* orientation toward the world, a reliance on which diminishes as we become more skilled, ethical, thoughtful, and reflective in our lives. Consider, for example, the following statements from Simplicius on this matter: “[*Tychē*] is to be found where the products of both art and nature display deficiencies; for example, in the case of medicine, [*tychē*] slips in where skill fails to reach” (1997, 94). In other words, according to Simplicius, for those who are bad or unskilled doctors, *tychē* plays a large role, for an unskilled doctor can “happen” to cure a patient; for good or skilled doctors, *tychē* doesn't factor in—know-how takes over. While Simplicius seems to have Aristotle's statement in the *Metaphysics* in mind here (wherein Aristotle says that “experience makes *technē*, but inexperience makes *tychē*” [*Meta.* 981a2-3]), his point is that *tychē* does not play a role in the most noble people who have the most noble (and skilled) natures; those who have deficient natures, however (be it in skill, ethical comportment, or

weak intellect), see things coming to be and passing away—even in nature itself—on account of *tychē*.<sup>21</sup>

This sort of thinking—i.e., a thinking that maintains a teleological determinism in Aristotle over and against the powers of *tychē*—resounds firmly not only in medieval texts, but in modern thought as well. The idea that “chance is for the sake of something,” as Marcelo Boeri puts it (1995, 88), shows that one of the main problems underlying thinking about *tychē* in Aristotle remains its relationship to teleology, an insistence on the purposiveness of nature. According to Boeri (and, *prima facie*, in opposition to Simplicius), “chance and teleology are not opposite concepts but are, on the contrary closely related” (88) because chance is not contrary to nature but is itself—in being for the sake of something—by design: “[E]verything is ordered to some end,” Boeri writes, because “natural processes [...] are determined not mechanistically but by design” (1995, 90).

Furthermore, Otfried Hoffē says that “Aristotle relates both kinds of chance [*tychē* and *automaton*] to a purpose that is, however, reached or missed in an irregular, unpredicted, and unplanned way. Consequently, he considers as given an either-or form of teleology, or rather deficient modes, assigning *automaton* to *physis* and *tychē* to *technē*” (2003, 78). On one hand, Hoffē correctly identifies what Aristotle does do in the *Physics* insofar as Aristotle hashes out a discussion of chance regarding both nature and human affairs (in this instance, what pertains to *technē*, or productive knowledge); on the other hand, Hoffē, in this passage, determines nature to be altogether divorced from human affairs, a reading that I’d like to resist. This train of thought, however, continues through Russell Winslow’s assertion, regarding Aristotle’s discussion of *tychē* and *automaton* in the *Physics* by saying, “[i]f chance

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<sup>21</sup> However, we will see Aristotle reformulate this relationship between *technē* and *tychē* later on, when we see that the emergence of *tychē* importantly happens in concert with those who have *technē* and also with those who are engaged with *poiēsis*.

were something primary and central to the causality of nature, then we would be replete with examples of ‘monstrosity,’ or with instances of animals coming to be from plants and from beings whose form betrays a mixture of the forms ox and human or dog and rose. Indeed,” Winslow continues, “if chance were to rule as a cause, it would not be considered ‘chance’ at all but rather ‘consistent’ and ‘for the most part.’ But this is not the case in Aristotle’s world.” This reasoning leads Winslow to conclude that “chance cannot be a cause of a being or occurrence in nature always or for the most part and, if it cannot be said to be a cause always or for the most part, chance cannot be a primary cause” (2007, 41). The debate, then, seems to be settled regarding the possibility of chance as an *aitia*: Since *physis* is primarily what’s always or for the most part, then *tychē* and *automaton* cannot play a role in nature, for the very definition of *physis* includes regularity and repetition, against which nothing can come to be by nature.

However, Aristotle’s thinking about *tychē* and *automaton* counters Simplicius, Boeri, Hoffē, and Winslow, among others, but maybe not for the reasons we might normally offer, i.e., that *tychē* is something “contrary to nature,” at best, or a cause to be subsumed under an overarching teleology or divine purpose. Rather, what these thinkers miss, in my estimation, is an account of *physis* in Aristotle’s text(s) such that the place of chance in a natural inquiry makes sense. To this end, and against Russell in particular, we might call upon Emerson, who in “Old Age” says, “Nature is full of freaks, and now puts an old head on young shoulders, and then a young heart beating under fourscore winters” (1862, 136). Or we might think of Baudelaire, who says, “Nature produces only monsters” (1952, 129). What Emerson and Baudelaire offer that the others do not is, in my estimation, quite Aristotelian: We ourselves must be open to possibilities and actualities that present themselves to us, both in



human nature and *physis* writ large, for otherwise, as Emerson keenly notes, we might simply grow old, predictably with aged hearts.

I turn, then, to *Physics* II. 5-6 with particular attention to a consideration of *physis* that eludes many commentators. Over and over again, we see Aristotle perplexed at those who fail to consider chance in nature or in our lives, from the wise men who precede him to prevailing opinions of his day. Yet Aristotle himself could not be any clearer regarding a necessary investigation into chance, saying that “it is clear that *tychē* or *automaton* is in some way” (*Phys.* 196b17). We know, Aristotle says, that some things happen in a certain way always or for the most part, just as, e.g., my tulips stretch toward the sun, or my sister is sure to speak of her dogs when we talk. It doesn’t seem likely for chance in any sense to be the cause of these events, whether these things happen by necessity and thus always in the same way, or for the most part. However, “other things besides these happen [or ‘come to be,’ *gignetai*]” (*Phys.* 196b15). We might suggest, prematurely, that these “other things” make all the difference regarding Aristotle’s thinking about the relationship between chance and nature. But let’s get there.

Of the things that come to be (*gignetai*), some come to be for the sake of something and some not (*Phys.* 196b18). Of things that come to be for the sake of something, Aristotle says that some pertain to choice (*proairesin*) while others do not. Both ways in which things come to be, according to this initial division, remain among things that are for the sake of something. This initial description marks a formative horizon for the rest of Aristotle’s discussion, for it is here that we see a human being emerge *in* a discussion of *physis* by virtue of how it is that our choices and decisions come to light in a discussion of chance. Thus we have a first clue regarding the relationship between human beings and *physis*, hearkening back, perhaps, to the natural road: In things that come to be *at all*, we find human choice.

Provocatively, given that Aristotle initially discusses *tychē* and *automaton* as challenging the ways in which things normally happen (cf. *Phys.* 196b10), it might seem strange, and rightly so, for choice to emerge in a discussion of things coming into being, even if for the sake of something: What is it about chance that belongs to human life in such a way that we, as human beings, belong to nature in this discussion of things that seem to happen irregularly, or that seem *atopos* in nature itself?

What it means for a thing to come to be “for the sake of something” responds, in part, to the perplexity with which Aristotle encounters his own thought. To be for the sake of something is not merely a fulfillment of a physical manifestation of a given potential, like Aristotle’s insistence that an acorn fulfills its nature in becoming an oak tree. Rather, Aristotle explodes this scientific explanation to include both thought (*dianoia*) and nature: “And for the sake of something are as many things as are brought about from thinking or from nature [*esti d’ eneka tou hosa te apo dianoiās an praxtheīe kai hosa apo phuseōs*]” (*Phys.* 196b24-25). In other words, while I will not elide human nature with nature itself, I also understand Aristotle here to be speaking to how human choice is always already situated in *physis*, such that it is proper to speak of choice in a discussion of *physis*. Thus, Aristotle importantly brings human beings’ praxical engagement with *physis* to the fore: We cannot, and must not, divorce ourselves from questions of nature. Again, an inquiry into *physis*, as I intimated at the beginning of this section, is also always an inquiry into our nature as well. Thus, understanding *physis* entails, we might say, a reflective movement not only from things that appear to us to things that are *haplos*, but also to the ways in which things that appear to us occur from their self-showing as well. *Physis* is then like chance—a phenomenon, to itself and to us.

**Section III**  
**The Role of *Kata Symbebēkos***

Whenever things happen or appear incidentally (*kata symbebēkos*), Aristotle says, we say that they are disclosed by *tychē* (*Phys.* 196b25); that which is incidental belongs, then, to *tychē*. That is, when considering the ways in which both thought and nature can be for the sake of something (*dianoia* for a given end or good, as we shall see in the *Ethics*, or nature for itself, in my estimation—i.e., the *telos* of *physis* is none other than *physis* itself), Aristotle notes that another possible relationship in *physis* or *dianoia* can happen: to one thing, infinitely many incidental things belong (*Phys.* 196b27-28). For example, Aristotle says, the *aitia* of a house is a builder's *technē*, for without the builder, no house would come to be. However, Aristotle says, when we think of things that are *kata symbebēkos*, like being pale or educated, or, we might say, an educated pale person, these “attributes” do not stem from what a thing actually is; rather, an indefinite number of things come to be *kata symbebēkos*.

Were I to give what seems to me to be the standard Aristotelian reading of this passage, I might say something like this: That which is incidental, insofar as it fails to belong necessarily to the nature of a thing in its existence, does not speak to the essence of a thing. For example, that I am a tallish woman with sometimes blonde, sometimes brown hair is incidental to my nature as a human being, such as being a shortish, balding man would be incidental to the nature of a human being, especially if one considers *what* we actually do: As a philosophy graduate student, my tallishness, for example, has nothing to do with my being such a student, except incidentally, and the ways in which I possess an indefinite number of accidental qualities demonstrates how they cannot participate in who I am essentially, for my nature must correspond to what I actually do, not to the qualities that I

possess. Likewise for the shortish, balding man: He also studies philosophy, and neither his hair condition nor his height has any bearing upon his studies.

On one hand, such a reading seems right: To speak of attributes in such a way such that they determine the character of our actions, or our character in the first place, seems to overshoot the mark. It does not matter—or does not matter very much, one might say—what happens *kata symbebēkos*; what we are interested in is the *aitia* of something. We must strip things down to their essential nature in order to speak with scientific certainty about what a thing is.

This kind of thinking might hold were it not for two important factors: First, Aristotle has, at this point, already granted *tychē* as a way in which things come to be, against, e.g., a metronomic regularity of the “four causes” in explaining nature. Second, the examples that Aristotle himself gives concerning what counts for an instance of that which is *kata symbebēkos* are deeply puzzling, which, in my mind, highlights the importance of accidental or incidental relationships in and through nature and our thinking about it.

The force of the first point above is clear, for by granting *tychē* a place in his discussion of nature, Aristotle tells us that such a strange presence belongs with us on our natural road into an investigation of nature. Thus, *tychē* marks *something* as it makes things visible to human beings, even if we don’t know what this “something” is (yet). Second, Aristotle’s three examples involve the *aitia* of a house being in the builder (i.e., in another thing from the object produced) and how a person can incidentally be pale or educated. Certainly, the house could not come to be without a builder, architect, etc.: But in what way is this person truly the *aitia* of the house? We would not want to say that the nature of a house is its builder, even though it could not come to be without this person. Thus, the builder seems to be an efficient cause of the house. If the traditional reading above holds,

then what takes center stage is none other than the essential nature of a thing, such that epistemic knowledge, once achieved, will not only give us a universal rendition of various *ousiai*, but will also grant the possibility of this knowledge in the first place.

When thinking of that which is *kata symbebēkos*, however, and its role in the ways that things show themselves to us, we might fruitfully remind ourselves of the fourfold senses of being (*tō on*) in Aristotle as he outlines in *Metaphysics* IV (*Meta.* 1003a31-1012b32), where Aristotle says that being is said in many ways (*Meta.* 1003a2-3). In offering a fourfold distinction among beings and within being itself, Aristotle marks out “incidental being” (that which is *kata symbebēkos*), being in the sense of “being true” (*on hos alēthēs*), being (*on*) of the categories, and potential and actual being (*on dynamei kai energeia*). What interests us here is the first way of thinking being, which is, we might say, the ways in which being relates to others and to itself. *Kata symbebēkos*, we might say, *is* the very relationship of beings in their configuration in the world, such that, while I may be a tallish dark-haired woman at this moment, the manifestation of *kata symbebēkos* relates not only me to others (such that I can be identified as such a woman), but also me to myself; it is the way in which I show myself to others and to myself. As such, while this method of self-showing is incidental, it remains, nonetheless, a way in which (my) peculiar being becomes visible.

Franz Brentano says, “[s]omething has accidental being by virtue of the being of that with which is it accidentally conjoined. By contrast, independent being (*on kath’ hauto*) has being because of its peculiar essence” (1975, 6). Yet could one not argue that the “peculiar essence” of a being shows itself in the ways that it *is*, *kata symbebēkos*? Brentano uses the example of a four-leafed clover to make his point, saying that there is proof in “exceptional cases” that incidental relationships fail to signify the essential unity and nature of a thing: “Clover has three leaves in most cases, but not always; hence in individual cases in which it

has a different number of leaves the conjunction is accidental. Clover has four leaves *kata symbebēkos*, not *kath' hauto* [‘according to itself’] (1975, 8). That is, the nature of clover is such that it usually opposes four leaves; however, when such a relationship between clover and four leaves appears, we say that this relationship is incidental to the nature of clover: “Four-leafedness as such has its peculiar being, without which it would not be what it is; but the clover inasmuch as it has the being of four-leafedness is an *on kata symbebēkos*” (an ‘incidental being’)” (1975, 8). The relationship between the nature of clover as three-leafed sometimes happens to intersect with the being of four-leafedness. While this experience happens—and we consider ourselves lucky when it does!—we thus speak of a certain kind of opening, or monstrosity, in nature.

Regarding Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* II.8, Brentano says that if we know that something is *kata symbebēkos*, we do not truly know what or that it is; it is only a thing by name (1975, 8). That is, we specially name a “four-leafed” clover, rather than speak simply of a “clover,” which implies three leaves. For this reason, Brentano says, “no science deals with the *on kata symbebēkos*, since nothing that belongs to an object *kata symbebēkos* can contribute anything to the understanding of its nature, and [...] it is not possible to have a science of something which happens only accidentally on a few occasions” (1975, 8). The reason for which one cannot have a science of something that only happens sometimes is because science (I’m understanding *epistemē* here) aims for universal knowledge, which requires not only regularity, but necessity in some thing’s being what it is, such that the essence of the thing can be known by virtue of its unchanging knowability; this essence is fundamentally prior to the relation of beings. To this extent, Brentano is surely right: a necessary and universal knowledge of that which is strange and irregular in nature seems impossible, for one never knows when one might find a four-leafed clover...or (a) Socrates.

Yet, insofar as Aristotle aims at giving a *logos* of what is, or being, such a *logos* entails that we consider not only what a being is according to how it normally is in nature, but also how beings show themselves in these incidental relationships, not only as they arise in *physis*, but also in thinking and choice (as I've noted). The belonging together of *physis* and *dianoia*, then, provides a clue for how we might respond to Brentano's configuration of *kata symbebēkos* as laying outside an epistemic wrangling of *physis*, for while "it is possible for it to seem that nothing comes about from *tychē*" (*Phys.* 197a11), there are, nonetheless, ways in which things relate to each other without having a definite cause such that these relationships establish their own peculiar being. Or—and perhaps better—the relationships among beings multiply and complicate how we speak of *aitiai* in the first place.

Keenly, Aristotle explains the relationship between *dianoia* and *physis* concerning that which is *kata symbebēkos* through an example of yet another person who goes to a marketplace, but this time the person collects a debt from another without knowing in advance that the debtor would be in the marketplace as well; thus the market-goer incidentally collects his debt from another (*Phys.* 196b30-35). In this case, Aristotle says, the result—collecting the debt—"though not belonging to the causes in him, is among choices and things that result from *dianoia*" (*Phys.* 197a2). The result of this exchange, then, is said to have happened *tychically*, for *tychē* pertains to human arrangements and situations, resulting (as we shall see more substantively in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) from things that intersect *physis* and *dianoia*. When thinking and choice (*proairēsis*) enter the picture, the horizon of our discourse changes from an inquiry into epistemic certainty to one of peculiar instances, such that Brentano's suggestion that beings arranging themselves *kata symbebēkos* from time to time becomes even more powerful: What happens, in *physis* as in human life, such that a *logos* of incidental relationships becomes imperiled, venturing on surrender to that

which without an account or reason (*alogou*)? In other words, if *physis* is primarily and most fundamentally that which happens regularly in it, or in our lives, then a host of phenomena submerge into muddy water, or break, like honeycombed patterns on fractured thin ice: The task, then, would be to separate the dirt from the water, or to reform the honeycombs into a sheet of smooth ice.

Aristotle, however, does no such thing. Given that beings *kata symbebēkos* belong, ultimately, in a discussion of *physis* as much as, say, a discussion of *technē* does, Aristotle responds to *tychē* by saying, “It is necessary that the *aitiai* be indefinite from which what arises from *tychē* comes about (*‘Ahorista men oun ta aitia anankē einai, aph’ ōn an genoito to apo tychēs*)” (*Phys.* 197a8-9). In other words, when we think of *tychē*, we must *rethink* how it is that we normally fix *aitiai* to be definite moments in time such that we can point to *x* and say, “that’s it! *That’s* what’s responsible for such-and-such being the case!” Rather than locate the genesis of an event at a particular static cause or moment from which something comes into being, Aristotle here locates the being of an event (at least when pertaining to thinking and choice) in its appearance *as* an event. The cause or explanation, in other words, of collecting a debt lies *not* in first wanting to go to the marketplace, but in the event as it happens, and its very happening is *kata symbebēkos*. Thus it is that *tychē* and that which happens *kata symbebēkos* belong together: Insofar as many things do happen by *tychē*, when these things do happen, it is necessary for the *aitiai* as explanations to be indefinite, or without horizon (*ahorismos*, *Phys.* 197a9).

That this thought—of *tychē* pertaining to beings that don’t fit into a horizon but that show themselves nonetheless—is difficult would be a grave understatement, one that Aristotle knows all too well. Moreover, *tychē* itself seems to be unbounded and unclear to human beings (*Phys.* 197a11) to the point where, Aristotle suggests, it is nearly



understandable that people overlook it (*Phys.* 197a12), or that, when they do consider it (as his predecessors have done), they fail to give a full account of its nature. Furthermore, Aristotle provocatively says, it is right to speak of *tychē* as *paralogou* (*Phys.* 197a19). Unlike *nous*, which is *alogou* (without the *logos*), according to Aristotle, *tychē* stands, we might say, against the *logos* in the way that *paradoxa* challenges *endoxa*.<sup>22</sup> Thus it seems that we need either abandon *tychē* altogether (given that what we have *is* the *logos*, or the *logos* is that to which we aspire), or we need to rethink the role of *tychē* in a discussion of *physis* that bears upon how we find ourselves on and in the *pephukē hodos*.

#### **Section IV** **Chance: A Necessary Logos?**

Does a bit of chance come to Aristotle's aid in the *Physics*? Having discussed alternative ways to understand normally rigidified words in Aristotle—*physis*, *aitia*, *anankē*, and *logos* among them—and having situated Aristotle as primarily a thinker of *inquiry*, not certainty, as an examination of these ideas has shown, I turned to the disruptive character of *tychē* in Aristotle's *Physics* with an eye toward how Aristotle's thinking about it bears upon Socrates' situation in the *Phaedo* as well as in his own descriptions of his philosophical practice. Regarding Aristotle specifically, the residual questions I have in mind are as follows: How does an understanding of *tychē* in the *Physics* help us understand its role in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in light of its emphasis on thinking and choice, and to what extent should we take seriously Aristotle's claims in that text that one cannot flourish without *tychē*? Is *tychē* a strange "lost cause" (akin to Lucretius' *clinamen*), an explanation that mere mortals

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<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the movement of philosophy, for the Greeks, is the movement from endoxic starting points to *paradoxa*, which simultaneously affirms and challenges the horizon of commonly held opinions. Such is the movement, I think, of speaking about *tychē* in this portion of the *Physics*: If we can give no simple *logos* of the whole of nature, but can instead speak *paralogou*, then we see the movement of philosophy itself as it emerges in-between *logos* and that which is *alogou*; the emphasis here, in other words, is on our status as inquirers *on the very horizon* that we seek to investigate.

give when we fail to understand the scheme of the universe? My hope is that, from the sustained discussions laid out in this chapter concerning the movement of Aristotle's *Physics* in the first two books, we can gather together the threads of this discussion in order to speak meaningfully of the role of *tychē* in an investigation into nature as it culminates also in an investigation into ourselves.

If what I have outlined in this chapter holds, then we can make the following important observations about *tychē* in the *Physics*: First, the necessary natural road on which we find ourselves when making an inquiry into nature depends on how we ourselves engage in the process of demarcating horizons for such an inquiry, pointing to how it is that we hear Aristotle's discussion of *tychē* and *automaton* as holding open possibilities that his predecessors overlooked in their accounts of the cosmos. Such a comportment requires an openness not only to how things appear to us, but also to what's possible for us in such an inquiry in ways that over-determining Aristotle as primarily and only a scientific thinker closes off. This openness—to follow *physis* and philosophical thought where it leads us—importantly configures the character of our investigation, which is not removed from Aristotle's concerns in the *Physics* but instead speaks to the relationship between human nature and nature itself by highlighting ways in which nature is disclosed through our inquiry into it. Secondly, the relationship between *aitia* and *logos* reinforces the decisiveness of this character in ways that we might speak meaningfully about explanations, as Socrates does in the *Phaedo*. Rather than demarcate *aitia* from *logos*, thinking *aitia* as *logos*, in at least some instances, highlights a way in which we needn't stand mutely in front of Aristotle's formulation of *tychē*. In my discussion of Aristotle's relationship to his predecessors, thus, we saw that Aristotle's problem with them is that they fail to wonder at the role of *tychē* and *automaton* in discussions of *physis* and furthermore, that they relegate *tychē* to an *aitia* in a

traditional physicalist cause of the universe. Certainly, from Aristotle's perspective, such a consideration is not only to be wondered at, but is strange as well, since we do see many things happening by *tychē*, things that depend on an intimate relationship between human thought and nature, even human thought as it emerges from and within nature. Hence the importance of Aristotle's seemingly strange discussion of *dianoia* in the *Physics*: In what ways does thinking itself belong to a discussion of nature?

Here we enter the hermeneutic circle yet again: Insofar as we are thinking beings making an inquiry into nature, implicitly we make an inquiry into *our* nature as well, which depends on a prior understanding in or comportment to nature. The failure of purely physicalist views of the universe overlooks this circle (perhaps understandably), for epistemic certainty does not require interpretation in the ways that I've laid out here, but Anaxagorean truth. The importance of Socrates' insistence on the *deuteros plous* in the *Phaedo* as providing the only meaningfully possible kind of explanation for human life, then, with an eye toward the best *logos* providing the best explanation of an event takes center stage: Mightn't Aristotle himself be making a second sailing, cognizant of the perils of ignoring the *logos* altogether while searching for a purely scientific *aitia*? To my mind, Aristotle warns us of seductively scientific Sirens through his attention to *tychē*, underscoring the importance of the manner in which one speaks or comports oneself in a philosophical investigation in the first place.

Moreover, in thinking through that which is *kata symbebēkos* and its relationship to *tychē* for Aristotle, we have seen how Aristotle's insistence that we begin with how things appear to us is never simply a matter of an object appearing to a subject; rather, in denoting one way in which things come to be, that which is *kata symbebēkos* is utterly relational such that the culmination of this relationality not only indicates the peculiar nature of a given

thing, but also the infinitely many ways in which we interpret these things. What is (*tō on*), in other words, *is* always a belonging together, even of what's strange. Thus, a discussion of *tychē*, like *technē*, belongs in a discussion of *physis*, not removed from it, for *tychē* belongs to the ways in which things show themselves.

Furthermore, insofar as we human beings are not simply essences but are also—and perhaps more significantly—peculiar beings, each of us related to the world, each other, and ourselves in particular ways, I must emphasize the significance of *tychē* in the *Physics* as a destabilizing force that changes the character of our inquiry by changing the horizon available to us through which we interpret the whole of everything. Aristotle is right: *Tychē* points to that which is peculiar, confronting what we expect to find in an inquiry into nature.

Gathering these thoughts together, then—as a *logos* should do—I have indicated what is possible for us in reading Aristotle's *Physics*, puzzling over *tychē* in relation to Socratic philosophical practice must be seen as a matter of inquiry, not of decisive certainty, and the task before us is as follows: How does our own philosophical comportment today stand in relation to the Greeks on inquiring into nature? Having shown that Aristotle encounters many *aporiai* in his inquiry into nature in the *Physics* including the relationship between necessity and nature, *aitia* and *logos*, and how this disrupts attempts to read Aristotle doctrinally, and having puzzled over the role that *tychē* plays in the same work, we might suggest that the sustained relationship that Aristotle maintains to *tychē* is an attempt to give a *logos* to something which exceeds the *logos* in some ways but which nonetheless orients human beings in the world in the pursuit of the best *logos*. It is in the difference, one might say, between modern and Greek philosophy that something that seems so superstitious today—fortune, chance, luck, happenstance—plays a decisive and central role in Greek thinking about the world and the human place within it. I submit that Heidegger's

assessment of a modern prejudice for scientific certainty points out perhaps the impossibility of reading Aristotle's *Physics* today with any certainty. Rather, it is in our best interest to pay attention to where we find ourselves on the natural road such that we can always keep in mind how things stand in relation to us (e.g., how *aitia* and *anankē*, as I have shown, both precede and elude own inquiry) and how we inquire into our own self-knowledge.

The natural place to turn for continuation into the task of philosophy as it emerges through fundamental *aporiai* is to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, for it is in this text that he strengthens the language of *tychē* as a phenomenon as it relates specifically to human life while sustaining nonetheless an inquiry into nature. It is sufficient to say, for now, that if a bit of *tychē* comes to our aid, we, too, might be able to inquire into that keystone of Western philosophy, the *Physics*, with the hope that the fundamental *aporiai* presented therein allow us to rebuke the hubris of Lady Philosophy, permitting us to sit for a while longer with Socrates, not Boethius, in his prison cell in order to follow in the footsteps of the *logoi* preceding us, even if we don't agree to anything now.

CHAPTER IV  
***TYCHĒ AND THE INQUIRY INTO HUMAN NATURE IN ARISTOTLE'S  
 NICOMACHEAN ETHICS***

One can fall well or badly, have a lucky or unlucky break—but always by dint of not having foreseen—of not having seen in advance and ahead of oneself. [...] In such a case, when [a person] or the subject falls, the fall affects his upright stance and vertical position by engraving in him the detour of the clinamen, whose effects are sometimes inescapable.

-Derrida (1984, 5)

In the previous two chapters, we saw how Aristotle sustains an engagement with *tychē* in the *Physics* by paying attention to how human beings are already situated on the *pephukē hodos* in making an inquiry into *physis*. By considering, as we must always, how things appear to us in the horizon of an inquiry, we have seen how *tychē* ultimately emerges in relation to human thinking and choice for Aristotle while not being simply removed from nature like an object from a subject. To this end, we have seen how traditional conceptions of *tychē* in Aristotelian scholarship miss the mark when figuring the place of *tychē* in Aristotle, for no *epistemē* of *tychē* can be given; such is the source of displeasure for Aristotelian scholars who insist on epistemic certainty embedded in an over-arching teleological view of the cosmos. Contrasting these dominant and paradigmatic readings of Aristotle, then, I have offered attentiveness to the *Physics* by way of Aristotle's sustained discussions of *tychē* and the language of strangeness and wonder appropriate to its emergence in an inquiry into nature. Further, I have stressed, as I will continue to do in the rest of this dissertation, the ways in which rethinking traditionally understood terms like *logos* and

*aitia*—and in this chapter, *eudaimonia*—might help us ground a fruitful discussion of *tychē* by disrupting the conceptual frameworks that often over-determine and thus lose sight of the very topic or phenomenon for consideration in Aristotle’s texts. In other words, one cannot begin to offer a *logos* of *tychē* without considering how it appears to us and arrests us in the very account we try to give of it. Thus, when speaking about that which is *kata symbebēkos*, for example, one must speak of that which is utterly particular, like Socrates, knowing all the while that confronting strangeness requires a strange *logos* indeed.

In turning now to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we are immediately faced with several questions: What is the relationship between Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* such that it makes sense to speak of them together concerning the role of *tychē* in Aristotle’s thinking? Furthermore, given the preceding chapters on the relationship between *aitia* and *logos*, to what extent can—or should—an understanding of *tychē* (to the extent that such a thing is possible) play a role in human flourishing, or in a person’s striving to become good? Too, what kind of “ethics” would a serious consideration of the place of *tychē* for *eudaimonia* look like—or how might one receive such a *logos* from Aristotle, and what is required of us as readers to undertake a consideration of *tychē* in the *Ethics*? These questions orient and ground this and the next chapter, and I submit that how one responds to these questions not only determines the way in which one reads Aristotle’s texts but also speaks to one’s character in striving to interrogate what it means to flourish as a human being in the first place.

For our purposes, we can first note important ways in which the *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* hang together, and thus we can see how the *Physics* in many ways provides a formative horizon for considering the task of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Suggesting, as Aristotle does, that the human good is not simply removed from a question of

*physis* insofar as an ethical discourse always moves within an inquiry into nature, the first thing to note is that these two texts are not dichotomously opposed; instead, they resonate strongly with each other insofar as both take up divergent but consonant inquiries into nature. While we saw in the *Physics* that Aristotle's concern is *physis* writ large, we also saw how it is that we find ourselves *in* nature, and thus how human life too is at play in a natural inquiry, and even emergent from it. Thus in the *Physics*, an inquiry into nature is in some way an inquiry into human nature as well. Since we have seen Aristotle engage his predecessors, articulate particular phenomena, and call us to be attentive of the character of our inquiry *from the very beginning* of the *Physics*, it is not a stretch to say that how one receives the *logos* of *physis* is an ethical task as much as is receiving a *logos* about human flourishing. Thus, by locating ways in which human beings are situated on the *pephukē hōdos* and by being attentive to the character of the *Physics*, we have seen that *tychē* pertains to that which appears to us—hence the importance of that which is *kata symbebēkos* as a relational web from which we strive to articulate that which is particular in nature.

In turning to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, then, we move specifically to the question of human nature as characterized by the previous two chapters. It is here that a new horizon couches our inquiry, however, and we can note the double-importance of such a horizon: If in the first two chapters I stressed how we find ourselves on the natural road and that how we engage Aristotle depends on our openness to philosophical phenomena that he encounters along the way—and thus if the ways in which we attune ourselves to such an inquiry can be called ethical, or dependent on our character in important ways—then we can see how an inquiry into nature shapes our current concern as well. It is not a matter of an ethical inquiry determining a natural one, nor is it simply vice-versa; rather, the demands of the Greeks are such that these inquiries are co-constitutive, ebbing as they flow.



This newly discovered horizon shapes the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I thus pick up where our inquiry into nature left off, with the emergence of human life through the appearance of *tychē*, *automaton*, and *kata symbebēkos* in the text. What we have learned from reading Aristotle's *Physics* about how to proceed through difficult texts bears upon the character of our inquiry in this text as well, and due attention will be paid to the ways in which Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* forces us to confront the horizons—if not the limits—of thought and life themselves.

Our attention now focuses on the possibility of the human good in our lives, doing so through a sustained engagement with *tychē*, both as it fixes Aristotle's attention at determinate points of inquiry but also as it functions importantly as an undercurrent throughout the discourse of the *Ethics* as a whole. In fact, Aristotle's inquiry into the human good in the *Ethics* sustains several important discussions concerning the role of *tychē* in human life and its relationship to *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing.<sup>23</sup> In the beginning of

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<sup>23</sup> Two notes on the translation of *eudaimonia* and *tychē*: First, *eudaimonia* more nearly means “flourishing” than it does “happiness” for the Greeks. I insist on “flourishing” throughout this chapter (in many ways!) rather than rely on the language of happiness in order to highlight the work-character of *eudaimonia* for the Greeks and thus to separate it from a rather impoverished view of “happiness” as something like a psychological principle that can be satisfied such that a person declares herself “happy.” Furthermore, since the character of *eudaimonia* is robustly constituted through particular ways of being in the world, if flourishing is possible, it must be mightily interrogated as to what it is in the first place. Hence *eudaimonia* also resonates more strongly, in my view, with Aristotle's task of ethical inquiry than reaching a psychological state can satisfy.

Second, while the translation of *tychē* as “chance” dominated the last two chapters, I will speak comfortably of *tychē* as chance but also as fortune in the remaining chapters. While the Greek word is the same, two reasons guide my decision: 1.) In turning specifically to the human good, I will be speaking as much about the perspective of a particular person regarding her feeling fortunate as I do about things that happen by chance. I have no problem equivocating between the two, and the language of “fortune” has an added bonus: It simply lends itself to different parts of speech in English that “chance” does not. (E.g., I may speak of Socrates as fortunate, and that phrase makes sense. However, if I speak of Socrates as “chancy,” I test the ear and patience of my audience in strange ways.) 2.) The word “fortune” also solicits the language of a gift as something received, or of a bounty found. Also, we will see Aristotle speak of those who consider themselves fortunate or not, especially in relation to divine dispensation (*theomoirein*) and human flourishing. Thus, when combined with the treatment that *tychē* gets in the *Poetics*, referring to it both as chance and fortune does not seem a stretch to me, for a shape-shifter like *tychē* plays as least as many roles.

the text and throughout the first book in particular, *tychē* marks an important endoxic starting point for Aristotle, for many people mistake good fortune (*eutychia*) for *eudaimonia* (*EN* 1099b8), not recognizing that *tychē* is, in the common way in which it is thought, too dischordant to complete an account of human flourishing (*EN* 1099b25).

However, Aristotle's account of the life and death of Priam in the *Ethics* offers a complicated counterpoint to this discussion for Aristotle because those who are said to have no chance (*atychia*) or those who suffer terrible misfortunes, as Priam does at the end of his life, cannot be said to flourish (*EN* 1100a5-9). Aristotle wonders, in thinking of Priam, if Solon is right: Must we look to the end of a person's life to see whether she can be said to flourish or not? The result of this *aporia*—neither good fortune eliding simply with *eudaimonia*, nor misfortune abstaining from some kind of role in human flourishing—raises three important questions for Aristotle in Book I about the role of *tychē* in *eudaimonia*, or in the pursuit of the good: 1) If *tychē* is not *eudaimonia* in the way that many think, might *eudaimonia* nonetheless, if not result from, then at least heavily consult *tychē*? 2) In what ways might *tychē* enhance *eudaimonia* over time while *also* being a destabilizing force in one's life, regarding external goods in particular, and the possibility of a blessed life in general? 3) Since the misfortunes that befall a person have varying degrees of impact, must we look to the end of a person's life, as Solon demands, in order to consider whether she has been fortunate or not?

These three questions are paradoxes, i.e., they challenge, go against, and deepen endoxic beginnings. More precisely for the beginning of this chapter, they offer responses to the endoxic starting point of whether *tychē* can be considered *eudaimonia* or not. These paradoxes are not, strictly speaking, resolved; rather, they guide the trajectory of the *Ethics* as Aristotle's own inquiry deepens to concern *arête* (excellence), human "agency," courage,

death, friendship, and the possibility of *eudaimonia* at all or in the first place. For the Greeks, paradoxes don't simply overturn dominant commonly held opinions prevailing in their time; rather, in challenging these opinions, we can also see the importance of these opinions. And yet, the movement of philosophy, one could say, is the movement of *paradoxa* itself, as it certainly was for the Greeks. Such a movement never abandons "opinion" as such but may be, as Russell Winslow poetically notes, "the disposition of a citizen becoming a foreigner to her own city" (2007, 112). In many ways, this statement resounds with how one can read the *Ethics* today: Aristotle's ethical text is well-known to nearly every philosopher and scholar, and yet it remains strange to us, reminding us of the difficulties one encounters when thinking about flourishing or becoming good. The movement of *paradoxa* thus demands not only that we begin with commonly held opinions such that we can abandon them for worthier pursuits but also requires making new beginnings or engaging in philosophical thought when it confronts us, for different kinds of questions require different kinds of inquiries, even if they concern the same thing.

Thus, as we saw with Aristotle's *Physics*, sensitivity to the way in which the text proceeds is paramount to understanding. Or, to put it as Heidegger does, "[t]he one speaking always speaks to something in a certain respect" and never straightforwardly (2005, 31). This sentiment holds as true for the *Nicomachean Ethics* as it does for the *Physics*: Especially when confronting the obscurity of *tychē*, we must be cautious not only in what we say about it, but also in how we receive Aristotle's *logoi* throughout the text. Yet, the nature of *tychē* is such that one is always at risk in speaking of it, particularly as a phenomenon. But what kind of risk might one run when considering the weight of *tychē* in its relationship to *eudaimonia*? As Heidegger notes, the *logos* contains within it the possibility of deception, both of ourselves and of the world, but such deception is not innocuous; rather, "[t]his

*speaking with its possibilities of deception* stands as such in a world which presents *possibilities of deception* on its own” (2005, 29). The world, according to Heidegger, is capable of deception in two ways: First, it presents itself to us in respective settings that leave open many possible ways of interpreting the world; second, the world itself is elusive, obscured, and dark. As such, “an *abundant interweaving of possibilities of deception* becomes evident as a *possibility of being, interwoven with the existence of speaking and the existence of the world*” (2005, 30). I call upon these Heideggerian passages here in order to highlight the possibilities that arise for us as we risk ourselves in reading Aristotle’s *Ethics*, which forces us to engage not only Aristotle’s world, but to interrogate our own.<sup>24</sup>

In light of these remarks, one might say that *tychē* ultimately plays at least two roles in the *Ethics*: First, it formulates Aristotle’s inquiry into the possibility of *eudaimonia* and the good in human life, laying out the roles of external goods in one’s life and moving through paradoxical thoughts about *tychē* in order to examine closely how external goods affect what we normally consider as “agency.” These thoughts align with the paradoxes laid out about and move Aristotle’s inquiry deeper to the locus of ethical action. Second, *tychē* functions primarily as a *phenomenon* in human life, insofar as it speaks to how we experience, or might experience, our lives as we live them in friendship with others and ourselves. As we shall see, *tychē*, as a liminal yet urgent concern for human life, even speaks to the necessity of courage in friendship, and what it might mean to love one’s life. This second role proves a dramatic shift in Aristotle’s text and as his words accelerate toward concluding thoughts about friendship and the promise of yet another beginning (into politics,

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<sup>24</sup> I return to this Heideggerian impetus in the final chapter when I speak explicitly not only to tragedy for Aristotle as it emerges in his *Poetics*, but also in *poiēsis* as a whole including art and poetry. In that chapter I recall what I lay out here but in the language of “earth” and “world” as they are configured in Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art” in relationship to the *Poetics*.

he says, but back to *physis*, I say), we, too, will require a different exegesis, one that strikes at the very heart of the possibility of the human good. The apex of this dramatic shift arises in the next chapter, when we consider the relationship between *eutychia* (“good fortune”) and *euphuein* (“good nature”) in light of the *kairos* (circumstance) of Socratic courage and the life of philosophy.

One must keep in mind the demands placed on the reader when engaging Aristotle, sensitive to the ways in which one is confronted with the whole of everything at every turn in Greek thought, as I said in the introduction. Yet, insofar as one undergoes a *logos* as much as one tries to give it, as I have already begun to articulate in this chapter, I continue to follow Aristotle’s own thinking on the matter in a way that allows us to confront the appearance of *tychē* as it emerges for Aristotle with particular attention to my sketch in the last paragraph regarding two different ways of considering *tychē* in this text. Thus, in order to speak of ethical action and the possibility of a flourishing life particularly as it is bound to the task of the *logos*, courage, and friendship, in this chapter I consider the following:

1. The emergence of *tychē* as *eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s endoxic beginning;
2. The necessity of “external goods” (*ta ekta*) for *eudaimonia*;
3. *Theos*, *makarios*, and the language of the gift;
4. Solon and looking to the end of human life;
5. *Tychē*, stability, and the perils of forgetfulness.

Following Aristotle as he encounters *tychē* in this text reveals not only another perhaps surprisingly sustained engagement with it as we saw with the *Physics*, but also prepares us to gather together more thematic elements of the text in the next chapter.

One final note on my method of proceeding through these two chapters: At the beginning of my first chapter, I outlined contemporary and traditional discussions on the

*Physics* before, or as a way of, engaging the text itself. Doing so was necessary for framing the emergence of *tychē* in a consideration of *physis* insofar as *tychē* remains largely overlooked in Aristotelian scholarship, particularly in the *Physics*. However, in these two chapters I mainly consult scholars along the way rather than up front given that, simply put, the scope *Nicomachean Ethics* is in many ways obvious: It concerns the possibility of human flourishing, and the ways in which a person can become good. Nimbly navigating, however, how these aims touch base with and speak to *tychē* is my task; thus, engaging scholars mainly along the way enables me to point to differences in my understanding of Aristotle's inquiry given that the very ways in which Aristotle's aims are obvious also point to a fundamental obscurity regarding the radical contingency of a flourishing life.

**Section I**  
**An Endoxic Beginning? *Tychē* as *Eudaimonia***

One might be tempted to read the whole of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an attempt to grapple with the role of *tychē* in human life, and one would not be completely off-base in doing so. As Christopher Long notes, in the *Ethics*, "Aristotle turns his full attention and philosophical acumen to contingent existence and develops a conception of knowledge capable of doing justice to the vagaries of such contingency" (2004, 131). According to Long, *phronesis* ("practical wisdom") is a special kind of *praxis*, but moreover designates "an ontological significance" that emerges in Aristotle's thinking itself and continues to persist in the form of a question: "[T]o what extent is ontological knowledge of the finite individual possible?" (2004, 132) The task of the *Ethics*, in seeking to respond to this question, concerns the relationship between universality and singularity, and ultimately, the finite individual over and against an abstract universal. Whereas *epistemē* (and also *sophia*) concerns that which can't be otherwise, *phronēsis* pertains to contingency, i.e., that which

can be otherwise, and so belongs to an ethical discourse about human nature, given that we make manifold and various decisions according to what we consider good for us.

Accordingly, for Long, the *Ethics* grapples less in reference to that which is *katholou*, or pertaining to the whole, than it does with particularity and a person's striving to flourish, and thus aims to recognize the contingency of our actions and decisions in trying to flourish.

Such a thought aligns with the beginning of the *Ethics* in which we learn that, while all things aim at some good, this good is at least said in many ways (as "being" [*to on*] is also said to be in many ways in the *Physics*), and thus a manifold sense of the good (*tou agathou*) is at play in Aristotle's ethical discourses, for this manifold sense pertains to human life.

Because Aristotle grapples with particularity on such a fine level, Long's ultimate conclusion is thus that the *tode ti* (the "what is")—insofar as it designates a particular, concrete individual—links ethics to ontology in Aristotle, especially in light of *phronēsis*, which, as *phronimos* (a person with practical wisdom) designates a concrete individual engaged in ethical considerations, intertwined and inseparable. "[O]ntology becomes ethical the moment it recognizes its own contingency," according to Long, because "the ethics of ontology turns away from the quest for certainty, toward the ambiguity of individuality, seeking to do justice to that which cannot be captured by the concept" (2004, 154). Since our experience is always of the concrete individual as ourselves individuals, this experience is not, precisely speaking, universalizable; such an attempt at universalization will result in an empty conceptual schema, akin to how we witnessed the failure of *epistemē* to speak to that which is particular in nature, i.e., things that appear *kata symbebēkos* or by *tychē*. Because we are praxical beings, then, according to Long, we are simultaneously ethical and ontological, with no priority discernable between the two ways in which we experience our

world.<sup>25</sup> Again emphasizing the relatedness between the *Physics* and the *Ethics*, we can see how particularity emerges in the *Physics* pertaining to human choice and thinking; the *Ethics* is a further attempt to grapple with the particularities and contingencies of human life.

To this end and likewise, Claudia Baracchi considers the shortcomings of *epistemē* in light of the particularity of human existence most demonstrated in the *Ethics*. Claiming that first philosophy for Aristotle is ethics, she says, “First in the order of being, ethics is, indeed, last in the order of knowledge, most encompassing—for it entails humans’ self-reflexivity about their own endeavors, their coming back full circle to reflect on their own undertakings, most remarkably on their own reflective exercises (e.g., scientific investigation of *physis* and ‘beyond,’ logical or rhetorical analyses, the study of the soul...)” (2003, 229). According to Baracchi, *phronēsis* for Aristotle is both practical and active in striving toward some end but is also contemplative or “theoretical,” able to think about what is good both for the person with *phronēsis* and also for others. In this way, *phronēsis* sits aside *sophia*, and we can see this relationship when we consider that understanding *sophia* and its role in *eudaimonia* points to a daimonic movement of humans beyond themselves in a place in which they (we) belong (Baracchi 2003, 239). This strange sort of knowledge is a self-interrogation outside ourselves but in our place of flourishing, since *sophia*, or wisdom—which may be impossible for human beings—also links closely with *eudaimonia* for Aristotle.

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<sup>25</sup> Long’s discussion on the relationship between ethics and ontology is tempting, and I employ these passages here in order to demonstrate ways in which scholarship tries to think the individual in Aristotle’s thought. His emphasis on contingency in the *EN* speaks to the fundamental concern I’m trying to address here, which is none other than the radical contingency of human flourishing and life. However, it seems that the word “relative” could very well be substituted for the word “contingent” in the passages above as well as throughout his discussion, for though he strongly insists upon it as an important word, he seems instead to be saying that *arête* is relative to a particular individual in a particular time; thus, it seems like the necessary force of contingency breaks down and gives over to a relative stance that affirms the radical particularity of the individual, but not as a necessary contingency. Thus for Long, epistemic questions become ethical ones, but relativity, not contingency, seems to be Long’s main concern (cf. Long 2004, pp. 57, 65, 114-116, 120, 128).



This gesture to the “beyond-human” (Baracchi 2003, 242) in Aristotle, according to Baracchi, notes the possibility for thinking both of gods and (other?) animals, and thus raises the question and attempts to respond to what, precisely, composes a human being. *Phronēsis*, on her reading, is not necessarily exclusively human, and “this rapprochement of divinity and animality enormously complicates the relation of humans to the other living beings as well as the connections between the divine and life” (2003, 242). Thus there may be a way of going or gesturing “beyond,” both ethically and as it relates to *eudaimonia*, though not in a totalizing, epistemic way.

I point to both Long and Baracchi to consider how we might speak philosophically about a particular person’s striving for *eudaimonia* and the task of the *Ethics* as it concerns offering and receiving *logoi* about the radical contingency of human life, with particular attention paid to how this life gestures beyond itself when speaking of *eudaimonia*. In laying the stakes of such a discussion, we can anticipate how *eudaimonia* is simply much more, or at least other, than we might normally take it to be. And its importance and possibility, I submit, is closely tied to *tychē*.

Let us consider how this is so. After noting in the *Ethics*, as Aristotle does in the *Physics*, that we must begin our inquiry into the human good from what is known to us (*EN* 1095b1-5), Aristotle lays out three candidates for *eudaimonia* and the good life: pleasure (*hedonē*), honor (*timē*) through the political life, and contemplation (*theoria*). The first, pleasure, is what “most people” hold to be the good (*EN* 1095b14), but this life is completely slavish, differing not from the life of fatted cattle. The second contender, honor, results from political pursuits, and is pursued by people “in order to be convinced that they themselves are

good” (*EN* 1095b27-28) while the people pursuing these ends may not be “good” at all.<sup>26</sup>

This kind of life is, however, more praiseworthy than a life of pleasure because it at least solicits excellence (*arête*, *EN* 1095b30-32). (The third, a contemplative life, is excused from Aristotle’s overt endoxic starting points concerning what most people hold to be *eudaimonia*.)

On the heels of considering a political life as what’s good for human beings, Aristotle says that even if a political life that pursues honor also in some way solicits *arête*, this life is still incomplete. The reason for which such a life remains unfulfilled, however, is not because it requires bending to the whims of others in pursuing one’s goals, nor because honor is a “bad” end to pursue; rather, Aristotle says, this kind of life

seems too incomplete, since it seems possible, while having [*exonta*] *arête*, even to be asleep or to be inactive throughout life, and on top of these things, to suffer evils [*megista*] and the greatest misfortunes [or, to be without *tychē*, *atychein*]. No one would consider one who lived in that way to flourish [*eudaimoniseien*] [...]. (*EN* 1095b33-1096a2)

In other words, for Aristotle, the task of flourishing does not simply concern “having” virtues or excellence, because a person can be inactive throughout life, and such inactivity denotes a failure to live, let alone to flourish; *eudaimonia* concerns a certain active attunement to and in the world, and this active attunement demands a receptivity of the world (i.e., one can’t simply be asleep through life and flourish). Furthermore, should a person be without *tychē* or suffer terribly, *eudaimonia*, Aristotle suggests, is unlikely. Two important points surface here concerning what people usually consider *eudaimonia* to be, and they provoke Aristotle’s subsequent considerations of *tychē*: 1) A person with *arête* may not be immune to *tychē*, and so those who pursue honor as the greatest good, for example, could find their lives maligned

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<sup>26</sup> Spinoza echoes this sentiment in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* about those who pursue honor, saying also that these people must direct their lives according to other people’s rules and desires (Spinoza 1994, 3-6).

by misfortune, or by not having *tychē*, and 2) *Eudaimonia* also is not immune from *tychē*, and maybe even requires it. So, even if one “has” *arête* (if it is even possible in the first place to possess excellence as such, which, as we shall see, is debatable), then contingent or external factors can impact one’s life in such a way that her life might not be considered to flourish, or might provide reasons for which we might not consider an *atyctic* person to flourish.

However, the ways in which I just described possibilities for discerning how Aristotle lays the stakes for the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia* in the previous paragraph masks a deeply aporetic moment for philosophical consideration, which is that *eudaimonia* as flourishing may not be up to us in the way that pursuing politics or a life of pleasure is. In consulting *tychē*, which as we learned in the previous two chapters pertains to human thinking and choice, appearing to us as we appear to ourselves in our inquiries and lives, Aristotle opens a reconsideration *eudaimonia* in this longer passage, and we are called to investigate it: What, really, is a flourishing life in such a way that *tychē* either threatens or determines it? A quick gloss on the etymology of *eudaimonia* will demonstrate the ways in which *tychē* must belong to *eudaimonia*, at least in certain respects.

According to Sir David Ross, the corresponding adjective to *eudaimonia* “originally meant ‘watched over by a good genius,’ but in ordinary Greek usage the word means just good fortune, often with special reference to external prosperity” (1995, 198).<sup>27</sup> Ross notes also, as I have (pg. 98n23), that “[t]he conventional translation ‘happiness’ is unsuitable in the *Ethics*; for whereas ‘happiness’ means a state of feeling, differing from ‘pleasure’ only by its suggestion of permanence, depth, and serenity, Aristotle insists that *eudaimonia* is a kind

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<sup>27</sup> Ross’s translation of *daimon* (from *daimonia*) as “genius” is inadequate, but his point that the word calls one beyond oneself in ways consistent with Aristotle’s thinking about *eudaimonia* is well taken.

of activity; that it is not any kind of pleasure, though pleasure naturally accompanies it” (1995, 198). Embedded in these characterizations lie three important ways to reconsider *eudaimonia*, all of which are highly suggestive: First, if we take *eudaimonia*, insofar as it’s related to a person being attended by a “good genius,” seriously, then we need to discuss ways in which *eudaimonia* might significantly pertain to flourishing in a way that doesn’t simply belong to us as a state or habit might; rather, the language of being “watched over” solicits *our* belonging not always to ourselves insofar as we are capable of being watched over, or as we belong not only to ourselves. Second, Ross notes that in ordinary Greek usage the word *eudaimonia* simply meant good fortune, and we should dwell with this suggestion, as we shall see Aristotle do in saying that *eudaimonia* seems to be nothing other than good fortune. Third, Ross is right in saying that *eudaimonia* is not a kind of pleasure, but is pleasurable, and is most of all an activity. The question is, though, what kind of “activity” (I’m understanding *ergon* here, so activity as “work” or “deed,” and also activity as it concerns *energeia*, which will be for Aristotle the work of *psychē*) can *eudaimonia* be if we understand it to pertain to the first two points outlined above? Gathering this tripartite thinking together, *eudaimonia* seems to be excessive to our desire for it, and might very well hinge on something other than our “will” or virtue-generating habits.

Suggesting that *eudaimonia* pertains to the excess of human life might seem anathema to the Greeks from our modern perspective, but let us return briefly to Socrates at the end of the *Greater Hippias*, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation in order to see what kind of language might pertain to a flourishing life in relation to *tychē*. In that chapter I noted how Socrates’ account of his own philosophical practice, in contrast to that of Hippias, is bound to a *daimonia tis tychē* (*Gr. Hip.* 304C), a result of which, Socrates says, leads him to wander around and exhibit his *aporiai* to others. Whereas I initially linked

Socrates' mention of *tychē* to the role of *aporiai* in Aristotle as well as in Socrates' own philosophical practice as characterized by him, I now emphasize the word *daimonia* as the suggestive root of *eu-daimonia* for Aristotle in the way that Socrates characterizes it here. Thus, Socrates says that his philosophical practice results in him demonstrating his *aporiai* to others—such is the character of Socratic *elenchus*, and such is the way in which conversations with Socrates happen through encountering and taking up impasses in philosophical *logoi*. That Socrates locates the genesis or articulates the happening of his philosophical practice as bound to a *daimonia tis tychē*, however, is quite significant, for the *logos* Socrates offers here demonstrates the ways in which Socrates—and quite possibly philosophy itself—doesn't simply “belong” to Socrates as something that he necessarily “does” while fully in control of himself; rather, this sense of *daimonia* resonates beautifully with Ross's suggestion that we consider the etymology of the word *eudaimonia*, as it may resonate also with Baracchi's gesture to the “beyond-human”: We may not, ultimately, fully possess ourselves in flourishing, but might inevitably be bound to others—even the watchful eye of a good genius—when considering what it truly means to flourish. We may, moreover, be given over to ourselves in this reflexive and overabundant movement. In this recognition of the excessive nature of ourselves as belonging not only to ourselves in a determined way, *eudaimonia* resonate with what it might mean to be truly fortunate, and to be so in a way that exceeds our epistemic knowledge of it, calling us back to *tychē* and ourselves.

We will continue to see how these complicated ideas cash out in rethinking the force and place of *eudaimonia* in human life. For now, I simply bring to our attention the relationship between *eudaimonia* and *tychē* as it begins to take shape for Aristotle, as it does for Socrates. Since, according to Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is best, most beautiful, and most

pleasant (*ariston ara kai kalliston kai ēdiston hē eudaimonia*, *EN* 1099a25), and since all of these things are present in a life at work (*EN* 1099a30), a person needs to be equipped to undertake such a life in order to flourish. What it means to be equipped for such a life, however, requires *tychē* in another respect, for “it is impossible, or not easy, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them” (*EN* 1099a34-35). Having laid out in this section, then, the ways that *tychē* might resonate with *eudaimonia* insofar as Aristotle says that a person cannot be said to flourish without *tychē*, as I noted a few pages ago, let us turn our attention to what it means to be equipped for a flourishing life concerning *tychē* and external goods.

## Section II *Tychē* and “External Goods”

What does it mean to be equipped for *eudaimonia*, or the possibility of it being-at-work in one’s life? And how, given what I noted at the end of the last section, can a person prepare herself for the possibility of a flourishing life, if what it means to flourish might not depend solely on this person? If my suggestion in the last section holds, i.e., that *eudaimonia* resonates with *tychē* not only etymologically but also insofar as Aristotle says simply that one cannot flourish without *tychē*, then it seems that we have stumbled onto a tautology: To what extent can external goods (*ta ekta*), if they signify the fortunes that befall a person in her life, prepare oneself truly for being fortunate, or *eutychia*? Can one really say that flourishing depends on *tychē* in a certain way, if that flourishing itself is a matter of *tychē*? I submit that not only is this suggestion possible, but it is also necessary for Aristotle, given the manifold accounts of *tychē* that we receive from him in the *Ethics*. What we shall see in this section is that Aristotle faults those who simply conflate *eudaimonia* and *eutychia*, but not for the reasons we may think: For those who hold that these two words are the same, the ways in

which people assert them to be so has more to do with a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature than it does with the nature of *tychē*, for these people fail to understand what kind of life entails a consideration of chance. While the impact of Aristotle’s discussion of external goods will be seen more clearly in the next section when we turn to the life of Priam and Solon’s reminder, working carefully through the necessity of external goods for *eudaimonia* underscores the importance of *tychē* for a flourishing life.

Aristotle says, “it appears that there is an additional need [*prosdeomai*] of external goods [*ta ekta*], as we said, since it is impossible, or not easy, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them” (*EN* 1099a33-35).<sup>28</sup> This passage occurs just after the one last discussed in the previous section, where we saw Aristotle characterize *eudaimonia* as that which is best, most beautiful, and most pleasant. In our discussion we saw that *eudaimonia* may very well gesture beyond a solitary individual in ways that give a person back to herself in flourishing under the watchful eye of a *daimon*. Thus, what is best, most beautiful, and most pleasant seems to belong to more than an isolated individual, echoing the way in which we understand what’s best or pleasant in virtue of another, in its coming to us *as* pleasant or beautiful. But how is it that, in speaking of an excessive human nature, Aristotle can speak to ways in which we take up and engage the world in a meaningful way? Since the trajectory of the *Ethics* engages how a person might flourish or engage in beautiful actions, Aristotle turns his attention to what makes such flourishing possible, or at least helps it along. And what helps it along is, in a certain sense, things that come by *tychē* as “external goods.”

The word for “additional need,” *prosdeomai*, is pivotal in this passage, for it hearkens to the poverty in which a person might find herself if bereft of *ta ekta* (if such a thing is

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<sup>28</sup> Φαίνεται δ’ ὁμως καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀγαθῶν προσδεομένη, καθάπερ εἵπομεν· ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τα καλὰ πράττειν ἀχορήγητον ὄντα (*EN* 1099a33-35).

possible). While one might be tempted to contrast the necessity of external goods to more dominant “internal” goods, like *arête* or *phronēsis*, doing so would erect a false opposition between the solitude of an individual and what she encounters in the world or in particular circumstances. For Aristotle, such a contrast is unhelpful, for a human being cannot flourish as a hermit (*EN* 1097b9-11), but requires friends, citizens, and others. In disparaging the life of a hermit in this earlier part the *Ethics*, Aristotle speaks clearly to the highest good, *eudaimonia*, being self-sufficient (*autarcheis*), most choiceworthy, and complete (*EN* 1097b1-21). This self-sufficiency is importantly not what suffices for oneself alone (*EN* 1097b9), but rather comes to be so through the connections and relationships in which one finds oneself. Thus the significance of *prosdeomai*: the verb means “to require besides,” “stand in need of,” and “be in want of,” much like the basic requirements of a human life to demand the presence of others for Aristotle. But what does it mean to stand in need?

In the *Republic*, Socrates tells Adeimantus and Glaucon that “[e]ach of us is not self-sufficient, but in need of much” (*Rep.* 369b4-c). Occurring at a pivotal moment in the dialogue, these words mark a change from considering justice in an individual soul to seeing how it comes about (*gignetai*) in a city through an account (*logos*, *Rep.* 369a3-5) of it. To this end, Socrates says that considering the ways in which each person is in need of much requires also a consideration of which kind of city is best-suited to respond to these needs, speaking to a fundamental human disposition as requiring others (or a city). Perhaps echoing Aristotle’s statements that the life of a hermit is no life at all and moreover that, as I’ve noted, a true sense of self-sufficiency according to Aristotle requires more than what suffices for oneself alone (and thus demands, e.g., friendship and a city), the character of human life that emerges not only for Aristotle but also in the life of Socrates demands that self-sufficiency requires something other than our sheer will or desire to flourish; in many ways, it comes



from another. Thus, when Aristotle says that it is impossible, or not easy (*adynaton*) to act beautifully if a person is not equipped for doing so, we can take him to be speaking to basic requirements for a flourishing life, if such a thing is possible for us. External goods, *ta ekta*, are thus necessary for such a life, if there's to be any possibility of *eudaimonia* at all. *Ta ekta* simply means "outside," or "that which stands outside," and perhaps we can rewrite the passage as follows: In order to live a self-sufficient and choiceworthy life, and in order to work toward *eudaimonia*, which itself is a kind of excessive being-at-work, we must recognize the ways we are impoverished or ill-equipped to do so on our own; a life in solitude cannot be said to flourish. External goods, then, seem to make all the difference regarding what kind of life is possible for a person, for Socrates is right: Each of us is not self-sufficient, but in need of much.

These things said, Aristotle's list of what's included in *ta ekta* is decidedly strange, ranging from wealth and good looks to corrupt children and dead friends, all of which either help or hinder a person's capacity for *eudaimonia*. He says,

[M]any things are done, as if by instruments (*organōn*), by means of friends and wealth and political power. And those who lack certain things, such as good ancestry, good children, and good looks, disfigure their flourishing (*eudaimonikos*); for someone who is completely ugly in appearance, or of bad descent, or solitary and childless is not very apt to flourish, and is still less so perhaps if he were to have utterly corrupt children or friends, or good ones who had died. So as we said, there seems to be an additional need (*prosdeisthai*) of this sort of prosperity, which is why some people rank *eutychia* on the same level as *eudaimonia* [...]. (EN 1099b1-9)

While this passage brings consternation to contemporary virtue ethicists who point to an imbedded elitism emergent in Aristotle's thought,<sup>29</sup> Aristotle's concern here is to emphasize

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<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., *The Fragility of Goodness* (Nussbaum 2001), *The Unnatural Lottery* (Card 1996), and implications of these interpretations for contemporary ethical thought in "Moral Luck" (Nagel 1979). Representative of much contemporary discourse concerning Aristotle's "ethics" and Aristotelian elitism, Nussbaum says, "[t]he first and most striking defect is the absence, in Aristotle, of any sense of universal human dignity, a fortiori of the idea that the worth and dignity of human beings is equal" (2001, xx). The

the ways in which human life is *already caught up* and bound to its emergence in the world, standing one way or another in relation to all these things. To this end, what interests Aristotle are the ways in which *ta ekta* contributes to a flourishing life, not what might make such a life impossible. That Aristotle ends the *Ethics* with three books on friendship, for example, gestures to the significance of it in becoming good, but noteworthy to this end is that one does not just “have” friends, or good children, or wealth, as one might simply have dishes in one’s kitchen; rather, each of the goods listed here—insofar as they potentially contribute to *eudaimonia*—requires something on behalf of the person’s relationship to these goods, an attunement or receptivity to acknowledging these goods *as* good. As we saw Aristotle say about those who simply “have” *arête*, for example, a mere having is insufficient for *being* excellent or for creatively interpreting the world; one can sleep through life while “having” *arête*, and thus fail to have it at all.

The same thinking applies here. A person cannot have friends like she has dishes; rather, what it means to be a friend and to have friends requires action *with* the friend such that friendship emerges between two people. It is a fundamentally creative act, striking at the difference between acquisition and action, and for Aristotle, the emphasis in the *Ethics* is on action. Because this is so, we see that he concludes this list by saying that some people mistakenly rank *eutychia*, good fortune, on the same level as *eudaimonia*, but I submit that Aristotle finds these people mistaken because they think that *tychē* is simply a matter of being lucky enough to *have* external goods come to them, failing to realize that a mere

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consequences of such a position, according to Nussbaum, is that Aristotle, in lacking a modern political viewpoint, relegated to necessity or chance things that human beings should work harder to change: “the suffering was perhaps not necessary, and [...] if we had worked harder or thought better we might have prevented [the tragedy in question]. At the very least it means that we had better get ourselves together to do whatever we can to avoid such things in the future” (2001, xxxv). The goal, for Nussbaum, is to protect a rational view of the self over and against whatever happens to it; passages like this one from Aristotle trouble Nussbaum on account of their tendency to destabilize an insular sense of self characterized by rationality alone.

“having” is insufficient for *eudaimonia*, and thus is also insufficient for truly understanding *eutychia*, or even *tychē* as the radical contingency of human life.

About the status of *ta ekta* and the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia*, Steven White says that Aristotle points to a “genuine and serious worry” about the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia* in these passages, for “[i]f the major ends of human life are heavily subject to fortune, then a good life also depends heavily on fortune; if our major ends result only ‘coincidentally’ from our actions, then deliberate action itself seems pointless from the perspective of human life” (1992, 87). The question, according to White, is “how important” things that come by *tychē* are for human flourishing, with the task being how to understand in what ways “the most important ends” of human life and action are subject to fortune (1992, 87). In his reading of this passage, White says that bodily goods (health and strength) and external goods (wealth and power) are subject to things beyond a person’s control, but that these things matter little to the self-sufficiency of a person’s soul: “Even if the virtuous cannot be happy without *some* favor from fortune, it does not follow that they need *much* favor or that anyone could be happy by its favor *alone*” (1992, 83). Thus, prosperity is neither primary nor sufficient for *arête* or *eudaimonia* because the rational activity of a person acting deliberately insulates the power of the soul by downplaying the effects of external goods, regardless of how much or little they might impact our lives.

But, by diminishing the force of *ta ekta*—and subsequently, *tychē*—for Aristotle, White isolates the soul, itself by itself, from how it is already bound in and to the world. In pinpointing ways in which *arête* belongs to the soul and not to things beyond one’s control or in relation to these things, we must conclude that the resulting picture of human life is like a warrior with a shield, whose goal is to fend off the world and protect himself from it, not recognizing that he too stands in need of the world in ways that don’t depend on him. Yet,

White is right to point out precisely why *tychē* puzzles not only many people who confuse it for flourishing, but also Aristotle as well. I submit, however, that people who inappropriately conflate *eutychia* with *eudaimonia* (both in Aristotle's text and in contemporary thought) do so because they overlook ways in which a person must interpret her world in light of what comes to her, and always in response to these things.

Looming in the background of this discussion is resentment, or the ways in which a person finds her life impoverished in light of others' lives. Along with the worries of contemporary virtue ethicists (see pg. 114n29), we might rearticulate the issue in yet another way concerning the equity and inequity of the world, and how it is that we see others prosper in ways that we don't. Again, the fundamental error in thinking of one's life as a matter of *tychē* lies in thinking that *tychē* is simply removed from the life of the person it affects and her interpretation of the world. More precisely, as we saw in the *Physics*, *tychē* emerges through ways in which we already find ourselves in nature, and thus what happens to us is what speaks to the nature of human life and becomes our task for taking ourselves up.

In her excellent article on the role of nemesis in the *Ethics*, Ronna Burger writes that “[t]o cling . . . to the ‘beautiful speeches’ of morality [in the *Ethics*], when they are in conflict with the ‘hard knocks’ of life, is precisely the condition for the experience of righteous indignation” (1988, 128). Nemesis takes pity as its proper contrary, and both are moralistic: indignation “translates good fortune into reward, just as pity translates bad fortune into punishment” (1988, 129). The distress for each arises “from the consequent discrepancy between this perceived external reward or punishment and an assumption about the internal character of the one who undergoes it” (1988, 129). In other words, one feels righteous indignation when one's surly neighbor at least seems to have good things befall him. Pointing to the apparently undeserved good fortune of others, Burger emphasizes the force of

appearance, i.e., that this neighbor only *seems* to have good things befall him. Congruent with our discussion to this point, however, Burger suggests that “perhaps the application of the measure of virtue and vice to external fortune and misfortune is altogether conceived and the latter have nothing whatever, or very little, to do with desert [what one ought to get]” (1988, 129). Good or bad fortune, then, cannot just be matched to “inner worth,” for in receiving what one “deserves,” then chance itself would be eradicated in favor of necessity only.

Righteous indignation shows itself as the desire for a natural order of justice that would match character to chance, with a person receiving what she “ought” to have. Though we may want nature to punish the bad and reward the good, our desire demands that we convert this wish into law and satisfy ourselves through it to try to make sure that one’s inner character proportionately receives what it has earned or deserved. Yet surely such a thing is impossible, and thus the notion of equity as “the realization of the impossibility of the law’s fulfilling a certain standard of precision” because its impossible universality “makes forgiveness possible” (1988, 132). Forgiveness thus depends on the recognition of the role of chance, and “pity, like indignation, on the denial of it” (1988, 132). Burger suggests that this might be a way to rethink *pathos* as the incommensurability of what one deserves versus what one gets, in light of our tendency to pity someone instead. Forgiveness, then, in the way that it recognizes *tychē*, should replace pity, for pity suggests that life “always rewards the good” (1988, 132). On this view, one pities another because good things don’t happen for this person when one thinks that they ought to.

Burger raises the question of the equitable person and wonders if he is as invulnerable to indignation as he is said to be to shame, arguing that the equitable person “thus reveals negatively, but his distance from it, the fundamental presuppositions of

*nemesis*—on the one hand, that human beings are fully responsible for their character and actions, on the other, that good and bad fortune can be meted out proportionate to desert” (1988, 133). Nemesis, as the “hidden root” (1988, 133) of all ethical virtues, according to Burger, thus ultimately points to the ghostly presence of the gods in the *Ethics* as it forms the “silent horizon for the account of ethical virtue as a whole” (1988, 133). With these comments, we come close to soliciting the question of divine dispensation, *theomoirein*, in the Greeks, which anchors the next passage I will turn to from Aristotle. According to Burger, though, “the gods become a double cause of resentment; for even if we could attribute punishment to them, they seem too personal and willful to satisfy what *nemesis* really desires—some objective force of justice, operating like a law of nature, in which effect follows automatically and intrinsically from cause” (1988, 132).

Absent such a possibility, however (i.e., the knowledge of a cause that operates appropriately to human beings in a way that would align human life with the motion of the planets, satisfying some objective cause of ethical action), as we have seen in Aristotle’s inquiry into nature in the *Physics*, the place of *tychē* diminishes for those who don’t recognize it as it stands against sheer necessity in nature. Burger echoes this sentiment, saying, “To disclose the illusion involved in the denial of chance is, therefore, one reasonable aim of ethical inquiry; of course that alone, even if achieved, would not guarantee either the possibility or the desirability of being weaned from the experience of indignation when character and fortune fail to coincide” (1988, 136). In light of the incommensurability between what a person thinks she deserves and what she receives, then, and regarding the impossibility of delimiting a cause for a person’s flourishing, Burger implores us to take up the Aristotelian *logos* as a deed, in order to test life itself.

For Burger, the gods disappear in human life, for they can neither receive human indignation in light of a basic sense of unfairness or true human desire; they cannot receive appeals from suffering human beings, because the gods are forever removed in a certain sense from human life. Thus, an attempt to appeal to the gods to assuage one's fears, correct injustices, and ask for a correct measure that aligns one's goods with one's character falls on deaf ears; the gods remain immune to human pleas. While this account may be true, what's missing from it is not what the gods themselves are, such that they become our target of anger and frustration, but the other half of the story: how it is that we receive what is given to us as a gift, or even as the basic happening of human life. Aristotle is keen on this point, as we shall next see, for in resonating with the ways I've laid out *eudaimonia* in the previous section and in light of *ta ekta* in human life, *tychē* also resounds with the language of the gods. Taken together, these words strike a chord in speaking profoundly about the excesses of human life, speaking to the ways in which human beings as given back over to themselves—even in striving for *arête*—and thus dynamically reinforce the necessity of a creative receptivity from a person to her life and the world.

What we have learned from an examination of Aristotle's passages on *ta ekta* and its relationship to *eudaimonia*, then, is the following: *ta ekta* resonates with *tychē* insofar as it serves to remind us of the ways in which we find ourselves in need of goods that don't depend merely on our will or desire. Furthermore, since Aristotle says that it is difficult, if not impossible, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them, external goods are necessary for human life, contributing to the possibility of beautiful action. However, these goods are necessary insofar as we recognize that they, too, require creative activity in putting them to work in our lives; i.e., they depend on the interplay between a person and the world, with a creative impulse demanding that we recognize the ways in which we stand in

need of goods that come to us, knowing that these goods—like friendship—depend on our putting them to work *in* our lives.

### Section III Tychē and the Gods

Returning to the text of the *Ethics*, we see Aristotle reach an impasse in trying to grapple with the relationship between *eudaimonia* and *tychē*, particularly regarding the role of the gods in human life. He says that not only do some people mistake *eutychia* for *eudaimonia* (EN 1099b8), but that this mistake strikes at the heart of how one flourishes at all. Moving away from what “some people” think to the philosophical matter at hand, Aristotle says,

This is also why there is an impasse about whether *eudaimonia* comes by learning [*mathēton*] or habit [*ethiston*] or training of some other kind, or else comes to one’s side [*paraginetai*] by some divine lot [*theian moiran*] or even by *tychē*. Now if there is anything else that is a gift of the gods to human beings, it is well-said [*eulogon*] that *eudaimonia* too should be god-given, and it most of all human things, in the measure by which it is the best of them. But perhaps this would be at home in another sort of investigation, though it appears that even if *eudaimonia* is not god-sent [*theopemptos*] but comes to one by means of *arête* and some sort of learning or training, it is still one of the most divine things, for the prize for *arête* also seems to be the highest end and something divine and blessed [*theion ti kai makarion*]. (EN 1099b9-18)

Significantly, this long and complicated passage follows the necessity of *ta ekta* in human life, for if *ta ekta* plays a role in *eudaimonia*, to what extent, and how much? In the first sentence here, Aristotle parses out what appears to be two dichotomous ways to consider *eudaimonia*: Either it comes from some sort of internal fortitude depending on an individual person, *or* it happens regardless of the person in question, as discussed in the last section.

Relating to the passage we just examined on the role of *ta ekta* and its importance for *eudaimonia*, this sentence is a natural *aporia* for those who mistake *eudaimonia* for *eutychia*, for it seems that either flourishing depends wholly on a person’s habits and training, or that it



happens beyond a person's control. However, if we keep in mind the ways in which Aristotle thinks that human beings *already* stand in need of something outside themselves, as the force of *ta ekta* indicates, then we might put into relief those who think that flourishing is a matter of either-or in the way that people sometimes think. By moving from an endoxic starting point, noting that many people mistake *eutychia* for *eudaimonia*, Aristotle strengthens the philosophical matter at hand: *Eudaimonia*, we might conclude from this passage, resonates with *tychē* in yet another way, for it gestures beyond an individual, ultimately returning her to herself.

To see how this cashes out, we can note the presence of *theos* in Aristotle's thinking at this point, a word that gestures to the gods in Greek thought, but which also appears in Homer as the happening of human life as a gift to human beings; it is the appearance of life as life. The first of its five appearances in Aristotle's passage relates to *tychē*, for in saying that the *aporia* about *eudaimonia* concerns what seems to be up to human beings at all or in the first place, Aristotle's first use of this word relates utterly to human life as a happening, or as something "divine" bestowed on human beings. The second word in this first phrase is *moira*, translated generally as "fate." Thus, we might think of *theian moiran* as "the fate of the gods (or the divine)" insofar as human life accepts this fate as the very condition for life in the first place; we might also think of it as people generally do, which is to then say that everything is out of a person's control, determined by the gods. In this latter and more impoverished suggestion, to accept one's fate resonates with a punishment that one must endure in light of the gods' desires, resulting in the resignation of one's life to matters out of one's control. Or, as we saw with *nemesis*, we demand an object for our fury, forgetting that the gods mutely deny our suffering. The former and way of considering *moira*, then, speaks not to the fury of human life but to its very happening in what we are given. (This way

speaks of what's possible for human life in its givenness, an idea to which I return in the final chapter of this dissertation.)

The second and third mentions of *theos* speak of gifts that come to human beings from the gods. With the language of “gift” present here, Aristotle intensifies the first usage offered above; i.e., a “divine lot” is precisely what is bestowed on human beings in its—or our—happening. Also as a gift, *theos* here echoes with *ta ekta* as something standing outside or beyond a human being, coming to a person without her request. *Tychē* in this reading coheres both with *theomoierein* and the gift of the gods, for as we learned in the *Physics*, *tychē* denotes that which pertains to human life as it finds itself *kata symbebēkos*, in a continual process of creative interpretation in and of the world by virtue of *dianoia* and *proairēsis*. The gift here, then, is nothing short of *eudaimonia* itself, for in being “best” for human life, the measure exceeds our capacity for it, standing in response and need of something beyond ourselves.

Yet, while Aristotle says that another sort of investigation would be more appropriate to a discussion of the relationship between *eudaimonia* and *theos*, it is nonetheless well-said that *eudaimonia* belongs to *theos* in a meaningful way. Given that this text is an inquiry into human nature, however, Aristotle says that even if *eudaimonia* is not god-sent (*thēopemptos*) but comes to a person by means of *arête*, learning, and training, then it is still divine, for the “prize” for *arête* also seems to be divine and blessed. This fourth and fifth mention of *theos*, then, as the possible dismissal of the gods, returns to the *telos* of *arête* as beyond a person; i.e., *arête* as virtue or excellence finds its home gratuitous to a human being. Aristotle suggests here that regardless of the ways in which one tries to flourish, the end of such flourishing always points to another. Again we can put into relief the false inner-outer

distinction that seems to pervade Aristotle's text, for what we learn in this passage is that *arête* also speaks to more than a solitary individual and what is only up to her.

Now, how does *tychē* help us understand the movement between human life and its excess in a way that gives a person over to herself? In speaking of *tychē* and *theos*, Aristotle emphasizes how *arête* returns to a person as a gift that must gesture elsewhere. If the ends of *arête* point beyond a human being, then how can a person seek to cultivate *arête* in the first place? What we learn in this passage is that the strong intensification of the presence of *theos* recalls Gadamer, who, as I noted in the introduction, reminds us that the Greeks speak to "this truth: we are always other and much more than we know ourselves to be, and what exceeds our knowledge is precisely our real being" (1986, 78). This way of being other, then, solicits a necessary humility in light of what is possible for human life, but this humility requires, as we will see in the next chapter, a courageous comportment to undertake and take up one's life in the first place. The point of dwelling on the presence of *theos* in these passages as they relate to *tychē* reminds us of such a challenge, for if even *arête* comes to a person by means of learning or training and is not a gift of the gods, *arête*, like *poiēsis* (as we will see in chapter five), finds its end in another.

At this point, though, if we consider Aristotle's language to speak to a fundamental excess of human life, and if we remember how it is that even an inquiry into nature is bound to how we find ourselves *kata symbebēkos*, we can wonder how it is that a person can act at all in her life, let alone act in accordance with *arête* and towards *eudaimonia*. Such a question is certainly not lost on Aristotle; in fact, by suggesting that the *Ethics* is fundamentally an attempt to grapple with the radical contingency of human life, I have tried to show precisely how carefully and seriously Aristotle takes such a challenge, and how the language of *ta ekta*, *eudaimonia*, and *theos* all illuminate a peculiar facet of human nature, or

a way of speaking of this nature in a certain respect that is often overlooked, as I have noted, in contemporary Aristotelian scholarship. While in the next chapter I return to the relationship between *theos* and *tychē* as it emerges in conversation with *physis*, detailing precisely how rare a truly fortunate person is, here we can keep in mind not only Aristotle's references to the gods, or to life as a—and in its—happening, but also to how a person responds to *ta ekta* in her life, mindful of continuously standing in need of others or the watchful eye of a good *daimon*.

According to Aristotle, a complete life (*biō teleiō*, *EN* 1098a18) is required for *eudaimonia* as it comes to be as the *energeia* of *psychē* (soul, or life) in accordance with *arête*; no short amount of time suffices for a complete life, and thus a short amount of time is also insufficient for *eudaimonia* or coming to be blessed (*EN* 1098a18-21). The word for “blessed” in this passage is the same word in the longer passage I just discussed, and again we can note how it speaks to the excessive activity of human life. According to Liddell and Scott, the word *makarios* derives from the adjective *makar-*, which means “blessed,” “happy,” or “fortunate.” Interestingly, in Hesiod, the word as a noun also means simply the dead, as they become blessed after enduring suffering in their lives. Likewise, the word also appears in Pindar as the name of islands where demi-gods and heroes would rest forever (1992, 484). In light of these possible translations of *makarios* and their emergence in Greek thought, we must note how very strange it seems for Aristotle to speak of *eudaimonia* as an *energeia* of *psychē* in accordance with *arête* if we were to consider *arête* to be translatable to “virtue” as something that a person does in her life. If the *telōs* of *arête* is found in a complete life, and this complete life is most beautiful by virtue of how it stands in relation to the excesses of this life, then how can a person aim to cultivate herself? That is, if the *telōs* of *arête* solicits the language of something beyond her control—whether it's *eudaimonia* as

the watchful eye of a *daimon*, *ta ekta* as goods that come to her, or *makarios* as blessings bestowed by the gods on human beings, or, even stranger, the language of the dead that pervades this blessing—then what, really, can a person do in order to flourish?

Aristotle's response to these two related questions seems to be: everything and nothing. While this response might appear to be a cheap answer to a difficult question, Aristotle, as we have seen, shows us precisely the difficulty a person encounters when thinking of or speaking of *tychē* and its related words insofar as they point beyond a person as a reminder to take up her life in a creative interpretation of the world. Thus, the language of *theōs*, *makariōs*, *tychē*, *eudaimonia*, and even *arête* in the *Ethics* speaks to an orientation of human life as having its end in another. But, in having its end in another, or in relation to others, a person becomes responsible for her life in its very happening; she is given back over to her life in its happening. After all, as we learned from the *Physics*, that which pertains to human beings by virtue of *dianoia* and *proairēsis* belongs also to the language of *tychē*, such that how things appear to us, in our thinking about them, makes all the difference in how we engage the world.

Yet, given that Aristotle speaks of a complete life as necessary for *eudaimonia*, we must now ask how it is that a person lives such a life as it appears to her, and how she can grapple with what befalls her. The task of the next section, then, is to lay out an account of great and small fortunes that happen to a person, how someone responds to reversals of *tychē* in her life, and how it is, given that the future is utterly unclear (*EN* 1101a18), this same person can be called blessed as a human being (*makarios d' hōs anthrōpous*, *EN* 1101a22).

**Section IV**  
**Tychē, Solon, and Looking to the End**

“[M]any changes and all sorts of chances come about in the course of a life [*pollai gar metabolai ginotai kai pantoiai tuchai kata ton bion*],” Aristotle says, “and it is possible for the most thriving person to fall into great misfortunes in old age, just as the story is told of Priam in the epics about Troy; no one calls flourishing the one who suffers such fortunes and dies in misery” (*EN* 1100a5-9). Likewise, Aristotle invokes Solon, who says that we must look to the end of a person’s life to consider whether a person flourishes or not, both regarding the totality of this life and in death (*EN* 1100a10-100b20). Importantly, these two examples recall a *mythōs* about Priam and a story from Herodotus, the first historian who himself reported stories. In order to see how Aristotle speaks of the possibility of flourishing in one’s life and also that which can or will make a human life more blessed, I now turn to Aristotle’s mention of Solon in order to see why it is that we can or should look to the end of a person’s life in order to consider whether this life can be said to flourish or not, given the many great and small reversals of fortune that happen to a person over the course of her life. Doing so accords with Aristotle’s own discussion about the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia* on the heels of the our discussion in the last section regarding *tychē*, *theōs*, and what it might mean to be “blessed.”

Aristotle raises the question about *eudaimonia* at the end of a life as follows:

“[O]ught one to call no other human being flourishing either who is still alive, and is it necessary, as Solon said, to look at the end?” (*EN* 1100a10-11) According to Aristotle, Solon does not say that someone who is dead flourishes, but that the dead may in fact be blessed (*makariseien*) in being beyond evils and misfortunes (*kakōn onta kai tōn dystychēmaton*, *EN* 1100a12-18)—i.e., in being beyond life. The first implication of this idea is that *tychē*

belongs to life such that death puts one beyond it, even if the dead pertain to what it means to be blessed (which, as I suggested in the last section, in a certain way means none other than being dead). Yet, what concerns Aristotle is not so much how a person can be said to prosper after death, but instead how the complete life belongs to those who are living, and maybe how people receive those who are dead.

According to Herodotus in the *Histories* (I.30-34), the Athenian Solon, in his travels, stays with Croesus at Sardis, who receives Solon as his guest. A few days into his stay, Croesus asks Solon—on account of his “love of knowledge” and experiences while traveling—whom Solon would deem most happy, Croesus thinking himself the most flourishing of mortals. Solon answers quickly: Tellus of Athens. Not only did Tellus’ country flourish, but he also had two good and beautiful sons, who themselves had children, whom Tellus saw mature. Moreover, Tellus died gloriously in battle, and was honored upon his death by his fellow Athenians. Upon hearing this response, Croesus indignantly asks Solon who he would deem as second place regarding *eudaimonia*, thinking surely that it would be him. Solon responds: Cleobis and Bito, two strong youths who replaced oxen that were to carry their mother to a festival in praise of Hera. Solon has heard that their mother was so pleased at the actions of her children that she offered a prayer to Hera so that they could become blessed. Her children, after the festivities had passed, slept in Hera’s temple and died, after which statues were made in praise of them and offered to Delphi.

After hearing these two accounts of people who can be said to flourish, Croesus angrily asks Solon about his own status regarding *eudaimonia*, and why it is that he is not considered to flourish. Solon responds, “A long life gives one to witness much, and experience much oneself, that one would not choose” (I.31). Measuring a long life at seventy years (about the age of Socrates’ death), Solon speaks to the importance of a variety of

experiences required for *eudaimonia*, many of which are out of a person's control. Yet, given that Cleobis and Biton did not live lives as long as Tellus', sheer duration of a life is also insufficient for a flourishing life, but the manners in which they lived and died allows Solon to deem them happy.

Solon says that a person, until he dies, cannot be said to flourish but instead can be called fortunate (I.32). Perhaps anticipating Socrates, or retroactively echoing his statement about the needs of human beings and what it means to be self-sufficient in light of these needs, Solon also says, "[N]o single human being is complete in every respect—something is always lacking" (I.32). Precisely because we stand in need of much, *tychē* speaks to that which pertains to human life as we gather ourselves together in light of what befalls us.

About the exchange between Solon and Croesus, Seth Benardete notes the differences between the two ways in which Solon deems Tellus and the two brothers to flourish. The first account, Benardete says, occurs because of what Solon himself has seen; the second account comes to Solon by way of what he has heard. Tellus' long life and beautiful death are praised by his fellow Athenians, and he dies in a glorious way in the city; Cleobis and Biton die in a temple after performing an admirable deed. All are honored: Tellus on account of his bravery and beautiful life as a ruler, the two brothers by virtue of their worthy actions in honoring their mother under the demands of a festival praising Hera. For Benardete, this difference points to the ways that "[t]he human good and the divine good are not the same" (1999, 133); i.e., the ways that Tellus is praised by his fellow citizens after dying for the city signifies how a human being can say that another has flourished, but the gods also have a say in deeming a human life flourishing as well.

Solon's declaration that one must look to the end of a life in order to see how it flourishes thoroughly informs Aristotle's thinking at this point. Emerging from the concern



of how a person grapples with extreme reversals of fortune in her life and how it is that *eudaimonia* can maintain itself as the continuous work of *psychē*, Solon's statement arrests Aristotle in his thought. Through the particularity of Priam's suffering as well as through the specific lives of which Solon speaks, Aristotle reaches an impasse, reinforcing, in my reading, the precariousness of human life even in its completion. If a person acts according to *arête*, like Priam, but suffers a terrible death with his children all killed and everything in disarray, then this person cannot be said to flourish. But, why not? Must one indeed look to the end—and the end only—in order to speak to a person's life? If so, then we need to consider the relationship between a person's death and the whole of her life such that a measure for flourishing can appear.

According to Aristotle, the response to this question lies in how we consider a complete life to require stability, mindful of the ways in which we belong to others, or to something or someone other than ourselves. He says,

If in fact one ought to look to the end [*to telos*] and at that time judge each person blessed [*makarezein*], not as being blessed but as having been so before, how is it not strange [*atopon*] if, when someone flourishes, what belongs to him cannot be truly judged as his because one does not want to call the living happy on account of reverses [*metabolē*] and because one assumes that happiness is something durable and not at all easily changed, while fortunes often come back around again for the same people? For it is clear that, if we were to follow along with the fortunes [*tais tychais*], we would often call the same person happy and miserable in turns, making the happy person out to be a kind of chameleon or a structure built on rotten foundations. (*EN* 1100a32-1100b8)

The first thing to note about this passage is Aristotle's contrast between *eudaimonia* as it demands a kind of stability, and that which comes from *tychē* as reversals of fortune, which seems to threaten to topple a continuous activity of *eudaimonia*. If it's true, Aristotle says, that Solon is right and we must look to the end of a life in order to see whether a person has flourished, we can only look *to* this person's life, and not to her death; we simply can't know

if this person is blessed or not upon the completion of a life. Regarding the passage I examined from Solon, we might say that the knowledge of blessedness relates to *theos* in a way that remains inaccessible to human beings, coming to us as a gift we cannot exchange or return. Inversely, such is also the source of righteous indignation, as I mentioned earlier, for there can be no object that receives human displeasure outside of human life itself. Thus, Aristotle emphasizes that what pertains to human thought on this matter utterly concerns a person's life, and this life seems to require some sort of stability or duration in order to be complete.

No chance amount of time, Aristotle says, is sufficient for a complete life (*EN* 1101a15). As Nietzsche speaks of Lessing's son (2005, 451), Aristotle sensibly deems duration important in human life in order to become good or flourish. As we see in the longer passage above, however, duration alone does not suffice for a human life; rather, the *kind* of life that one lives is what's most significant. Thus, when Aristotle seeks to preserve *eudaimonia* as an active condition of flourishing that is receptive to the world and others, to some extent Aristotle seems to buffer human life from reversals of fortune such that one can persevere in light of hardships. Hence, Aristotle says that, were we to follow *tychē* and all that comes with it, we would then call the same person flourishing and miserable, depending on the circumstance and what happens to this person. Such schizophrenia no more belongs to *eudaimonia* than it does to a single human life, the suggestion maintains; thus, what "belongs" to this person is included in the measure of a person's life. Yet, given everything we've discussed so far concerning the nature of *eudaimonia* as it demands a belonging together of a person to another, or a person in excess of her life, then what "belongs" to a person seems to be debatable in the usual sense of the word.

Curiously, however, in saying that no chance amount of time suffices for a human life, Aristotle points to how such an amount of time is precisely what we have. And again, rather than insulate a human life from *tychē*, or rigidify *eudaimonia* into something like an accomplishable goal, Aristotle reinvigorates his discussion of *eudaimonia* in light of what happens by *tychē*. For Aristotle, that Priam cannot be said to flourish, even though his life was lived honorably and in accordance with *arête*, raises serious problems concerning what happens to a person in her life and how it is that terrible misfortunes can disrupt a life that might, at its end, be said to flourish.

Aristotle follows up this passage with an explanation of what can be said to belong to a person in light of how this person stands in relation to others, or in the excess of a human life. Regarding things that come by *tychē*, Aristotle says that “a human life has need of them [things that come by *tychē*] as something added, as we said, while the things that govern happiness are ways of being at work in accordance with *arête*” (*EN* 1100b8-10). The necessity of *tychē*, then, stands as a paradoxical thought: To what extent can *tychē* be necessary for *eudaimonia*, especially in light of the ways that *eudaimonia* signifies an excess of a person’s life, as discussed throughout this chapter?

#### Section V *Tychē, Stability, and Forgetfulness*

The key to understanding the relationship between Aristotle’s thinking of the necessity of *tychē* at this point and the competing necessity of stability in one’s life lies in how it is that those who are most fortunate pass their lives *most* continuously, not least, as we might think. The reason for such stability is threefold, as Aristotle elucidates in *EN* 1100b10-1101a25, the passages subsequent to those discussed in the last section: First, the *energeia*, or being-at-work, of a human life is more durable than *epistemē*; second, the continuous lives

of those who are blessed do not suffer from forgetfulness (*lēthēn*, 1100b15); third, those who actively take up or receive their lives will, in being most fortunate, act beautifully according to given circumstances, for they will indeed lead poetical lives. This last point will be elucidated more powerfully in the next chapter, when we turn to the *kairos* (circumstance) of a beautiful life and its relationship to *physis*. Additionally, it lays the groundwork for my concluding chapter regarding the relationship between *tychē* and *poiēsis*.

Regarding the first point, Aristotle says, “in none of the acts [or ‘deeds,’ *ergon*] of human beings is stability present [or ‘established,’ ‘made firm,’ *bebaiotēs*] in the same way it is present in ways of being at work in accordance with *arête*; for these seem to be more durable [or ‘lasting,’ ‘staying in place,’ *monimōterai*] even than *epistemē*” (*EN* 1100b14-16).<sup>30</sup> In other words, stability accompanies the deeds of a human being, in their very action. Intensifying my earlier claim that Aristotle insists that a human being cannot simply “have” *arête*, we see that same point repeated here regarding the *ergon* of human life: That which is fundamentally at work mandates activity at its base, and this activity is paradoxically more stable than that which yields *epistemē*. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation and repeated at the beginning of this chapter, *epistemē* cannot meaningfully pertain to a human being in her activity; no “universal knowledge” of an acting human being applies to the movement of life in its happening. For this reason, Aristotle suggests that *arête* only comes to be *in* and *through* its happening, and thus is not a matter of merely “having” *arête*

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<sup>30</sup> The whole passage from the *Ethics* under consideration in this section is as follows: *περὶ οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτως ὑπάρχει τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἔργων βεβαιότης ὡς περὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τὰς κατ’ ἀρετὴν· μονιμώτεροι γὰρ καὶ τῶν ἐπιτημῶν αὐταὶ δοκοῦσιν εἶναι· τούτων δ’ αὐτῶν αἱ τιμιώταται μονιμώτεροι διὰ τὸ μάλιστα καὶ συνεχέστατα καταζῆν ἐν αὐταῖς τοὺς μακαρίους· τοῦτο γὰρ ἔοικεν αἰτίῳ τοῦ μὴ γίνεσθαι περὶ αὐτὰ λήθην· ὑθάρξει δὴ τὸ ζητούμενον τῷ εὐδαίμονι, καὶ ἔσται διὰ βίου τοιοῦτος· αἰεὶ γὰρ ἢ μάλιστα πάντων πράξει καὶ θεωρήσει τὰ κατ’ ἀρετὴν· καὶ τὰς τύχας οἴσει κάλλιστα καὶ πάντη πάντως ἐμμελῶς ὅ γ’ “ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός” καὶ “τετραγῶνος ἄνευ ψόγου.” (*EN* 1100b13-22)*

as one has trinkets. The emphasis here is on the action, or the work, of a human life. And this work, says Aristotle, maintains itself through the continuous mindfulness of one's actions. *Energeia*, in other words, entails movement insofar as the word literally means "to be in work," or "in the work," which signifies a continuous motion or change, over and against the regulatory stasis of *epistemē*.

The second point of this passage pertains to those who pass their lives most continuously in being at work in accord with *arête*, i.e., those who are blessed. Here Aristotle narrows the scope of his discussion from the activity of all who are at work in the way just mentioned to those who are most honored on account of *eudaimonia*, for these people both act in accordance with *arête* and contemplate that which accompanies it. Strangely, perhaps, the reason that these people are most honored is because they are not forgetful (*lēthēn*). Thus, an enduring life in a certain manner—i.e., one that pertains both to activity and a kind of mindfulness—may be said to demand an attunement to *alēthēia* that others fail to have, or may entail a recognition or a remembrance of some kind, or mindfulness to keep forgetfulness at bay.<sup>31</sup> Given that Aristotle's mention of forgetfulness at this point provides a clue to the *energēia* of life for those who are blessed, I now briefly recall two Socratic examples in order to understand the relationship between *epistemē* and memory, first in light of Socrates' philosophical practice as detailed in the *Phaedo*, and secondly at the beginning of the *Apology*, wherein Socrates elucidates the perils of *lēthē* regarding the task of self-knowledge.

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<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on the perils of forgetfulness occurs also in Bk. VI, where Aristotle delineates those who have *technē* from those with *phronēsis*. Aristotle says that *phronēsis* is an active condition involving more than the *logos*. "A sign of this," Aristotle says, "is that forgetfulness [*lēthē*] occurs in that sort of active condition [*technē*], but there is no forgetting of practical judgment" (*EN* 1140b26-30). Again in Bk. IX during a discussion of friendship and reciprocity, Aristotle says that "most people are forgetful [*amnēmones*], and aim at getting something good rather than at doing good" (*EN* 1167b27-28).

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the ways in which *aitia* and *logos* relate to each other in Aristotle's *Physics* in light of Socrates' turn to the *logos* in the *Phaedo*, emphasizing the ways in which an *aitia* in the usual sense of the word fails to give the best or most complete account of an event. Keeping that discussion in mind, another facet of Socrates' account of his turn to philosophy is quite significant in this passage, which is that an impossible inquiry into nature exceedingly blinded him, forcing him to unlearn, or forget, everything he thought he knew (*Phae.* 96C). Among the kinds of questions that Socrates asked in trying to make an inquiry into nature is of the genesis of memory (*mnēmē*), which he twice mentions (*Phae.* 96B), before noting the ways in which this inquiry blinded him, forcing him to surrender his inquiry. Given that Socrates, as I've noted, looks for the *best* explanation, his turn to the *logos* speaks to the paralyzing effects of forgetfulness, for what could be more anathema to philosophy than that which fundamentally opposes learning? In other words, if an inquiry into nature can't provide an account of *mnēmē*, and if one is forced to unlearn everything that one knows in such an investigation to the point where the inquirer becomes blinded, then the problem, according to Socrates, seems to be that this person continually finds himself in the process of unlearning (*apemathon*, *Phaedo* 96C), blinded and stationary in light of the tasks of philosophizing.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, in the *Apology*, Socrates begins his defense by noting that his prosecutors spoke so persuasively in the first part of the trial that Socrates himself almost forgot who he

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle discusses the relationship between memory and learning in the *Metaphysics*, wherein he says that for human beings, "experience arises from memory, since many memories of the same thing bring to completion a capacity for one experience [*empeirias*]" (*Meta.* 980b28-981a2). For Aristotle, the importance of memory as bound to experience has the capacity to bring about knowledge (*Meta.* 981a2-10).

was (*epelathomēn*, the root of which is *lēthē*, *Apo.* 17A).<sup>33</sup> Juxtaposing this near forgetting with his prosecutors' accounts of his philosophical practice in Athens, Socrates says that their words bore little truth (*alēthes*, *Apo.* 17A). However, Socrates was almost carried away, in spite of himself, because of the seductive power of their words; indeed, he almost forgot who he was. Trusting Socrates on this point, we can note the power of a certain kind of deceptive *logos* in failing not only to attend to the movement of truth (a full discussion of which escapes this dissertation), but also as bringing about an overwhelming forgetfulness that such seduction induces.

If we can say—as I think we must—that these two passages speak to the character of Socrates' philosophical practice, then we can shed light on the perils of forgetfulness according to Aristotle. First, in detailing the forgetfulness that attends to Socrates' youthful inquiry into nature, we can note the implicit suggestion that philosophy, against this kind of inquiry, demands attentiveness to *alētheia* as a continuous movement of philosophy, staving off a paralytic blindness. Second, in speaking to the persuasive power of his accusers, Socrates reminds us that a powerful *logos* can induce forgetting, even a forgetfulness of oneself. However, if we attend also to this point, we learn through the trial what a *truly* powerful *logos* is—none other than the life of Socrates.

These Socratic instances illuminate the dangers of *lēthē* as they threaten philosophical practice as a whole. Those who are able to ward off forgetfulness, however, or those who are fortunate enough for it not to encroach upon them, Aristotle says, will said to flourish throughout their lives, and thus will be honored as the most blessed. Thus, when one speaks of the activity of *eudaimonia* as a comportment in and to the world, one must also be mindful

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<sup>33</sup> The ironic undertones of Socrates' statement here (i.e., that Socrates' life is characterized by him as being in pursuit of self-knowledge while claiming never to have attained it) are powerful. However, we might say that whomever Socrates considers himself to be, it is certainly *not* how his accusers render him.

of its accompanying excess, for it is through this excess that things can be said to “belong” to a human life in its very movement. Or, in other words, the difficulty of understanding a blessed human life for Aristotle lies in our inability to be constantly at work in the act or process of remembering, or the movement of *alēthēia*.

Now something must be said about how these two points speak particularly to *tychē*, for, echoing the *Physics* II. 4-6, Aristotle next says that “many things happen by *tychē*,” and it is here that we can anticipate the rest of this dissertation’s trajectory through the next chapter to its riveting conclusion: Aristotle says that these things can make life beautiful and *poietical*, signifying a life that belongs more than to itself in having its end in another (*EN* 1100b22-29). Great misfortune can decimate a life, as happens in a way to Priam, for it’s possible that *tychē* “imposes pains and hinders many ways of being at work” (*EN* 1100a30); misfortune, then—or a lack of *tychē* in the first place—can disrupt the activity of a life itself. However, according to Aristotle, it is possible for those who suffer misfortunes to flourish, if given the “fullness of some long time in which one had come to devote oneself to great and beautiful *aitiai*” (*EN* 1101a11-14). We must remember, though, that the goal for Aristotle is a certain sort of complete life (*EN* 1101a17). Oppositely, if great fortunes come along, or many turns of *tychē*, then a person’s life may become more blessed (*EN* 1100b22-25), already being blessed on accord of being at work and lacking forgetfulness in a certain way.

Regardless, Aristotle says, “one who is truly good and sensible will bear *tychē* gracefully and will always act in the most beautiful way the circumstances permit” (*EN* 1101a2-3). We may note at first that such a statement gestures to the rarity of such a person, recalling the *phronimos* discussed at the beginning of this chapter as one who recognizes the fundamental contingency of human life; we may also anticipate the courage required in a given circumstance in order to act most beautifully, according to the limits of that



circumstance. What we need remember most of all, however, is that this statement is predicated on a prior understanding of the relationship between *tychē* and *eudaimonia* as discussed in this chapter, for *tychē*, in the way that Aristotle suggests here, makes possible the advent of circumstances in the excessive movement of a human life, reminding us to return to the task at hand, i.e., the phenomenon of *tychē* as it speaks not only to our human nature, but also as it recalls us to *physis* itself.

## CHAPTER V

### THE *KAIROS* OF A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

[Palamedes] dedicated the dice he had invented to Tychē, in her sanctuary in Argos. Tychē was not a popular divinity at the time. But one day everybody would recognize her as the image that most closely resembles nature. When life strips off all her finery, what remains is fortune. Everything that happens is a constant collision of tossed dice.  
-Calasso (1994, 353)

Philosophers have taught us that the logic of freedom does not reside in transgression as one might readily suppose, but precisely in the capacity to begin.  
-Kristeva (2008)

In the last chapter we saw how the *Nicomachean Ethics* is, among many things, an attempt to grapple with or understand the radical contingency of human life. We also saw how the language of *epistemē* necessarily fails to pertain to *tychē*, for unlike *epistemē*, *tychē* pertains to that which can be otherwise. In recalling how Heidegger says that one always speaks about something in a certain respect and never directly (particularly for that which is *adelon*, as *tychē* is), we have begun to see how *tychē* appears always in relation to other concerns for Aristotle. This thinking led us to an appreciation of the emergence of *tychē* in the *Ethics* as it functions to remind us of how human life is bound up in these relations, and how, because this is so, a person's responsibility for her life resonates in the *energeia* of her life. This *energeia*, however, always gestures beyond a solitary individual, I have argued, and so it is that an occasion opens up in which a person is constituted in the very moment of being at work in her life. Such a movement, as I think it ought to be called, speaks to the excessive dimensions of human life, but not in a way simply surrenders a person to another;

rather, according to Aristotle, insofar as one acts, one always does so in a particular circumstance, and never *haplos*; i.e., a person never “simply” acts, but also always in a certain way, within the horizon(s) of a given *kairos*.

Thus the double-gesture of *tychē* at this point in the *Ethics*: Insofar as *tychē* always emerges in relation to other concerns for Aristotle, and insofar as we have seen Aristotle demand that a person take herself up in light of *ta ekta*, *theōs*, and a host of other related words, I have noted the precarious tension that a person finds herself in when considering the competing demands of a complete life and the generosity of *tychē*. These tensions speak to the necessity to engage in beautiful actions without being certain what those actions are or to foresee their possibility in advance, the difficulty of *eudaimonia* in the ways that it is generally meant versus how Aristotle points to it as meaning something akin to a recognition of a contingent life in the first place, and the strange language that pertains to such a discourse at all. These obscure ideas serve to remind us, above all, of the challenges that life itself holds in relation to *tychē*, and how *tychē*, in a certain sense, demands that we remember such challenges. Hence my emphasis at the end of the last chapter on the stability of a human life in its being at work, and why it is that we must ward off forgetfulness that threatens not only to destabilize an inappropriate impetus to universal knowledge when considering the particular tasks of human nature in light of ethical (or maybe even philosophical) concerns, but also how we must, at base and always, be called back to the stakes of the question that we began with in the first place, i.e., the role of *tychē* in an inquiry into nature, both human and otherwise.

On the heels of these thoughts, this chapter is divided into two parts, beginning with an articulation of *tychē* in relation to *kairos* in the *Ethics* in order to see how the language of *kairos* helps us understand not just the particular instances a human being encounters in her

life, but how life itself is given to a person in these instances as the possibility of life showing itself in the first place. I will do so by way of Heidegger in order to show how these thoughts resonate with how I characterize *tychē* in the introduction of this dissertation as making possible the possibility of human life itself as an occasion inasmuch as it also is radically receptive to life in its givenness, aware—sometimes importantly, sometimes not—of the contingencies that make life possible. In order to see how this idea emerges in the *Ethics*, I provide a sketch of *tychē* and *kairos* as they appear in Books II, III, IV, and VI, concentrating on the following: the necessity of those acting to look at the circumstances surround the occasion themselves (*EN* 1104a5-10); how willing acts require knowledge of particular circumstances (*EN* 1111a14-15); the ways in which a “great-souled” person acts beautifully, and how her beautiful actions speak to the greatest of external goods (*EN* 1123b15-21); Aristotle’s insistence that *phronesis* deals with particulars (*EN* 1142a16); and what it means to be *hēlikia*, or “flowering in life” (*EN* 1143b8-10).

This last emphasis occasions the second part of this chapter, which returns us to the relationship between the *Ethics* and the *Physics* via Socrates’ philosophical practice, insofar as Aristotle speaks to the rarity of being/becoming both *euphuein* (“good natured,” or “good by nature”) and *eutychein*, which raises serious questions about the possibility of human flourishing in the first place. We will then have the occasion to puzzle over the complicated relationship between these words in making a return to *physis*, the very place where this dissertation began, seeing how Aristotle reinforces the necessity of making a return to *physis* at the very end of the *Ethics*. The context for such a discussion is none other than Socrates’ life, which, at the end of the *Phaedo*, is deemed to be the best (*aristou*), most phronetic, and most just (*Phaedo* 118A). Considering Socrates’ life, in other words, gives us the occasion for the question of *tychē* again to appear to us in its—and our—potentiality.

**Section I**  
**Tychē and Kairos: The Opportune Moment**

In his *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, Heidegger says, “The involvement with the world of care is apparently, in apprehension, a seriously adopted task, one which allows no rest, day or night, and to which life has supposedly committed itself in full, and yet actually (for apprehension itself, ‘still at times’) it is a mere letting oneself be pulled along, letting oneself be transported” (2001, 102). In light of the articulation of life here as a matter for thinking as well as that which allows this thinking to already emerge in the first place, Heidegger says, “[t]he question is how, from a chairological point of view, life as such can and does announce itself (how it occurs) in apprehension” (2001, 102). Suggesting a double way of understanding apprehension—first, as something that suddenly announces itself to life, stopping it and us in our tracks, and second, as we struggle to apprehend something ourselves—Heidegger speaks importantly of a “chairological” point of view, which is precisely what human life has such that it can be addressed and announced. Congruently, we can recall the first two chapters of this dissertation in how it is that we found ourselves necessarily leading ourselves forward in a certain way, which in turn pulled us through an inquiry into nature, while seeing how it is that human life emerges in such an inquiry. That is, in taking something as the matter of our investigation, i.e., *tychē*, what has opened for us is a discussion of human nature in its very emergence, resonating beyond and back to a particular human life. Inasmuch as we have taken something as this matter, however, it has importantly already claimed us (or at least me) in advance, such that we can ask about it in meaningful ways. The task that precedes this section and continues through its duration, then, demands an openness to the possibility of philosophical inquiry, something to which we must continuously affirm and submit.

In fact, according to Heidegger, it is when speaking about possibility that the world itself opens to us, always familiar and always anew; such is the space for philosophizing (cf. Heidegger 2000, 9, 13-14, 21). Yet, as Heidegger maintains, possibility—and the world opened up *through* possibility—is never merely withheld from us any more than it is simply given. A longer passage from “The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics” will help ground the task of *kairos* and its role in the *Ethics*, examined through our “kairological point of view.” Heidegger says,

Certainly, beings remain as they are revealed to us. And yet beings are not able to shrug off what is worthy of questioning: they, as what they are and how they are, could also *not* be. By no means do we experience this possibility as something that is just added on by our own thought, but beings themselves declare this possibility, they declare themselves as beings in this possibility. Our questioning just opens up the domain so that beings can break open in such questionworthiness. (2000, 31-32)

Before continuing with the rest of this passage from Heidegger, we must pause to consider the movement of which Heidegger speaks here. First, in recognizing the contingency of particular beings, when one speaks of possibility, it is not simply as something not-yet-done; rather, the work (or *energeia*, as I said in the last chapter) of beings stands in such a way as to already *be* their possibility through their declaration of it—as Heidegger might say, through their being in the first place. Yet, insofar as what is possible for human beings in particular stands in relation to a kind of worth, this worth, too, is not something merely added; rather, it demands a breaking open in terms of questioning, such that we may be worthy of the questions that address us in a way that claims us through our very being. But let us continue this passage:

What we know about how such questioning happens is all too little and all too crude. In this questioning, we seem to belong completely to ourselves. Yet it is *this* questioning that pushes us into the open, provided that it itself, as a questioning, transforms itself (as does every genuine questioning), and casts a new space over and through everything. [...] Every being, in turn, has this Possible in it, in a different way in each case. (2000, 32)

What we learn here from Heidegger is that the task of questioning seems to take place in a moment, and that in this moment we *seem* to belong “completely to ourselves.” What’s missing from such a formulation, however, as Heidegger rightly notes, is the way that a being is opened up through the work of the question such that whatever it means for a being to “belong” to itself is immediately transformed in light of the question at hand, changing, we might add, everything for this being. When Heidegger says that a new space is cast through everything, I take him most seriously to mean that everything changes for a being through and in the act of questioning; the world becomes anew. Hence, when Heidegger says that we are pushed into the open in the moment in which we are given over to ourselves, this twofold stance of beings—or more specifically, human beings—demands that we raise ourselves to the tasks of the questions that claim us. And in this moment we must answer.

“Moment”: This word is one possible translation of *kairos*. Heidegger speaks of *kairos* as “time,” saying that “every mode of occurrence has, as such, its determinate (factual) chairological character [...], its determinate relation to time, i.e., to *its* time, and this relation lies in the sense of the nexus of actualization of facticity” (2001, 102).<sup>34</sup> The question, then, for Heidegger is “how, from a chairological point of view, life as such can and does announce itself (how it occurs) in apprehension” (2000, 102). The announcement of life itself, then, takes place in time, but in *its* time, occurring through the ways it apprehends us in such a way that we must respond or act. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, for Aristotle, one never acts *haplos*, but always in a given circumstance; likewise, we might add, no one ever “simply” gives a *logos*, but always also speaks in a certain respect. And for

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<sup>34</sup> In speaking of *kairos* as time, I don’t mean to suggest that Heidegger speaks here of merely chronological time or a passing of “now” points; such would most likely be the domain of *chronos*. Thus, as “time” for Heidegger, *kairos* is the most important sense of moment, for it speaks both to change and possibility.

Aristotle, the ability to act in a certain respect, within a particular circumstance, is what's important and is why, moreover, a normative ethics (so popular in contemporary scholarship) fails to attend to the tasks of human life or speak to the emergence of human life in these moments, as becomes evident in Bk. II of the *Ethics*.

According to Liddell and Scott, the word *kairos*, in addition to being translatable as moment or time, also bears a sense of measure, which, for Aristotle, is precisely that which makes a person answer or act in a moment. Interestingly, however, another translation of *kairos* speaks to the activity of weaving, and as a different noun, a *kairos* is “the row of thrums in the loom, to which the threads of the warp are attached” (1992, 392). As the residual threads left on a loom after the intended weaving has been completed, these threads are sometimes incorporated into the next weaving project and sometimes left along the plane of the loom, but in any or either event, they signify as a reminder the relation between the loom and the thing made. The *kairos*, then, in this sense, also speaks to the first translations of the word I offered above, for it can be understood as the circumstance of the action, or where the act comes to fulfillment; it functions, in this way, also as a measure in serving as the opportune moment.

In speaking of the tasks of an ethical discourse, Aristotle says that one needs acknowledge in advance that a *logos* pertaining to acting (*prattein*) must speak in outline (*typos*), and not precisely (*EN* 1104a). In this statement, Aristotle rearticulates the shortcomings of *epistemē* in an ethical discourse, and we can recall his many statements concerning how one must not look for the same sort of precision in all *logoi*, agreeing with how even the same thing must be spoken of in different respects given different kinds of inquiries. One must speak in outline about such matters, however, if one is to speak at all, because *logoi* must accord with the matter at hand. And so, Aristotle says, when actions are



involved, the measure of stability that pertains to, say, *epistemē*, is lost. But, as I said in the last chapter, what might emerge is a different kind of stability through the activity of *energeia*.

In fact, when speaking about *kairos*, Aristotle seems to have this measure in mind, for one never acts *haplos*, but always in a certain circumstance. He says,

And since the general discourse (or “*logos* of the whole,” *katholou logou*) is of this sort, still more does the *logos* that concerns particulars lack precision (*hō peri tōn kath’ hekasta logos ouk ekei takribes*), for it falls under no art (*technēn*) nor under any skill that has been handed down, but it is always [necessary] for those who are acting to look at the circumstances surrounding the occasion themselves (*dei d’ autous aei tous prattontas ta pros ton kairon skopein*), just as is the case also with the medical [art] or [the art of] steering a ship. (*EN* 1104a5-10)

Beginning this passage with how one must speak regarding actions, Aristotle demands that, when speaking particularly, one must always look to the circumstance, or *kairos*, of the action itself. Given that the *logos* must harmonize not only with the whole matter at hand but also with particulars, the kind of *logos* appropriate to acting must pay attention to the occasion as it arises within a given circumstance. In the same way that medicine must pay attention to the particular person being treated while harmonizing with the knowledge that comes with the medicinal arts, Aristotle here reminds us of the particularity of acting in a given circumstance. Or as he says in the *Metaphysics*, a doctor does not cure “human beings” *katholou*—except incidentally—but “Callias or Socrates or any of the others called by such a name, who happens to be a human being.” The reason for this is because “what is treated is particular” (*Meta.* 981a14-981a24). Thus, in acting particularly, a doctor treats a patient individually, always in relation to the whole (i.e., “human beings,” or the medicinal arts), but never as such. Rather, one must look to the circumstances surrounding the occasion of the *technē* (“productive knowledge,” or “art”) in order to have any chance of bringing

about health. In other words, a doctor without a patient makes no sense; a doctor never simply heals.

Likewise, the second example in this passage speaks to the knowledge of steering a ship. Prevalent in Aristotle's texts, the image of a sailor on a ship, being tossed hither and thither by storms, anchors Aristotle in thinking about *kairos*. In Bk. III of the *Ethics* concerning an *aporia* that Aristotle encounters when speaking of willing, unwilling, and nonwilling acts, Aristotle says that a sailor in a ship would never simply willingly throw goods overboard, but if the *kairos* presents itself, the sailor would do so for his own sake and for the sake of others. This sort of mixed action (mixed because the measure for such an action is determined in part by the circumstance that presents itself as much as it demands a response from those acting) is never "simply" done. Instead, "since at the time when they are done they are chosen, the end for which an action takes place is in accordance with its occasion" (*EN* 1110a12-13). In the case of the seaman, what is done *is* what is chosen; the choice is in the act of throwing things overboard. This thought leads Aristotle to conclude that "one has to say what is willing or unwilling at the time when someone does it; and one does things of this sort willingly, for the *archē kinēseos* of the parts that are instrumental in such actions is in oneself, and anything of which the source (*archē*) is in oneself is also up to oneself either to do or not" (*EN* 1110a13-17). Yet, what is "up to oneself" is never simply so; rather, without a circumstance that presents itself to a person, no action is possible. In being attentive to the *kairos*, then, the sailor's knowledge extends to acting through the collapse of choosing and doing. Such a collapse demands an uncanny foresight based on the sailor's *technē*, but the strangeness of the particular cases Aristotle speaks of here must not go unnoticed: Both the doctor and the sailor, in order to thrive in their being, require extraordinary circumstances in order to respond through their potential to be who they are.

Storms, like human bodies, are or can be unruly, and thus the occasion of a terrible storm or a very ill person demands that the sailor and the doctor answer the demands of the *kairos* that presents itself to them.

Still, Aristotle recognizes, “it is difficult sometimes to distinguish what sort of thing should be chosen in return for what [...] and still more difficult for those who have discerned it to abide by what they have chosen, since for the most part the things one anticipates (*prosdokia*) are painful” (*EN* 1110a30-35). As we shall see, a person who can discern things in this way is phronetic, a word that resonates not only with acting, but denotes a kind of mindfulness—if not remembrance—of what is entailed in acting and thinking (or in thinking *as* a kind of acting). Moreover, according to Aristotle, depending on the *kairos*, an act is willing or not: “[I]t is not easy to give an account of what sort of things one ought to choose in return for what sort of ends, since there are many differences among the particular circumstances” (*EN* 1110b6-8). Regarding the possible ends, we can speak to the sailor throwing things overboard in a storm in order to save himself and others on the ship; the ends in this case would be a triumph of an attempt to save human lives rather than greedily try to have it all by keeping precious goods.

Yet also in the passages detailed here Aristotle concerns himself not only with what’s at stake in acting, but in how one can speak about acting at all, if actions always take place in particular circumstances in and through which a person must respond. In beginning this section with Heidegger, I tried to explain what, really, opens itself to us in thinking about *kairos*, both as a measure for acting and as an opportunity. We can see in Aristotle’s thinking that *kairos* brings us outside of ourselves in a way that speaks to our potential in its actualization through acting, like a skilled sailor in a storm; it is a moment of declaration concerning the possibility of human life. But we can also see the ways in which *kairos*, in its

happening, allows *us* to happen as well. That is, in being a moment of crisis or decision, *kairos* signifies a time outside of time, which may resonate with the time of philosophy.

To this point, Heidegger says, “[p]hilosophy is essentially untimely because it is one of those few things whose fate it remains never to be able to find a direct resonance in their own time, and never to be permitted to find such a resonance” (2000, 9). This is because “philosophy either projects far beyond its own time or else binds its time back to this time’s earlier and *inceptive* past. Philosophizing always remains a kind of knowing that not only does not allow itself to be timely but, on the contrary, imposes its measure on the times” (2000, 9). If philosophy is to have a time or a place, it must do so in the sense of *kairos*, which stands outside and perhaps measures chronological time. Or it must resonate with place in the sense of out-of-place or strange, *atopia*, as discussed in earlier chapters regarding the “place” of *tychē* in the *Physics* as well as the life of Socrates. In either event, a real question, as noted at the beginning of this section, illuminates a moment that changes the whole of everything. Or, to call upon Heidegger one more time (and in anticipation of the next and final chapter), “[i]n the poetry of the poet and in the thinking of the thinker, there is always so much world-space to spare that each and every thing—a tree, a mountain, a house, the call of a bird—completely loses its indifference and familiarity” (2000, 28). This loss of familiarity, one could say, is at base a recognition of *kairos* as the circumstances in which a person can be said to flourish. It is the moment when we are pushed out into the open.

When the world becomes anew, when questions claim us in ways that we couldn’t foresee, we are reminded of *tychē* as the *kairos* that makes life possible for us from the very beginning. By “beginning,” I mean not only the ways in which we find ourselves already claimed by the tasks of living, as echoes in the wisdom of Silenus, but also in the ways in which we are always asked to begin again, even philosophically (as evidenced by Schelling’s

*Ages of the World*, in which the untimeliness of philosophy seeks to measure the time in which philosophy does, or might, take place). The picture we get from Aristotle on these matters, then, is not so much a measure of human life or acting that imposes itself on a given *kairos*, but instead relates to how life importantly shows itself in these moments. For this reason, *kairos* serves as the measure for acting as it does for thinking. However, to be able to respond to a *kairos*, as with *tychē*, a person must *already* know how to act, not in a programmatic or calculated kind of way, but in a way that's utterly receptive to the *kairoi* that present themselves, for different *kairoi* call for different responses.

In speaking of greatness of soul, *megalopsychia*, in Bk. IV of the *Ethics*, Aristotle, after discussing the commonly held opinions of the negative characteristics of this comportment to the world, says that one who is truly great-souled will bear *ta ekta* most beautifully, for the truly great-souled recognize that beautiful *erga* are honored by the gods (EN 1123b13-25). As a result, a great-souled person maintains, perhaps counter-intuitively, moderation in the face of *eutychia*, even though things that come by *eutychia* can contribute to the greatness of a person (EN 1124a22-25). Moreover, the great-souled person takes great risks (or has 'great possibility' or 'power,' *megalokindynos*), implying a certain kind of danger in disregarding his life, "on the ground that it is not on just any terms that life is worth living" (*apheidēs tou biou hōs ouk axion on pantōs zēn*, EN 1124b5-10); some situations call for risking one's life while others don't, for the situations that do depend on the worth of the exchange of the great-souled person's life for another good. The courage entailed in such a comportment signifies the most positive aspects of this kind of person, leading Aristotle to conclude that the great-souled person might be the best human being (EN 1123b26-29). The downfall of a great-souled person's life, though, is that he ultimately maintains a greatness of his own soul, and finds or declares himself worthy of that which comes to him. Recalling the

discussion of nemesis in the last chapter, we might say that the great-souled person's downfall is his radical hubris in thinking that he does, in fact, deserve the goods that come to him, and does so in a way, according to Aristotle, that thereby determines this person to think himself worthy of great things (*EN* 1123b14-16); this person thinks he deserves his dessert. And in so doing, this person may ultimately be stingy with life (something against which Socrates warns at the end of the *Phaedo* [116E]) on account of this person deciding in advance what should be risked in return for what. This person also ultimately overlooks and abandons the force of *kairos*, because everything is already decided in advance (e.g., what he owes to whom, what he deserves, how he should act); no true risk is involved for him, for this person is not receptive to transformation.

The difference between this kind of person, who bears *ta ekta* calmly on account of having decided in advance the worth of goods and how he stands in relation to such goods, and the person with *phronēsis* is clear: A *phronimos* is able to recognize the weight of circumstances in order to discern how to act or to think. Both thoughtful (or deliberative) and active, a *phronimos* recognizes *kairos* for what it is, i.e., an opportune moment in which transformation is possible and in which, moreover, a radical openness allows for life to declare itself as well. According to Aristotle, *phronēsis* has to do with particulars, which become known by experience, but this experience requires a length of time (and maybe a complete life), for experience comes about (*ginetai*) through time (*chronou poiei ten empeirian*, *EN* 1142a12-15). Note here that time as *chronos* is not the deciding factor for Aristotle, but is instead is the bare skeleton onto which life is given or comes about. Among the many things that Aristotle says we must consider in a discussion of *phronēsis*, then, is this: “why it is that a child might become a mathematician, but not wise [*sophos*] or knowledgeable about nature [*physikos*]. Is it not because things of the one sort come from

abstraction [literally, ‘taking away from,’ or ‘separable,’ perhaps from a person, *aphaireseōs*], while the sources [*archai*] of things of the other sort come from experience? The young are not convinced of the latter, but talk about them, but what the former things are is not unclear [*adēlon*]” (*EN* 1142a15-20). That is, in separating oneself from a discussion (or even dialogue), no real risk is involved, for one makes an inquiry into that which can’t be otherwise; a person has no stake in a discussion or inquiry, for all things are either already clear or promise clarity in the way that mathematics demands solutions. Given that a person and life itself *can* be otherwise, however, *phronēsis*—curiously in speaking to the task of making an inquiry into nature, which, as we saw concerning contemporary scholarship on the *Physics*, supposedly pertains to that which can’t be otherwise—ultimately demands a fundamental recognition of the contingency of life, *kairos*, and *tychē*.

As I said earlier, *kairos* serves as a measure that speaks to an opportune moment in which a person is at risk. In so doing, it pertains also to *tychē*, for as I’ve said throughout this dissertation, *tychē* speaks to the circumstances in which a person happens to find herself. In this sense, *phronēsis* seems to require an uncanny ability to know the measure in advance of a circumstance; yet Aristotle, in articulating and rearticulating the particularity of *kairos*, might resist such an uncanny knowledge, were it not for *proairēsis* (choice), which demands a kind of grasping in advance (if we emphasize the *pro-* character of the word, which we can hear in the name “Prometheus” [literally, “foresight”]). If the thing chosen is the thing done, then what is done is also in a certain way chosen in advance, and yet what I’ve maintained throughout this discussion is the very real ways in which a person is at risk in a multitude of activities, from making an inquiry into nature to acting in one’s life. In fact, what’s startling about the last passage just discussed from Aristotle is the way in which he seems to point precisely at how *physis* can never stand as an object for a subject; such a demeanor is

reserved for the youth who are interested in mathematics (and also students of Anaxagoras?), without themselves having a stake in its matter, or in looking for the best *logos*. In other words, an inauthentic relationship to oneself emerges in making an inquiry removed from one's place, for a recognition of contingency and variability is given over to that which can't be otherwise, and thereby denies one's own life in the process.

In thinking of Socrates' second sailing and what I have offered as Aristotle's turn to the *logos* throughout this manuscript, or in thinking *aitia* and *logos* together as that which pertains to human beings in giving an account of nature as that which appears to us in our explanations (remembering that *tychē* is *precisely* that which appears to us in an inquiry into nature), then we can see how *tychē* and *kairos* weave together in how they open human life in order for it to shine through. Again we can note the untimeliness of such thinking: One must have some sort of primordial insight to be able to discern how to act in a given *kairos*, or in light of *tychē*, and one must choose such actions in advance. Bounded between an "already" and a "not-yet": Such is the uncanny time for philosophizing, a time at which, as Emerson says, all things are at risk.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In "Circles," Emerson says, "Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk" (2001, 177). Interestingly, Emerson speaks to many concerns laid out in this chapter concerning the importance of risk and receptivity, particularly regarding the force of circumstances. While outside the scope of this discussion, Emerson's essay "Fate" grapples with many of the same issues here, but considered from the opposite perspective, i.e., the notion of fate as limitation, and circumstance as something to be tarried with, if not overcome. Speaking of "tyrannical Circumstance" (2001, 265), Emerson says, "[t]he Circumstance is Nature. Nature is, what you may do. There is much you may not. We have two things,--the circumstance, and the life. Once we thought, positive power was all. Now we learn, that negative power, or circumstance, is half. Nature is the tyrannous circumstance, the thick skull, the sheathed snake, the ponderous, rock-like jaw [...] The book of Nature is the book of Fate" (2001, 266). For Emerson in this essay, the human struggle is to understand and fight against "whatever limits us," which is what we call Fate (2001, 268), knowing that sheer power cannot overcome the tyrannical circumstances of nature. This struggle, however, is creative and noble: "If the Universe have these savage accidents [human beings], our atoms are as savage in resistance" (2001, 269). Recognizing the impetus of nature, then, we also fight against that which limits us, trying to carve our own space and lives. In this way, the "circumstance" never truly stands oppressively over and against a person; rather, "[t]he secret of the world is, the tie between person and event. Person makes event, and event person" (2001, 274). Here Emerson explicitly touches base with Aristotle, concerning *kairos* and risk: There is no *kairos haplos*;



Interestingly, in his discussion of *phronēsis*, Aristotle speaks to those who may be able to demonstrate the attributes of *phronēsis* (and also of *sophia*)<sup>36</sup> in their lives as having the capacity to discern correctly a given horizon (*horōsin orthōs*), having been sharpened by experience (*EN* 1143b13-14). These people, who seem to have uncanny insight by nature, are said to be *hēlikia*: flowering in life.<sup>37</sup> A more fundamental understanding of the root of this word, however, returns us to *hēlios*, or the sun, as an extraordinary greatness that makes things visible. When we encounter these sun-like people, Aristotle says, we ought to pay attention to what they say to us, whether they demonstrate through knowledge to others the things they think, or whether they make undemonstrated statements, for in either case, we might surmise, they shed light on something beautiful and important (*EN* 1143b11-15). Thus, Aristotle tells us, if we are receptive, we witness others who are able to discern and deliberate in such a way that things are made visible not only for this person, but for others as well; the sun, too, requires its shadows.

Because of this, according to Aristotle, *phronēsis*, while it concerns things that are just, beautiful, and good for a human being, “we are no more able to perform [or “make,”

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rather, always in a certain way, to a certain person, and in a certain time. The co-constitutive motion between a person and circumstance culminates in letting something shine through that relationship, and examining what one finds. For this reason, according to Emerson, “[t]he soul contains the event that shall befall it, for the event is only the actualization of its thoughts; [...] The event is the print of your form” (275). This statement does not mean that one need only think of a situation and it will happen, but the foresight involved here returns us to the way in which Heidegger speaks of already being claimed in ways that are not solely up to us such that something can happen in a *kairos* in the first place.

<sup>36</sup> This particular discussion of *phronēsis* occurs in a larger discussion of *nous* (“intellect”), wherein both *sophia* and *phronēsis* pertain to *nous*, albeit in different ways. In Aristotle’s concluding discussion at this section, before making a dramatic turn in his discussion that pertains particularly to the tasks of *logoi* in speaking about these matters in an attempt to “become good,” Aristotle describes the relationship between *phronēsis* and *sophia* standing together in a way that pertains to *tychē* (τί μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ φρόνησις καὶ σοφία, καὶ περὶ τίνα ἑκατέρα τυγχάνει); they come together by *tychē*, perhaps in one life (*EN* 1143b16-17).

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle says, “A trace or sign of this is that these people [the flowering] seem to come about by nature” (σημεῖον δ’ ὅτι καὶ ταῖς ἡλικίαις οἰόμεθα ἀκολουθεῖν καὶ ἦδε ἡ ἡλικία νοῦν ἔχει καὶ γνώμην ὡς τῆς φύσεως αἰτίας οὐσης, *EN* 1143b8-10).

*poiein*] these actions by knowing about them, if indeed *hai arêtai* are *hexeis* [active conditions]” (*EN* 1143b20-26). Knowledge—or as Aristotle says here, the being of the *logos* (*EN* 1143b24)—is insufficient for truly instructing another what to do, if a person isn’t already comported in such a way as to be claimed by the tasks of acting or thinking, open in advance, as it were, for transformation and cultivation to be possible, even in light of the *logos*; i.e., if one doesn’t know how to listen, then a *logos* falls on deaf ears. Or as Aristotle says a few pages later, “*arête* makes [*poieî*] the choice be set straight [*proairesin orthên*], but the being done [or ‘acting,’ *prattesthai*] of everything that is naturally [*pephukê*] for the sake of that choice results not from *arête* but from some other power [or ‘capacity,’ ‘potential,’ *dynamēōs*]” (*EN* 1144a21-24). If we recall chapter three of this dissertation wherein I intimated that *arête* has its end in another, then we can note the way in which choice in this passage has its end (or beginning) in *arête*. But, the “being done” of everything also resonates both with *physis* and *dynamis*, nature and “potential,” and so we come full circle in this section: Might the real task at hand, from Aristotle’s thinking, demand that we are called to the force of our own possibility in a way that already claims us through the questions we encounter? If so, then we can hear how *kairos* in the way I’ve laid it out here might be another way of speaking of *tychê*, containing within it a certain kind of measure (i.e., the radical contingency of human life combined with the foreboding knowledge that this life could, in fact, be otherwise, or not be at all).<sup>38</sup> *Tychê* can also serve as a reminder that, when we’re fortunate to encounter the *kairos* of our life as it shines through another, as is the case with those who are *hēlikia*, we are reminded of what, really, appears to us, which, as we saw Heidegger say, is nothing short of life itself.

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, the Roman goddess Fortuna (from *tychê*) is also often called “Occasio” (“Occasion”), a Latin translation of the Greek *kairos*.

While *kairos*, as I've said, means not only the opportune moment but also signifies thread left on a loom, either to be woven into the next garment or abandoned after a garment is completed and always as a measure of what is being done, I now have a formidable task in front of me, which is to speak to the "other power" mentioned in the last passage from Aristotle, weaving it into what I've laid out here. If Heidegger is right and philosophy is always untimely, then speaking of this *dynamis* involves a great risk indeed, for in the next section we will see how seriously Aristotle takes the task of the possibility of human beings becoming good at all or in the first place; this possibility belongs to those who are truly fortunate (*alēthōs eutuxesin*). We will see, then, how Aristotle links *theōs* to *physis* at the end of the *Ethics* concerning what it means to be fortunate in this way. I will also, though all too briefly, explicitly return to Socrates, who has (you might have been able to discern) functioned as a phantom limb thus far throughout this manuscript, in order to organize our thoughts concerning what it means to be truly fortunate in the way that Socrates surely is.

## **Section II** **Tychē, Physis, and the Possibility of Becoming Good**

According to Werner Jaeger, after leaving Athens and heading to Asia Minor after Plato's death in 348 B.C., Aristotle dedicated an altar-elegy to Eudemus that speaks of Socrates, or Plato:

Coming to the famous plain of Cecropia  
He piously set up an altar of holy Friendship  
For the man [Plato? Socrates?] whom it is not lawful for bad men even to praise,  
Who alone or first of mortals clearly revealed,  
By his own life and by the methods of his words,  
That a man becomes good and happy at the same time.  
Now no one can ever attain to these things again. (1962, 107)

In speaking of Socrates (or Plato) here, we are reminded of those who are *hēlikia*, shedding light not only by virtue of the method of their *logoi* (which some people are unable to hear),

but also because of the lives that they lead. Since Aristotle urges us to pay attention to these people when they speak or when we witness their lives, we will return in the end to Socrates in the *Phaedo*, a dialogue that happens, as I've said, with the aid of *tychē*. In so doing, I will take up Socratic courage when facing death and will explain how it is that *tychē* requires the courage to engage in a beautiful life.

First, however, we must begin with a concluding passage from the very end of the *Ethics*, with which I began this dissertation. Arguably the most aporetic phrase in the entirety of the *Ethics*, we see Aristotle lay out here precisely how difficult it is to “become good,” and how it is that Aristotle calls us back to *physis* in considering what is possible for human life:

[S]ome people think one becomes good [γίνεσθαι δ' ἀγαθούς οἴονται] by nature [φύσει], others think it is by habit [ἔθει], and still others think it is by teaching [διδασχῆ]. As for what comes from nature, it is clear that it is not up to us that it is present [Τὸ μὲν οὖν τῆς φύσεως δέλον ὡς οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει], but by some divine explanation [διὰ τινος θείας αἰτίας] it belongs to [or ‘governs’] those who are truly fortunate [τοῖς ὡς ἀληθῶς εὐτυχέσιν ὑπάρχει]. (*EN* 1179b20-23)

In this passage Aristotle makes a return to the very beginning of the *Ethics*, in which he says that “[e]very art and every inquiry [*methodos*], and likewise every action [*praxis*] and choice [*proairēsis*], seems to aim at some good [*agathou*],” and for this reason, “it has been beautifully [*kalōs*] said that the good is that at which all things aim” (*EN* 1094a1-3). If the good is that at which all things aim, then it seems that, by the end of the text, we should hit the target; i.e., we should gain clarity regarding what this “good” is, how it comes about, and how a person might be able to become good. Yet, by emphasizing overlooked passages of the *Ethics*, we have begun to see how a programmatic regulation of ethical development is not as tidy as one might think, for even here—at the end of the text—Aristotle returns us again to the task of becoming good (that at which all things aim), noting that endoxic

statements concerning becoming good by nature, habit, or teaching fail in some way to miss the mark concerning human nature.

The difficulty of this passage lies not only in how these commonly held opinions fail to speak to the whole of ethical life, but moreover speaks to the task at hand in a consideration of the relationship between *physis* and *tychē*. Those who are truly fortunate, Aristotle says, are so by nature in a way that is not up to them. However, as we saw in the last chapter and in the first section of this one, such an implication does not demand a surrendering of oneself to powerful whims beyond one's control; rather, the opposite holds true: In a recognition of *tychē* as that which comes to us, we must respond. The reciprocal interplay between the two threads demands, at base, a recognition of the contingency of human life, knowing that it can always be otherwise or not be at all. Thus, the emphasis on that which comes to us (by *tychē*, *ta ekta*, *theos*, or that which is *kata symbebēkos*) never culminates in a mere "having" of goods, virtue, or life; rather, it is a matter of recognizing how life itself comes to be present in the *energeia* of human life. As I noted in the last chapter, *energeia* speaks to a continuous motion or movement of life, and thus is the work of a human life itself. Thus, when Aristotle speaks of *arête* (as I also discussed in that chapter), insofar as the *telos* of *arête* points beyond a solitary individual, this person is returned to herself in the form of a life at work.

While this longer passage from the *Ethics* returns us explicitly to an inquiry into *physis* so that we can understand its relationship to *tychē* concerning the human good, we must note that this passage is not the only one in the *Ethics* that speaks explicitly to the concerns laid out here. In addition to the passages discussed in the last chapter and those concerning the force of *kairos* in the *Ethics*, let us also consider the following from Bk. III of

the text, which appears within the discussion of willing and unwilling actions, and importantly just precedes the beginning of Aristotle's sustained discussion of courage:

But the targeting of the end [*tou telous*] is not self-chosen [*authairetos*]; instead one needs to have by nature [*phunai*, from *phuo-*, growth, stature] something like vision [*opsin*], by which to discern beautifully [*krinei kalōs*] and choose what is truly good [*alethēian agathon airesetai*]; this person is good by nature [or is ‘{a} good nature,’ *euphuēs*], and is naturally beautiful [*kalōs pephuken*], for with respect to what is greatest and most beautiful [*to gar megiston kai kalliston*], and which is impossible to get or to learn [*mathein*] from anyone else, but which one will have in such a condition [*hexei*] by nature—to be well [*eu*] and beautiful [*kalōs*] in this respect would be the complete and true [end] of nature [*hē teleīa kai alēthinē an eiē euphuīa*]. (EN 1114b7-1114b14)

Some translators render the first portion of this passage to read that a person needs to be born with “moral vision” in order to “constitute a good disposition in the full and true meaning of the term” (Rackham 1999, 151); others overlook the passage altogether in order to maintain the importance of rational deliberation in human life (cf. Joachim 1985, 57-58, 107-111). If we follow the first suggestion and make vision a moral compass, however, then this sight becomes a matter of impossible correctness, given what I’ve laid out this far concerning particular circumstances in which life shows itself; moral vision in this way seeks to assert itself over and through all possible situations, paying little attention to what is beautiful, or *kalōs*. The thrice repetition of the word *kalōs* here, however, draws our attention elsewhere, back to the relationship between *physis* and *tychē* as it arises in the previous passage. For, while it is tempting to posit a moral vision that contains within it a measure of correctness, we must wonder what it is that one sees with such eyes, for if this sight is as rare as Aristotle says, then what must be open to the moral compass is nothing but the failure of those who lack it. This person, then, would be blessed on account of being able to see “correctly,” but a result of which might call us back to Socrates’ experience with Anaxagoras, which brought about blindness.

A better way to consider vision (*opsis*) in this passage is, I think, to situate it as Aristotle does, which is as the most privileged sense (*Meta.* 980a22-29). As sight makes visible many differences, it has a certain *dynamis*, which is the power that accompanies *aisthēsis* (“sensation,” or “perception”). But what is the *dynamis* of *aisthēsis*, such that Aristotle speaks of vision here in a way that links *physis* to a *telos* of human life, as a gift that comes without one’s asking?

Heidegger speaks of the *dynamis* of *aisthēsis* as being “in relation to something as a power to do something” (1995, 168). It is not the production of something, as, we might say, a moral compass seeks to produce the right measure of acting; rather, “[t]he *ergon* of *aisthēsis* [...] is *alētheia*—the openness of beings, and in a special manner the perceptibility of things” (1995, 168). That is, *aisthēsis*, which includes vision, *is* a kind of coming to be at work, and in so being, pertains to the ability to discern beings as they appear to us. Yet, this power is not mere force in the sense of doing something; rather, it is the power to be utterly affected by what appears. In this way, to see is fundamentally receptive. Insofar as *aisthēsis* is a *dynamis*, it is “a relationship of that which opens to that which can take part in such openness, that is, to beings in their particular manner of being, or to their being in general” (1995, 168). *Aisthēsis*, as a *dynamis*, then, brings to our attention what is possible to be seen. And this indeed is powerful, for it suggests more than a mere capacity (the usual translation of *dynamis*) as something not-yet-done, but forces us out of ourselves and into a circumstance, the *kairos* of beings. Thus when Aristotle says that human beings have *dynamai* both for *aisthesis* and *dianoia* (*EN* 1170a15-16), the ways in which these powers show themselves is precisely in *energeia*, i.e., in their being at work in a life.

This power—described here as sight—promises to attend to beauty in such a forceful way that it seems to come from nature itself. For who could ever muster on her own the

equipment for such a comportment, one that bears witness (I'm thinking of *theoria* here, as fundamentally a "witnessing") to beauty, or life, itself? Such sight is impossible to learn from anyone, Aristotle says, but we may add an addendum: The reason that such vision can't come from, say, a teacher is because it simply can't be taught.<sup>39</sup> Unless one is already disposed in a way that projects (literally, "throws forward") one into the open, flinging, as Whitman says, the gossamer threads of one's life so that they may catch somewhere; unless one immediately loves Dante, as T.S. Eliot says one must, else the poem will never be beautiful to its reader; unless one is *already claimed*, by a question or a task—Unless these kinds of conditions hold, all will be withdrawn and withheld, oneself from oneself, and oneself from the world.

What is at issue here is, admittedly, dark and troubling, but also promises great joy. The odds are slim, Aristotle seems to be saying, for the *dynamis* of sight to come about, for it seems to happen by nature in such a way that we must count ourselves most fortunate, having then a good nature (*euphuein*), or a beautiful life. But what sort of nature—or nature in what sense—places the burden of sight on a human being, however rare, knowing that most people fail to have it? Socrates asks Glaucon in the *Republic* if he can see himself in the image of the cave; Glaucon responds that the image is strange, as are the prisoners in the cave. Yet, Socrates reminds him, these prisoners are like us; Socrates sees himself, and human life, in the image (*Rep.* 514A-515A).

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<sup>39</sup> One need only think of Socrates' professions in the *Apology* that he is not a teacher, a point that speaks to Socrates' relationship to the gods, his admission of ignorance, and the ways in which philosophy is not a *technē*, or a subject matter to be learned. For an interesting article concerning Socratic insights in relation to a possible "indirect ethical inspiration" that Socrates inhabits and gains through his interlocutors, see Michael Forster's "Socrates' Profession of Ignorance" (2007). In this essay Forster traces the primary source of Socrates' inspiration to Apollo, but this inspiration, on his reading, only comes to be in and through Socrates' relationship to others, not as a teacher to a student, but insofar as Socrates himself draws insight from an interlocutor, rather than primarily communicating, or instructing, his interlocutors in philosophical matters.



“For when no one else can understand,” Gadamer says, “it seems that the philosopher is called for” (1998, 9). If this is true, then we can recall Aristotle who, in a discussion of friendship in Bk. IX of the *Ethics*, says, “those who give freely to one another for their own sake are free of complaints (for friendship in accord with *arête* is of this sort), and one ought to make a return in accord with one’s choice (since this is characteristic of a friend as well as *arête*)” (EN 1164a33-1164b2). This free giving, or generosity, never hinges on what a person thinks she herself deserves, but in her willingness to freely give what is possible to a friend. In the next sentence, Aristotle intensifies the importance of this generosity, turning from friendship to philosophy: “[I]t seems to be this way too with those who have shared in philosophy, for its worth is not measured in money and no honor could be of equal weight with it, but perhaps it is enough, as with gods and one’s parents, to give what is possible” (EN 1164b3-7; emphasis mine). In other words, what one receives—be it from the gods, one’s parents, friendship, or philosophy—can never be fully repaid or returned, for the gifts are too large. Thus we must give what is possible, but what is possible is not a matter of, say, tithing accordingly; rather, as we shall see more fully in the next chapter, what’s possible is persuasive, and perhaps most persuasive of all. Thus, in rendering *dynamis* as possibility and also as force, we might say that giving what is possible is what one can do in a certain manner of being at work, and the ways that this possibility culminates in forcing one into the open demands that we must give ourselves fully to another, without asking for our “just desserts” in return.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Aristotle repeats this idea of giving what is possible throughout the end of the *Ethics*. For example, he also says, “[F]riendship seeks after what is possible, not what is deserved” (*to dynaton gar hē philia epizēteī, ou to kat’ axian*, EN 1163b16). As the greatest of external goods, *ta ekta* (EN 1169b10), friends are necessary for a flourishing life. Countering those who would say that the self-sufficient and blessed don’t need friends, Aristotle here reminds us that a complete life is one that suffices not for oneself alone, but requires others in order to flourish; we come to be in and through our relations to others. For this

We see the difference between those who give themselves freely and those who feel slighted on account of what they think they deserve most clearly at the end of the *Phaedo*, just before Socrates dies. While Socrates bathes himself, Phaedo narrates that he and the others examined the preceding *logos* as well as going through their own misfortune (*atychnōs*), noting how great their misfortune is at the time of Socrates' death. Phaedo says, "we simply believed that we'd spend the rest of our life just like orphans robbed of their father" (*Phae.* 116A). For those present, the death of Socrates is a great misfortune, one that is utterly personal in a way that speaks not only to the irreplaceability of Socrates, but also to how the fourteen present at his death stand in relation to their world. Seeing his death as a great misfortune, they speak of it relationally to their particular fate after his death, for in likening themselves to soon-to-be orphans, Socrates is limited to his relationship with them as a father becomes a role for his children. A child, one might say, sees her father as serving no other role than that of a parent; she cannot see the other ways that he engages in the world, for everything hinges on his appearance to her. In this way, when those present bemoan their misfortune, they see Socrates as he is to them, overlooking other significant ways in which Socrates engages the world.

The contrast between Socrates at this point in the *Phaedo* and his comrades could not be clearer. When Socrates drinks the *pharmakon*, he says, "but I suppose I am allowed to, and indeed should, pray to the gods that my emigration from here to there may come to be a fortunate one" (*euthychē genesthai, Phae.* 117C). Phaedo, upon hearing these words and witnessing Socrates' actions, covers his face and cries. "[F]or it was not him I bewailed, no, but my own fortune [*alla tēn emautou tuxēn*]...to be robbed of such a man for a comrade!"

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reason, no person alone is self-sufficient, but must thrive with others, emerging in the process to speak to what's possible. In this way, friendship is surely powerful.

(*Phaed.* 117C). Socrates speaks of good fortune in whatever waits for him; Phaedo speaks of his misfortune in himself being robbed of Socrates as he stands in relation to him. Phaedo does know the difference between the two: Here's a man about to die, and Phaedo thinks of himself, what it is that he (and others) will miss, i.e., their relationship to Socrates. But while on one hand, Phaedo speaks of the particularity of Socrates (for such a loss is indeed great), on the other hand, Phaedo does so in relation to himself, and what he'll be missing; he does not, in this way, recognize Socrates as Socrates in the way that a child might not recognize her father as more than the role that he plays in her life.

What those present fail to have, at least in the way that Socrates has it, is courage (*andrēa*), both regarding a particular *kairos* (especially the circumstances of one's death) and *tychē*. Courage is not a kind of fearlessness; rather, it is the ability to take up and engage the circumstances that present themselves to a person, even if this means giving up the hope of safety (*EN* 1115b) or facing one's death. A courageous person, Aristotle says, will "be frightened" but will endure certain things "in the way one ought and keeping them in proportion, for the sake of the beautiful, since this is the end that belongs to *arête*" (*EN* 1115b9-15). Implicit in this statement is the way in which courage points beyond an individual toward something beautiful, and thus what it means to be courageous means to act in such a way that this end is kept in view. Remember too that *arête* is never simply something that one has, but instead finds its end in another, beauty (*kalos*). Thus, courage demands projecting oneself toward what's beautiful in a given circumstance. As a result, Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Ethics*, "something beautiful shines through" those who truly engage *tychē* and the *kairoi* of life (*EN* 1100b31-1101a12).

Surely we can say that Socrates faces his death courageously and in distinction from those who face his death with him, but to get back to the matter at hand, i.e., *tychē*, what's

perhaps most odd about the circumstances of Socrates' death insofar as the dialogue of the *Phaedo* takes place is the explanation that Phaedo gives for Socrates' extended stay in prison in the first place: A bit of *tychē* comes to Socrates, occasioning the dialogue. As Phaedo explains to Echechrates, before recollecting what happens in the prison, it just so happened that the return of a ship from Delos, a trip that commemorates Theseus' triumphs, was delayed by chance (*tychōsin, Phae.* 58B). No execution can take place while the ship is on its journey; so the ship's return is necessary for Socrates' death to happen. Yet Phaedo rearticulates the force of *tychē* as the circumstance that allows for Socrates' prison presence as happening as a matter of *tychē*, for the day before Socrates' trial the priest of Apollo chanced to crown the prow of the vessel, setting it off on its journey (*Phae.* 58B-58C). Thus, at the beginning of the dialogue, the *logos* that Phaedo gives to explain why Socrates spends so much time in prison after his trial is a thrice repetition of *tychē* as the circumstance that affords Socrates his time, as it affords us the occasion of the dialogue itself. Were the ship not to be kept at bay, we might surmise, the most beautiful dialogue in the history of philosophy would not have taken place; were the circumstances otherwise, we would not be called to attend to the occasion of Socrates' death and his philosophical thought in the ways that we are. *Tychē*, in this instance, makes possible the rest of the dialogue, for in saying that it comes to Socrates' aid, we can see how it not only helps Socrates by extending his stay and occasioning the dialogue, but also how it makes the dialogue possible for us, its readers. And in saying that a bit of *tychē* helps Socrates, we are reminded of *ta ekta* as that which comes to us without our request in a way that's necessary for human flourishing. These circumstances are painful to those who are present with Socrates in the prison; however, Socrates, we might say, is grateful for the time that he has for philosophizing, even in prison.

In what is arguably the most beautiful passage of the *Ethics*, Aristotle says,

[D]eath and injuries will be painful to the courageous person, who will undergo them unwillingly, but will endure them because it is a beautiful thing, and not to do so would be a shameful thing. And to the extent that one is most excellent [*mallon tēn aretēn*] and flourishes [*eudaimonesteros*], the more will one be pained at death, for to such a person living is most worthwhile, and this person will be deprived of the greatest goods [*megistōn agathōn*], and this is painful. (*EN* 1117b7-14)<sup>41</sup>

Of all of the things to say about this striking passage, most notable for our purposes, perhaps, is the way in which Aristotle points to a courageous life having its end in something other than a stingy disposition toward one's life; the *telos* of courage, as a kind of excellence, is beauty. Beauty is that for the sake of which a courageous person faces death, though doing so is most painful to the courageous person, who knows precisely what a flourishing life looks like. But importantly, the courageous person sees himself not like Phaedo or Crito—or, god forbid, Apollodorus, whose wailing pervades Socrates' final dialogue—but instead, in realizing the circumstances that makes life possible in the first place, realizes his true good fortune in having life as a gift. The courageous person, one might say, is thus *implicated* in the movement of life's excess in such a way that this person recognizes how life itself does not belong to him any more than *arête* is a mere having of virtue as something that belongs to him; rather, the *dynamis* of this person's life, in coming to him from another, is put at work in the *energeia* of this life, which opens a space for life to show itself to this person. Hence Aristotle's emphasis on vision as a way of witnessing beings; hence Socrates' courage when facing death; hence a fundamental recognition of the radical contingencies of life such that a

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<sup>41</sup> The sentiment expressed here, albeit in a different way, is echoed by Clara in Schelling's *Clara*: "After a while of quiet contemplation, Clara said: 'Where does that deep devotion to the Earth come from, independent of all enjoyment we call earthly happiness and consisting of a full appreciation of the invalidity of this life? Why, if our heart is indeed numb to everything external, and considers it with pleasure only as a sign and picture of our inner being, why, even if we are firmly convinced that the other world far exceeds the present one in every way, is there nevertheless the sense that it's hard to part from this Earth, and if we don't have a secret horror of this parting for ourselves, then we have it for others?'" (2002, 76)

fortunate person recognizes the ways in which life might be otherwise, or not be at all; hence Aristotle's insistence on beauty as that toward which *arête* aims, something that exceeds the will of a solitary individual; hence the force of *tychē* and *kairos* as what shows us the possibilities of life. Hence, as Emerson says in "The Over-Soul," a human being is "a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence" (2001, 163).

Hence we are in danger of losing the question that orients this chapter, for we can see the risks involved in gathering together the threads of it, for the relationship between *tychē* and *physis* as cryptically articulated by Aristotle at the end of the *Ethics* demands a certain attunement to the radical contingency of a human life, knowing that it can always be otherwise. But if we're attentive, then we may see how something is beginning to recommend itself to us regarding this relationship: We are beginning to understand the question at hand, i.e., the emergence of human life as it pertains to *tychē* when thinking of *physis* insofar as articulating this relationship demands a courageous comportment in and to the world, or toward beings. Neither natural in the sense of a rock nor divine in the ways of the gods, the emergence of human life tugs at both ends, pointing beyond itself in the moment in which we are returned to ourselves. For this reason, *epistemē* offers an insufficient account of human life, for in only speaking to what is, it can't truly speak of *physis*, which demands an apprehension of beings not in stasis, but in movement and all that it entails, from *dynamis* to *energeia*. Thus, when speaking of *tychē*, we are already called to attention in how things emerge for us in a way that is not removed from an inquiry into nature, but offers a place to begin. It is, in short, the beginning of wonder, which (as I noted in chapter two) is the proper element of *tychē*. Or, as Heidegger says in his "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'"

Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being [the origin of which remains unknown, we might concur with Emerson], experiences the wonder of all wonders: *that beings are*. The being that is thus called in its essence into the truth of being is for this reason always attuned in an essential manner. The lucid courage for essential anxiety assures us the enigmatic possibility of experiencing being. For close by essential anxiety as the horror of the abyss dwells awe. Awe clears and cherishes that locality of the human essence within which humans remain at home in that which endures. (1998, 234)

Yet, we might add, such a home never simply *is* more than it becomes the place where human life resides, in its very movement. That which endures, if we can recall the stability of a continuous life emergent through *energeia*, is that which constantly changes. In attending to this movement, then—one in which it remains an open possibility for us to gaze on beings themselves, as the perpetual unfolding of *physis*—we stand in wonder. Of course, such is also the movement of philosophy, from its beginnings to its end as a deeper appreciation of its origins.

The thoughts above are neither meant to be fancy nor unfairly unclear. In case they are, however, let me rearticulate the heart of the relationship between *tychē* and *physis*, particularly at the end of the *Ethics*, as follows: *Tychē* pertains to that which can be otherwise, and in so doing, pertains to human life. As we saw in the *Physics*, *tychē* arises as a matter for philosophical thought within a discussion of *physis* because *tychē* is one way in which things appear *to us*. Insofar as *tychē* speaks to what's possible in human life, these things must pertain to thinking and choice—two human characteristics that speak to actions and occasions about things that can be otherwise. *Physis*, then, allows for this opening to appear in such a way that human life emerges *from* a discussion of nature (or beings, as Heidegger say) such that something can appear to us in its (and our) emergence. One way in which *tychē* is spoken of by Aristotle is in relation to that which is *kata symbebēkos*, which

means precisely that—relationality. Thus we can see how human life is utterly relational, and for these reasons, can never take *physis* as a mere object for a subject, for it is what both precedes and propels our inquiry. Thus, in an inquiry into nature we might have the *dynamis* to see *physis* in movement, not stasis.

However, to get to the emergence of human life in an ethical inquiry it was necessary to see how Aristotle thinks that we *already* find ourselves situated *in* such an inquiry. Thus the discussion of the natural road is a matter of leading and being led as our inquiry deepened. Such an investigation breaks open traditional conceptions of the goals of Aristotle's inquiry, which purport to be a kind of *epistemē* of the truth of "nature" in an overarching teleological scheme. However, in being attentive to the ways in which Aristotle might have in mind *aitia* as a sense of *logos*, we saw how human life must attend to what is possible for it regarding such an inquiry, and for these reasons we're reminded to look for the best *logos* in a given situation, asking if Aristotle, like Socrates, makes a second sailing in an inquiry into nature. Given that, as I've said, Aristotle insists that we move from that which is clear to us to that which is clear to itself, we have also seen precisely how difficult it is to determine what, really, is clear in an inquiry into nature, as we emerge from it in a way that demands our attention. Thus, when we considered the relationship between *tychē* and *automaton* in *Phys.* II, I noted the intense language of strangeness and wonder that pervades this section, for given how one must offer the best *logos* of something, then we must pay attention to how people speak of the matter at hand. For this reason, when Aristotle says that *tychē* points to a certain way that things appear to us, we should take him seriously as he does his predecessors, for their *logoi* give him pause, arresting him in his thought. Thus we saw *tychē* emerge for Aristotle as that which can be otherwise, particularly regarding human affairs. However, given that human beings are never simply removed from *physis*, even if



*physis* becomes a matter for our inquiry, we must then also say that *tychē* relates to *physis* in important ways, perhaps crystallizing in the way we find ourselves in an inquiry into nature insofar as *tychē* pertains to that which appears to us. Thus we have the first concrete clue from the *Physics*: *Tychē* belongs to an inquiry into nature, at least insofar as human life emerges from such an inquiry and is never divorced from it.

Yet, in order to examine what *tychē* is (particularly given its fundamental obscurity and shape-shifting nature), I turned to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Doing so opened the door for an inquiry into *physis* in another sense, i.e., the emergence of human life within nature to something particular to it. We were put onto this idea by the seemingly strange emergence of thinking and choice in the *Physics*, for why should an inquiry into nature relate to these two things? They should—and do—precisely because these characteristics help define human life in a way that already orients us in our inquiries; we are thoughtful beings (hopefully) as much as we deliberate and choose. But, in thinking as in choice things can always be otherwise; no possible *epistemē* could encapsulate the truth of human action and life. Thus we turned to what a *logos* of particularity might look like, noting that such a *logos* must speak in outline. Yet, since the goal of the *Ethics*, as Aristotle says, is to discuss the matters in the text such that we *might* be able to “become good,” speak we must, even if our *logos* carries within it the possibility of deception.

Thus we saw that the *Ethics* is an attempt to grapple with the radical contingency of human life. Speaking of such a matter refuses clarity, for how might one speak of things that can be otherwise, or not be at all? To assume clarity at base is to assume the validity and veracity of *epistemē* as a blueprint for the truth of human life, a clarity that we, as praxical beings, must resist. And yet all we might want is clarity, from what we ought to do to what is right, to the truth of “it all.” Aristotle, of course, knows this, and all too well: Such is the

dilemma of human action insofar as we are thoughtful beings, who do, in fact, make decisions every minute of every day. Wouldn't it be nice to relieve the burden of human life, just for a second, and get an answer for any one of these questions? Certainly. But there is no relief: the future is unclear; there is no program to tell one what to do; there is no Santa Claus to say whether one is right or wrong.

Thus we saw the scope of human activity get squeezed, at no times more so than in the relationship between *eudaimonia* and a person's life, particularly regarding the ways that *eudaimonia* resonates with *tychē* as that which comes from another. However, we did not despair. Instead, we got our second clue: Maybe the picture of human life that emerges in the *Ethics* is about the fundamental being-at-work of a human being in ways that are self-sufficient *only* by virtue of their requiring others (or the watchful eye of a good *daimon*). *Eudaimonia*, we said, is an active attunement, but this activity makes way for receptivity such that it is, at base, flourishing in a way of opening oneself up to the world. One thing that helps us interrogate the ways in which we're woven into the world, as we saw, is through a consideration of *ta ekta*, which are *necessary*, Aristotle says, for a flourishing life. Thus we get a third clue, and the image of human life that Aristotle seems to give us starts to come into focus: A person is more than the sum of her parts, is thoroughly excessive to herself and to the world, and, when speaking of *arête*, importantly has an end outside of herself in a way that returns her to a life at work. This third clue, then, demands an active receptivity to the world.

It may have seemed, at this point, that the precious "agency" of human life becomes too narrow to be believed. If we cannot even flourish on our own, if external goods are necessary for a human life, and if these things speak to the precarious nature *of* such a life, then how is one to act, and what should one do? Before attending to this question, we must

note that we have already said much that speaks to the character of human life, recalling Socrates: Each of us is not self-sufficient, but in need of much. To this end, we saw that self-sufficiency (a good patriotic quality for anyone to have) paradoxically is not self-sufficient, but requires others. Human beings are political creatures for Aristotle, and the life of a hermit is no real life at all. Whether we agree or disagree with that statement, what cannot be stressed enough at this point is clue number four: What the *Ethics* gives us, in lieu of a program for becoming good, is an articulation of the ways in which we already stand in relation to such a question that it is even a concern for us. That is, to ask about the possibility of becoming good, whatever that might mean, is to be proximate to the matter in the first place, not unlike the ways in which *physis* both guides and determines an inquiry into it. Thus, we must either already *in some way be* good in order to become good, or the question will never make sense. Hold onto this clue—it holds a potential key for how one can hear the end of the *Ethics*. But more on that in a moment.

In recognizing ways in which *theos* also plays an important role in the *Ethics*, we saw its solicitation with *tychē* insofar as *eudaimonia* seems to be the best gift from the gods. In this discussion we saw how *theos* resonates with *tychē* as what makes life possible in a way that points the work of *arête* in one's life beyond a solitary life; this person is said to be most blessed indeed. And yet such a thing is never simply up to us to do (i.e., one never simply "has" *arête* but engages the world in such a way that resists maintaining oneself as an isolated individual in the world). If it were, then *tychē* would not be a big deal for Aristotle, but as he says throughout the text, one can never truly say that a person who suffers terrible misfortunes can be said to flourish; such a state is simply too much to ask for one person alone. Thus clue number five: By calling us to attend to the ways in which other people suffer, Aristotle demands at base a generosity toward others.

We then considered the ways in which those who are most fortunate pass their lives most continuously, not least. Such continuity, as we saw, is more lasting than *epistemē*, for it speaks to how *energeia* is a persistent activity of human life. Such an activity demands that life be constantly at work, either as it relates to *arête* as having its end in another, or as it relates to those who are blessed. We saw that the reason for such continuity hinges on a kind of mindfulness, or unforgetting, which speaks to the ways in which a person is called to the movement of truth, or truth as a movement. And so we have the sixth clue: a life at work is more continuous and stable than even *epistemē*.

This life at work, however, always acts (or speaks) in a certain way, and thus we turned to the importance of *kairos* for Aristotle, for *kairos* designates both the particular circumstances in which a person acts and the force of possibility concerning philosophical questioning. For not only does one act in a given circumstance, but one is able to affirm one's possibility through acting in a certain way within a given horizon. We saw, then, the troubles with offering a *logos* of particulars, but we also saw the ways in which *kairos* relates to *tychē* insofar as both speak to what's possible for human life. And one thing that's possible, we noted, is the untimely circumstance of philosophy that emerges through a thinking together of *kairos* and *tychē*. Such a discussion led us to consider the "opportune moment" as an impetus to see the ways in which we're already claimed by philosophical questions such that they remain open to us in importantly transformative ways. Hence the seventh clue: Attentiveness to *kairos* and *tychē* demands a philosophical attunement that leaves open possibility while at the same time imploring that we recognize how we are always, in some way, exerting our possibility through the interplay between *dynamis* and *energeia* in responding to *kairos* or *tychē*.

At this point, we can step back and witness the lively interplay among the ways that these concerns emerge in Aristotle's texts, but as I said, the fourth clue above might hold the key in thinking through the relationship between *tychē* and *physis* as Aristotle does at the end of the *Ethics*: We must *already stand* in relation to a question such that it has, in some ways, *already* transformed us, or the nature of our discussion. And yet this "already" is not a simply question of priority; rather, it projects us into the open with the hopes that we might be able to see something in its appearance. Thus, in being an "already" it also holds within it possibility in a dynamic sense. So, what comes from *physis*, Aristotle says, is not up to us; this is because *we* emerge *from it* in a continual movement of change. This change is not locomotion, simple movement from one place to another; rather, as Walter Brogan says, "*metabolē* as change in the sense of a sudden turning [is] a transition from something to something. This involves a drawing away and projecting beyond" (2005, 36). For these reasons, Brogan says, change is understood as "a kind of movement and therefore a kind of continuity, but a continuity that has rupture belonging to its very core" (2005, 36). A leaf changes color; a banana gains its spots; things contain within them what they are not. But this privation (*steirēsis*) belongs to a being in a meaningful way, never simply as absence. Rather, as we began to see through the interplay between *dynamis* and *energeia*, the *dynamis* of a being finds its home in the work of the being, and vice-versa: a being at work announces its possibilities as well. Or, to put it as I did a moment ago, one must already stand in relation to something in order to seek it.

To put it else-wise, we might say, from the standpoint of *tychē*, as Pascal does (though he is surely not speaking of chance): "Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais

trouvé” (1998, 331).<sup>42</sup> Or, as Pascal Massie does, “[t]he secret of chance is that it holds no secret” (2003, 25); it is one of the many ways in which things appear to us. But, in so being, *tychē* remains, as Aristotle says, fundamentally unclear. Massie says, however, that chance “refers to an end as what is *in excess* of the event” (2003, 25), in a way, I submit, that we are always in excess of ourselves. Or we might put it as Derrida does: “Neither *subjectum* nor *objectum*—*Dasein* is *itself thrown*, originally abandoned to fall and decline or, we could say, to chance (*Verfallen*). *Dasein*’s chances are, in the first place and also, its falls. And they are always mine, *mes chances*, each time related to the relation to itself, to a *Jemeiningkeit*, a mineness (an ‘in each case mine’) that does not come down to a relation to an ego or an I (*Ich, moi*)” (1984, 9). This stance occurs because “the sense of the fall in general [...] is conceivable solely in the situation and places of space of finitude, within the multiple relations to the multiplicity of elements” (1984, 8-9).

Holding these thoughts together, then, we might make the following statement, however premature it may be: In considering the relationship between *tychē* and *physis*, we must remain open to the possibility of both to give us insight into beings. An action or thought I did not intend nonetheless opens me to something importantly transformative, something that takes me outside of myself in returning me to myself, however “other” that self is to which I return. And the world to which I return is other as well. Or, as Heidegger says,

[t]he way life (to indicate it formally) is something whose ‘other’ is in every case *its* ‘other,’ as its world—that is the way it is itself something that ‘is’ in the mode of possessing the tendency to ‘be’ in the actualization of the possession of ‘self’ (possession of self: formally in the basic modes of appropriation and becoming lost). Here the ‘self’ does not express a specifically and obtrusively ‘egoistic’ relational direction of this possessing, nor is it to be understood as a sort of self-observation or

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<sup>42</sup> “You would not look for me if you had not found me” (translation mine; from Pierre Hadot’s *Etudes de Philosophie Ancienne* (1998).

reflectedness. On the contrary, the self-possession and Being are determined in each case, according to their own sense, out of the concrete situation, i.e., from the lived life-world. (2001, 129)

We might hear that which is *kata symbebēkos* at work in this passage insofar as it denotes one way of speaking of the relationality between a person and her world. And one way of speaking of this, as I've noted, is through a consideration of *tychē* as making possible a person's life, which, while always remaining her own, points her outward, beyond herself, at every turn. Thus, when Heidegger says that the way of life always appears to a person as "its other," as its world, then we can maybe see how *tychē* speaks precisely of a being's *tendency* to be, always in relation to, and emergent from, everything else.

At this point, however, I must come clean with some thoughts I've had for quite a while. Some may find, in our contemporary world, nothing but despair, a boredom that arrests people daily, and an unforgiving facticity that speaks only of what merely *is*, not what can be. Such a stance, however, is thoroughly anathema to the Greeks, whose notorious optimism (with emphasis on the "op-" as it relates to sight in the ways I've discussed) chastises self-approving narcissism. Whereas we often tend to think that nothing is possible, the Greeks find that nearly everything is; whereas we might mourn Oedipus, he concludes that all is well; whereas those present at Socrates' death feel sorry for themselves, Socrates intimates that with a little luck he'll continue on his way; whereas we look for truth in the facts of the matter in order to isolate determinate causes, Aristotle encourages us to see where it is that we find ourselves; whereas we have inherited Descartes, we need to remember the Greeks.

And so it may be that the ultimate relationship between *tychē* and *physis* may not matter in the ways that we tend to think it ought, i.e., as an assertion that can be either proved or refuted. For what has opened for us instead is a way in which we are constantly asked to

receive Aristotle's *logos*, hearing what one hears in the echo that precedes it. The world is full, Aristotle tells us, whether from *physis*, *tychē*, or *theos*, and the sign of one who is truly fortunate knows this above all else.



## CHAPTER VI

*TYCHĒ* AND THE INQUIRY INTO POIETIC POSSIBILITY

Since man's life is nothing but a bit of action at a distance,  
     A bit of foam shining inside a glass;  
     Since trees are nothing but moving trees;  
 Nothing but chairs and tables in perpetual motion;  
     Since we ourselves are nothing but beings  
     (As the godhead itself is nothing but God);  
 Now that we do not speak solely to be heard  
     But so that others may speak  
 And the echo precede the voice that produces it;  
 Since we do not even have the consolation of a chaos  
     In the garden that yawns and fills with air,  
     A puzzle that we must solve before our death  
 So that we may nonchalantly resuscitate later on  
     When we have led women to excess;  
     Since there is also a heaven in hell,  
     Permit me to propose a few things:  
  
     I wish to make a noise with my feet  
     I want my soul to find its proper body.  
     -Nicanor Parra

An exemplary feature of human life that speaks to “what’s possible” is *poiēsis*.

Mainly dormant throughout our work thus far (though noted at important points) is the role of yet another way that things come into being—i.e., by *poiēsis* or *technē*.<sup>43</sup> We briefly saw how these words emerge in the *Physics* as well as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and having mainly bracketed their importance for Aristotle until this point, it is now safe to say that

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle often speaks of *poiēsis* and *technē* together; however, they maintain as many differences as similarities, so for my purposes, I have narrowed the scope of the discussion to focus on *poiēsis*, not only because this word is at the heart of Aristotle’s *Poetics* but because it helps marks a boundary for our discussion concerning “making” in a broad sense but also in an important narrow sense, as “poetry.”

*poiēsis*, both broadly construed as “making” or “doing” and more narrowly as “poetry,” intertwines with *tychē* in speaking to human possibility, for *poiēsis* is neither necessary nor always; rather, a space (or many spaces) open up for human creativity when bringing something into being such that something shows itself to us through its genesis. Such a bringing into being, however, is always twofold, requiring not just a positive moment of creation, but also the ability to be affected in multitude ways by what comes into being; hence *poiēin* is never sheer productivity for the Greeks containing only positive content, but also meets *paskein*, which means “to be affected by.” The interplay between the two, like that between *dynamis* and *energeia*, as we saw, is thus constitutive of what it means to bring something into being such that *poiēsis* retains, at its core, the struggle between emergence and submergence, activity and passivity, and the ways in which such a struggle helps bring beings into the open.<sup>44</sup>

Gadamer says, “everything we see stands there before us and addresses us directly as if it showed us ourselves” (1989, 11). This statement beautifully captures the essence of *poiēsis* as it emerges in tragedy for Aristotle, for tragedy is “an imitation [*mimēsis*], not of

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<sup>44</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle characterizes this struggle as one between acting and being acted upon, which are the differences and relations between *poiēin* and *paskein* (*Meta.* 1046a20ff.). He says that in one sense, that which acts and that which is acted upon (what I have called here “activity” and “passivity”) is the same; *poiēsis* entails *steirēsis* (privation) in order to bring something about. However, they maintain differences insofar as the thing acted upon, or that which is able to be affected (relating to *paskein*), has within it a certain source (*archē*), which denotes possibility as *dynamis* insofar as something can happen to or come about from it.

Perhaps a helpful way to think about the relationship between *poiēin* and *paskein* is to consider the etymology of the word *paskein* since the Greeks, into our contemporary usage: *Paskein* most originally means “to be affected by,” and is related to the Greek word *pathos*, used to signify the process of undergoing, enduring, or suffering. In Latin, the word became *passio*, retaining its affectivity when considering, for example, the “passions” of Christ, or even the “passions” of the soul for Descartes. In English, however, it is common parlance to speak of “having a passion for” something, *as if* this passion is something that someone does (e.g., play a musical instrument, paint, work on puzzles). Our contemporary usage loses the primacy of affectivity, however, for insofar as one is passionate, one is radically receptive; a misnomer occurs if one thinks of affectivity solely as something that one *does*. In this way, *paskein* relates to *dynamis* as a power or capacity to be affected or undergo change (*Meta.* 1046a20-35). (For more on this, see also Heidegger 1995, 64-72, 178-180.)

human beings, but of actions [*praxeos*] and of life [*biou*]” (*Poet.* 1450a17). In being such an imitation, we are asked to see what we see in its unfolding, not as it speaks solely to human life, but how it is that life itself shows something to us in our witnessing of it. For this reason, according to Aristotle, tragedy can guide one’s soul (*psychagoge*) through recognizing the interplay among *mythos*, reversals of fortune, and recognitions (*anagnorisis*) that present themselves to us through witnessing the *mimēsis* of life (*Poet.* 1450a34-35).

Tragedy is one facet of *poiēsis*. Differentiated from *praxis* as that which has its end in itself (e.g., the action *is* the thing done, as we saw in the *Ethics*), *poiēsis* importantly has its end in another (*tēs men gar poiēseōs heteron to telos*, *EN* 1140a14). In speaking of the similarities between *praxis* and *poiēsis* in the *Ethics*, Aristotle says that both pertain to things that are capable of being otherwise; both require *hexeis* (active conditions); both are particularly human events. However, *poiein* pertains to things that are in the process of coming into being, and to participate in this activity is “also to consider how something capable of being or not being, and of which the source is in the one who makes it and not in the thing that is made, may come into being” (*EN* 1140a11-14). Thus, the poet brings a poem into being and is the source, but only in a certain way, of the poem. The poem too extends beyond an individual poet, who might even come to completion in the poem. (However, this is but half the story, for as we have seen, *poiēsis* also speaks to ways in which a person is constituted by something else, maybe even the possibility of a poem in the first place for a poet.) *Poiēsis*, thus, doesn’t speak to what’s necessary (and so opposes *epistemē*), but instead to what can be otherwise. To this end, Aristotle says that *technē* loves *tychē*, and *tychē*

*technē*, for both pertain to things that can be otherwise (*EN* 1140a10-16); both pertain to what's possible.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, what it means to make something is excessive to the thing itself in a way that demands, e.g., an audience for a drama, a viewer for a painting, and a hearer for music. Not a solitary event, *poiēsis* emerges for Aristotle as something that points beyond itself, addressing us in a way that makes the acts of life appear to another. *Poiēsis* also speaks to the maker, or the poet, for this person carries a heavy burden, one that separates a world of stasis from a world of change, for the task of the poet is to say what might come to be, not to report what has already passed. In this way, Aristotle says, *poiēsis* is more philosophical than history, for while the historian speaks of what has passed, the poet speaks to what is possible, and “the possible is persuasive” (*Poet.* 1451b16-17). The difference, to put it crudely, is between death and life, for life attends to possibility, and death to what has come to pass. In resonating with life, then, *poiēsis* finds its natural ally with *tychē*, for both pertain to what can be otherwise. And in fact, in most Greek tragedies we learn that reversals of fortune can truly devastate a life to the point where, as we saw Aristotle say of Priam, one cannot be said to flourish if suffering terrible fortunes.

Given that my work thus far in this manuscript insists on *tychē* as it speaks to possibility fundamentally and in the first place, in this chapter I turn explicitly to *poiēsis* to consider one way in which this possibility shows itself. Beginning with the relationship between *eros* and harmony in Plato's *Symposium*, I turn to *poiēsis* in Heidegger as it

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<sup>45</sup> In this passage from the *Ethics*, Aristotle equivocates of *poiēsis* and *technē*, seeming to use them to speak of the same thing. The reason for such an elision at this point may be because they share characteristics of each other insofar as both designate a source that has its end in another and pertain to that which can be otherwise or not be at all. These two ways of speaking about an excessive end, then, align with each other against *praxis* as action that contains its own end within it in the thing done, not in the activity of “making” in the sense of bringing something into being.

maintains a persistent tension between earth and world in “The Origin of a Work of Art.” I then examine Kristeva’s articulation of the relationship between the symbolic and semiotic in order to think about the experience of a human life as fundamentally poetic. Finally, I look at Aristotle’s *Poetics* in order to situate rhythm and mimesis as they speak to what’s possible in human life concerning *poiēsis*.

### Section I Plato’s *Symposium*: *Eros* and *Harmonia*

In Plato’s *Symposium*, the physician Eryximachus, having advised the hiccupping Aristophanes how to cure his sudden convulsions and offering to praise love in his place while he recovers, speaks of Eros on account of his interest in health and medicine (*hiatrikēs*), saying that their ancestor, Aesclepius (the god to/of whom Socrates speaks his last words in the *Phaedo*), created the *epistemē* (knowledge) of health based his ability to instill love between opposites (*Sym.* 186e). Under Aesclepius’ guidance or oversight, according to Eryximachus, a talented physician knows how to bring about Eros in a body in terms of what is good (*kalon*) for the body in relation to preexisting oppositions and strife within that body; the *technē* (craft, or productive knowledge) of medicine is thus an *epistemē* of the activities of Eros. Because Aesclepius’ particular expertise lies in being able to bring about Eros from prior oppositions (and we will see the importance of this act as it concerns *poiēsis* itself, wherein the end of an action differs from and is outside the thing in question), he is thus the god who harmonizes contraries into something else, whether it be in athletics, agriculture, or music (*Sym.* 187a).

Citing the errors of Heraclitus, Eryximachus explains that harmony (*harmonia*) neither consists in opposition nor results from things being in opposition but instead is created in the musical arts (*musikēs technēs*) as concord (*symphonia*), which itself is a kind of

agreement (*homologia*, or “saying the same”). Strictly speaking, that which is *homologia* is anathema to opposites themselves, which are *alogia* and thus not in harmony. However, like medicine, music brings<sup>46</sup> opposites into agreement by engendering love and harmony among them; “music is a knowledge [*epistemē*] of the activities of Eros with regard to harmony and rhythm [*rhythmos*]” (*Sym.* 187c).

Not only musical and medicinal matters themselves, however, bring clarity to the ability of Eros to harmonize and bring into agreement opposite matters or concerns, for Eros also works through rhythm and harmony in other human affairs. According to Eryximachus, rhythm and harmony are at work in *poiēsis* in the composition of melodies, meter, and verse, as well as in musical performances and education. Discerning ways in which these things ought to come into being in view of the good that’s at stake in these matters is difficult, and one must recognize two kinds of love at work in poetic compositions: Eros, which shows itself as defensible in human creations and through our desire points us outside ourselves to worthy people around us (who are often praised in created verses), and another that seems like Eros but is instead a ruse, seducing human beings to aspire impossibly to the divine itself. Eryximachus thus says: “in music, in medicine, and in every other activity both human and divine, one should be as attentive as possible regarding each of these kinds of Love” (*Sym.* 188a), for true Eros realizes and brings about harmony in human affairs, and we human beings, in turn, ought to defend Eros in light of *philia* with the gods; entertaining the other, we might infer, brings about hubris in our inability to recognize our human place.

In Eryximachus’ speech, then, Eros and Aesclepius are both at work and concern each other, for it is Aesclepius who brings harmony and love between opposites in medicine, music, and other human endeavors, and Eros emerges both as that which guarantees the

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<sup>46</sup> Literally: “carries across or through” (from *diapherō-*).

relationship between human beings and the gods and as that which shows itself poetically in human life. When Aristophanes recovers from his hiccups at the end of Eryximachus' praise of Eros, he wonders aloud if the kind of Eros in his body desired the noises and tickling that he endured, and Eryximachus scolds him: "watch what you're doing! Though you're supposed to be giving a speech, you're making jokes, and forcing me to be on my guard against your speech in case you say something funny" (*Sym.* 189b); Aristophanes thus rescinds his musing and proceeds with his own speech.

Though Aristophanes jests (or, as an overly-sensitive Eryximachus interprets his response), Eryximachus' speech opens the relationship between Eros and Aesclepius, or love and health, as it concerns human affairs in general and *poiēsis* in particular. With his speech in mind, the centrality and importance of rhythm and harmony in *poiēsis* as a human activity that points beyond itself as a reminder of what it is to be human takes center stage. In order to investigate how rhythm and harmony play themselves out in relation to love and health in human life, I turn to Heidegger, whose insistence on the interplay between "earth" and "world" in "The Origin of a Work of Art" speaks to a continuous strife at the heart of *poiēsis*; Julia Kristeva, who situates rhythm as the unarticulated undulation driving human life, which grounds any subsequent articulation; and Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics*, opens his discussion of *poiēsis* and *mimesis* through *rhythmos*. All do so, I submit, with catharsis—*itself* a kind of health and love—in view. But let's begin with a poem from Heidegger:

When the cowbells keep tinkling from  
the slopes of the mountain valley  
where the herds wander slowly...  
The poetic character of thinking is  
still veiled over.

Where it shows itself, it is for a  
long time like the utopism of  
a half-poetic intellect.

But poetry that thinks is in truth  
the topology of Being.

This topology tells Being the  
whereabouts of its actual  
presence. (Heidegger 1971, 12)

Exploring the topology of Being helps us understand the topology of poetry and, implicitly, the poetic character of thinking. For Heidegger, the result, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” is the struggle between earth and world in the advent of truth (*alētheia*) as unconcealment concerning beings, and the ability (or necessity) of art, or poetry, to open such a world. In this respect, we might note the place-character of Being, which rings at the heart of what a topology is: an account of place (*topos*)—in this case, of beings. For Kristeva, the result of this topologizing is the poetic subject herself, both *as* a speaking subject and *in* a work of art, like poetry. Emerging dialectically between the semiotic and the symbolic aspects of a poetic life, her topology is thus one that is always in flux, emphasizing the *practice* of a speaking subject or text more than its historical character. What I offer here is a kind of topography, then—a writing of the place in which these thoughts emerge, and a place from which to discuss the dialogue that may emerge between Heidegger and Kristeva through Aristotle’s *Poetics*. I will end with a Charles Simic poem that will encourage us to think the space of beings in their emergent poetic character.

## Section II Heidegger’s Topology: Earth and World

“In the nearness of the work [of art],” Heidegger tells us, “we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be” (1993, 161). Heidegger says this in reference to the speaking character of Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoes, but we can think through this thought as it is provoked by the last phrase of Heidegger’s poem: How does the



topology of art (or, as he will finally say, poetry) point us to the whereabouts of Being, and what is being set forth in a work of art such that Being opens itself to us? We get a clue in the penultimate stanza of Heidegger's poem, and that clue relates a kind of thinking poetry to Being, such that something comes to shine forth, or be present, in the very experience of art and poetry. In allowing Being to come to be, we might say, poetry uproots us from our ordinary experience, opening a world in which the horizon of Being is allowed to be.

“All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is as such, in essence, poetry,” Heidegger writes at the end of his essay, for poetry, broadly construed, is the “setting-itself-into-work of truth” (1993, 197). Translating *alētheia* as “unconcealment” and not as truth *qua* correctness, Heidegger insists that the work of poetry, or of art, maintains no usual causal connection between art and artist, or artwork and its recipient; rather, the transportation of the recipient of art to the world of the work of art itself speaks to the essence of poetry, we might say, in a Greek sense: Broadly construed as “making,” *poiēsis* importantly maintains the overfullness of Being, for to make something is to let that thing come to be more than it otherwise would be. The key to understanding *poiēsis* in this sense is that for something to be poietic, the end must be outside of itself; we might, crudely, say that it must be excessive in relation to its materials (paint, words, wood, etc.). As we shall see in turning to Kristeva, this means—regarding poetry in its more specific, linguistical sense—that the sum of poetry is more than its grammatical parts, more than how words are arranged on a page, maybe even more than what they hope to communicate. This poietic resonance must be kept in mind in working through Heidegger's thought, for the poet/artist does in fact make something, but the work of art exceeds the material proper to the poet. (Heidegger explains this at length in the first part of the essay, wherein he says that the

painter does not, properly speaking, *use* colors from a palette, but instead lets the colors come into being rather than using them up.)

Heidegger says, “Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their strife and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings” (1993, 198). This “projective saying,” or naming, brings beings to “word and to appearance” (1993, 198), letting them shine forth *not* through a medium or the use of words (or paint, or stone), but through the horizon erected between earth and world, between the strife and harmony of their interplay. We might here think the topology of Being as it arrives for us, always too early and too late, in the consideration of the work of art, both as it works on us and sets itself—and thus beings—forth into the world.

But whose world, or which, comes into being in a work of art? Heidegger’s discussion of the relationship between earth and world in art emerges through an example of a Greek temple, which itself “portrays nothing” (1993, 167). And yet, the temple is extremely vibrant, and *works*: It both shows what it is and is not; it shows the “invisible space of air;” it cements itself on the ground; it surges, commands, rages. *The temple does all of this*. Heidegger reminds us that “[t]he Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*” (1993, 168); Heidegger calls it “earth.” Earth, like *physis*, is not (simply) matter, not an underlying *hypokaimenon*, or substance, not the planet or ground in any usual sense; it is not, as Heidegger makes clear in the first part of this essay, any mere thing. Rather, “Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent” (1993, 168).

As a sheltering agent, “earth” points us to something that must be sheltered, or at least says that there is something *to* shelter. (This sheltering may not be unlike the veil of which Heidegger speaks in his poem, wherein “the poetic character of thinking is still veiled over,” if we understand a veil also as sheltering thinking, presuming that thinking requires such a sheltering from its own poetic character.) Heidegger says that earth “shelters everything that arises as such,” and thus is not, precisely speaking, any *thing*. We may consider the temple: The temple is a temple insofar as it works to house the gods, and insofar as people find themselves in relation to it in this way. The very work of the temple allows for the presence of the gods, and to be a work thus means that a world gets set up: “To be a work means to set up a world,” Heidegger says, but then asks, “what is it to be a world?” (1993, 170)

Heidegger responds: “The world worlds” (1993, 170). Just as we mistakenly project properties onto subjects, so too do we mistake the world that is active and *does* something: World never stands before us, as an object, as something that can be seen. Yet, we are subject to the world—and only we human beings understand ourselves as having or inhabiting a world—nonetheless, and so we get another clue in thinking through the work of art: To be work, there is a setting up of a world. This is what work does (think of art work not just as the thing that it is, but also as it continues to work—recall the double gesture of the genitive “work of art” in both of these senses); it lets the world world. In the example of the temple, it is the temple itself which allows for its material to shine forth and become what they are for the very first time: rocks come to be rocks, colors glow, and all of this happens within the sheltering of the earth, or *physis*. Thus a transformation from our previous (mis)conceptions of how art—or artwork—works sets free the space of a world that comes into being.

Effortless and untiring, earth thus comes to be the horizon in which we ground ourselves, for in addition to a work of art setting up a world, the work also sets forth the earth. Hence we are given something within a world—the work lets the earth be an earth. As *physis*, earth thus reveals to us something about *our* nature in its setting forth a world as, we might say, a kind of reminder of the horizon in which we find ourselves when experiencing a work of art, a horizon that transports us importantly from where we usually find ourselves. As transformative, the world of a work of art explodes the horizon of earth, resisting objectification: It [the world] is the “every-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and earth, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being” (1993, 170). As such, world is historical, against the spontaneity that is earth. The struggle between the two, even as they show themselves in concert, results in strife:

The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. Yet the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there. (1993, 174)

Through this tension and interplay, according to Heidegger, the essential natures of world and earth come to be, each necessitating each other; neither can dispense with the other. Because of this, the work of art instigates this strife so that it can remain strife: World is historical, earth spontaneous. World clears paths, earth rises up as self-closing (1993, 180). World clears, earth conceals: “Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the instigation of the strife in which the unconcealment of beings as a whole, or truth, is won” (1993, 180).

For Heidegger, then, the truth of poetry shows itself in letting this strife come to light and work. Through the interplay of earth and world, we are transported, as I’ve said, from

where we otherwise tend to be, for it is through the work of language and art that a world opens to us, showing something to us about who and where we are, clearing a space for it to work on us, for us to work in it. It is, simply put, pure possibility, which Aristotle tells us in his *Poetics*, is most persuasive of all. In other words, it is a true topology: an account, or *logos*, of the place of beings in their origin, or springing-forth, into the world.

### **Section III** **Kristeva's Topology: The Semiotic and Symbolic**

“[P]oetry is a practice of the speaking subject,” Kristeva writes, “consequently implying a dialectic between limits, both signified and signifying, and the setting of a pre- and translogical rhythm solely within this limit” (1980, 25). As such a practice, it, like Heidegger’s interplay of earth and world in a work of art, is dynamic, but Kristeva’s emphasis is on the speaking subject more than—or at least in relation to—a work of art. For her, Heidegger “retains currency . . . because of his attentiveness to language and ‘poetic language’ as an opening up of beings; as an openness that is checked but nonetheless occurs; as a struggle between world and earth; artistic creations are all conceived in the image of poetic language where the ‘Being’ of ‘beings’ is fulfilled and on which, as a consequence, ‘History’ is grounded” (1980, 25). Let us note a kinship with Heidegger, then, insofar as poetry for both is a struggle between and within limitations of two different kinds of dialectic: for Heidegger, the dialectic occurs *within* a work of art as the struggle between earth and world; for Kristeva, the dialectic occurs most importantly and broadly within the speaking subject herself through the interplay of the semiotic and symbolic aspects of one’s life.

And so we shift our discourse to thinking about poetry in Heidegger as it is in a work of art already in relation to the interplay between Being and beings, to poetry as it is foremost

a *practice* of the speaking subject for Kristeva and is not primarily historical, as Kristeva thinks it is for Heidegger, but is experiential. It is within this new discourse that the structure of earth and world might help us think of a poetic subject, both in poetry broadly construed as making, and in its more precise sense in, say, a poem.

With broad strokes we thus begin our topology. First we place (since topologies are about places) earth by the semiotic, and world by the symbolic in shifting our speech. Let us recall the characteristics of earth: disruptive, sheltering, penetrating, spontaneous, concealed. Here is what Kristeva says regarding the semiotic *chora* in *Revolution and Poetic Language*, noting that it underscores our becoming meaningful speaking beings:

The *chora*, as ruptures and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality. Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. Although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited: as a result, one can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form. (1984, 26)

Like earth in Heidegger, one can never give *chora* (a term borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*) axiomatic form but can assume a topology for it because *chora*, in Kristeva's text, is akin to the drives (and may be derivative from them): Ever present as rhythm and rupture, it is a disruptive "ground" through which we come to inhabit the symbolic world of language. It is also that which guarantees entrance to the symbolic realm, for without the semiotic *chora* (which, by itself, is nothing), language would not speak, we might say, from any place. In contrast to the world of symbols that guide and determine our lives as speaking beings, Kristeva deems the *chora* "semiotic," i.e., "the operation that logically and chronologically precedes the establishment of the symbolic and its subject" (1984, 41). As such, it has no fixed time, save for preceding the genesis of the subject. Pointing to a subject coming into being from unarticulable desires, the semiotic always stands in relation to the symbolic both

as that which makes the symbolic possible (i.e., it is that which allows our understanding of ourselves as acting agents in the world to emerge), and as that which reminds us that our self-understanding in the symbolic realm, the realm of language and signs, is contingent upon a network of heterogeneous and disparate influences, from the biological to the social (1984, 41).

Much like day and night hang together and come to be in relation to each other, the semiotic and the symbolic, according to Kristeva, hang together and only really *are* in and through each other. What interests Kristeva most in this work—before she explicitly turns to poetic language and literature, as we shall do in a moment—is how a person becomes who she is in, we might say, a way that mimics the structure of poetic speech itself.<sup>47</sup> Breaking radically from a stable “I” or Ego that she sees at work in the legacy of modern philosophy and that we mistakenly (though necessarily) inherit today, Kristeva says that “to the extent that these two threads (drives and consciousness [or, we might add, the semiotic and the symbolic]) interweave, the *unity of reason* which consciousness sketches out will always be shattered by the *rhythm* suggested by drives: repetitive rejection seeps in through ‘prosody,’ and so forth, preventing the stasis of One meaning, One myth, One logic” (1984, 148). The unity of reason, which, we might say, is the supposed *hypokaimenon*, or underlying thing that couches and guides the modern solitary subject, ultimately fails to take account of the shattering effect of rhythm and failure that one experiences as a speaking being in a world of symbols. Even further: rhythm, which can be pleasurable (1984, 179), is the experience of a person in the failure of the symbolic realm to guarantee her safety and happiness; its pleasure, in a purely negative way, functions as that which buoys her asymbolically, reminding her of

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<sup>47</sup> Though Kristeva might resist this inversion of how we normally take a text to be a mimetic of human life, she might be sympathetic insofar as, in the end, there really is no difference between how a person experiences herself in the world and how one experiences a text.

her place in the symbolic realm because it is the semiotic network that guarantees her meaning and existence. The *chora* thus breaks from a simple *hypokaimenon* by itself being generated in the process of a subject's becoming, standing in relation to signs and signifiers as a kind of unground (if I may borrow an important word from Schelling) that allows for the possibility of becoming a subject.

In an earlier essay, "The Ethics of Linguistics," Kristeva articulates the distinction between the rhythmic semion and the structure of the symbolic as follows:

On the one hand, then, we have this rhythm; this repetitive sonority, this thrusting tooth pushing upwards before being capped with the crown of language; this struggle between word and force gushing with the pain and relief of a desperate delirium; the repetition of this growth, of this gushing forth around the crown-word, like the earth completing its revolution around the sun. (1980, 28)

From this passage we may glean that the semiotic is rhythm, repetition, and thrusting within a burgeoning subject; it is the earth in Heidegger. But against this earth, this rhythmic rupturing of the poetic subject, is the "ego," which Kristeva says is "situated within the space of language, crown, system: no longer rhythm, but sign, word, structure, contract, constraint;" in other words, it is the symbolic (1980, 29). In being symbolic, it is, we might say, the world that is set forth in a work of art in Heidegger's thinking, but is not (at least primarily) a historical world, but is instead the structure of language, symbols, and systems that a speaking subject comes to inhabit. (Loosely, the poetic subject inhabits the world of language, whereas poetry, in Heidegger, sets language forth into the world *as* language.)

For Kristeva, the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic—especially concerning rhythm *as* semiotic—is also evident in poetic language in a narrow sense, for it is poetic language that "puts the subject in process/on trial through a network of marks and semiotic facilitations" (1984, 58). In a technical sense, this process is evident in two components of a poetic work, the "genotext" and the "phenotext." The genotext is parallel to



the semiotic *chora* in literature and poetry for it is what organizes a space in which the subject will be generated; it, like the semiotic *chora*, is “language’s underlying foundation” (1984, 87); or, as she says in *Black Sun*, it is the “language beyond language that inserts into the sign the rhythm and alliterations of semiotic processes” (1989, 97). As such, it comes to be within language itself, which is the phenotext of literature or poetry. The phenotext aspect of literature is a structure that “obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee” (1984, 87). The signifying process in literature, then, mimics the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic in a subject’s genesis and is clear especially in modern poetry and literature, where the breakdown of grammar and punctuation themselves signify diverse failures of language to symbolize what underlies the subject in question, i.e., the semiotic *chora*, rhythm, desire.

Citing Mallarmé, Kristeva thus writes: “Following the instinct for rhythms that has chosen him, the poet does not deny seeing a lack of proportion between the means let loose and the result” (30). In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva cites Céline, who says that writing “involves taking sentences, as I was saying, and having them fly off their handle...” (1982, 187). We might say, in other language, that the structure of language itself—with all of its available breaks, stops, and infinite ellipses—still fails to account for the result of a poetic work as one that doesn’t just “employ” language in a usual sense to signify conceptual understanding, but that can break down language itself with the result being something else; the result, insofar as it is “something else,” is itself poetry broadly construed, or *poiēsis*. Mallarmé and Céline both know this: the result of poetry and literature is more than the sum of its grammatical parts. When sentences fly off their handle and the poet knows that the result of her *poiēsis* is more than words as they’re arranged on the page, we know that *poiēsis*

involves the revolution of language itself in addition to demanding a revolution (literally, a turning) of one's self-understanding.

Poetry, poetic language, literature, tragedy, art: According to Kristeva, "modern poetic language goes further than any classical mimesis—whether theatrical or novelistic—because it attacks not only denotation (the positing of the object) but meaning (the positing of the enunciating subject) as well" (1984, 58). Modern poetic language, in other words, disrupts even the positing of a unified symbolic structure, a disruption that is evident through a modern text itself. It also commands the flow of *jouissance* into language and allows for the dissolution of a unified subject that is implied in pre-1850s literature, a subject that is both transparent to itself and the world. Particularly modern poetic *mimesis* dissolves not only the linguistical structure's commanding role as master (that we've forgotten is in the first place posited), but also disrupts the very positing of a unified subject.<sup>48</sup>

It is in this thought that we encounter a difficulty to which we now turn in Aristotle: If the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic presuppose each other and come to be through each other, and if, moreover, the semiotic, which by itself is nothing, oozes into the symbolic in both our social and literary experiences, then what is the transgression of

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<sup>48</sup> Because of this, Kristeva often speaks of human beings not as subjects, but as "thetic": always disrupted and disruptive. And while much can and should be said about how Kristeva thinks of modern poetry in particular as responses to our peculiarly contemporary experiences of cultural, historical, and individual abjection, what we need most importantly to note is that rhythm, as semiotic *chora*, functions within the symbolic realm as that which both threatens and guarantees the formation of a subject in and through language. Through the breakdown of language itself in modern poetry and literature (and with, we might add, the ever-changing definitions of what constitutes a "text" in the first place), the mimesis at the heart of Kristeva's own text is a question: What is the relationship between *poiēsis* and mimesis regarding a subject who's on trial, or in process, in poetic language and in the world? Kristeva speaks of mimesis as a transgression of the thetic (a kind of pre-subject, or a substitute for a knowing Ego) for whom "truth" no longer has any meaning in relation to linguistical objects but instead refers to semiotic traces (a *sēme*, after all, is a trace); truth destabilizes our truth-seeking conceptuality. As Kristeva says, "all transgressions of the thetic are a crossing of the boundary between true and false—maintained, inevitably, by the flow of the semiotic into the symbolic" (1984, 58).

which she speaks regarding the very act of mimesis, and how does mimesis come to show itself most of all in *poiēsis*, something whose end is outside of itself? By turning now to Aristotle, we will see how *rhythmos* crystalizes the advent of *poiēsis* and helps us understand the decisive role of *mimesis* in poetic creation.

**Section IV**  
**Aristotle: Rhythm and Mimesis**

Kristeva writes that Aristotle “opposed the act of *poetic purification*,” which is an impure (and perhaps impossible) process that pretends to ignore, cleanse, or purify abjection. Rather, catharsis entails a repetition of abjection itself through rhythm and song:

Getting rid of it [the abject] is out of the question. [...] It is a repetition through rhythm and song, therefore through what is not yet, or no longer is ‘meaning’, but arranges, defers, differentiates and organizes, harmonizes pathos, bile, warmth, and enthusiasm. Benveniste translates ‘rhythm’ by ‘trace’ and ‘concatenation’. Prometheus is ‘rhythmical’, and we call him ‘bound’. An attachment on the near and far side of language. [...] That discourse is audible, and through the speech that it mimics it repeats on another register what the latter does not say. (Kristeva 1982, 28-29)

We may read Kristeva’s thought here as saying the following: Through catharsis, which is not simply a purging or discarding of what’s ugly, dirty, or despondent in human life, we see the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic, an interplay that itself is repetitive and rhythmic, miming the impure without pushing it to the side. The result, according to Kristeva, is a “mimesis of the passions,” which ranges from suffering to enthusiasm, in “language with pleasurable accessories,” i.e., rhythm and song (1982, 28).

For Aristotle in the *Poetics*, rhythm (*rhythmos*), harmony (*harmonia*), and speech (*logos*) are three ways in which *mimesis* comes into being, either in mixing with one another, as harmony and rhythm do in dancing, or in their singularity, as Aristotle suggests the

Socratic *logos* is a kind of imitation (*Poet.* 1447b11-12).<sup>49</sup> Mimesis itself differs regarding what's being imitated (e.g., a serious person [*spoudios*] in tragedy, or an inferior [*phaulos*] person in comedy) or in the ways that the imitation occurs (e.g., through painting, dance, poetry), but finds a common thread insofar as imitations are of those acting (*prattontas*, *Poet.* 1448a). However, if we understand imitation to be of those acting by itself, this condition alone isn't saying much, for Aristotle says that "nothing is common to Homer and Empedocles except the meter [*metron*]," for we speak of Homer as a poet and Empedocles as giving an account of nature [*phusiologos*] (*Poet.* 1447b17-20). So it seems either that the meter in which one writes or speaks is decisive for understanding *poiēsis*, or that these two Greeks have nothing in common.

One might read the beginning of the *Poetics* as Aristotle's attempt to dichotomize the poetic *logos* from one who tries to give a *logos* of nature, and to do so would not be completely inappropriate, for certainly Aristotle focuses most of his time on working through aspects of tragedy that seem to be a mimesis of events that never happened, but that are intimately bound to how we ourselves act. One might then read catharsis in the end as an experience of witnessing the whole of tragedy exemplified through one sufferer who might then be able to cleanse and thus divorce oneself from the action on the stage. However, if we ask the question of what's common to *poiēsis* as a whole regarding both the poet and the account-giver, we see that mimesis itself belongs both to natural and poetic aspects of human life.

"Two *aitiai* [explanations]," Aristotle says, "and these natural [*phusikai*], are likely to have generated poetics as a whole" (*Poet.* 1448b4-5). Since Aristotle begins the *Poetics* by saying that his inquiry into *poiēsis* begins first according to nature from the first things (*Poet.*

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<sup>49</sup> *Mimesis* concerns not only *technē*, but also our *ēthos* (*synētheias*, *Poet.* 1447a20-21).

1447a13), it may be no surprise that he offers two likely explanations for the genesis of *poiēsis*: From childhood, imitation is natural to human beings because it is how we start to learn from others, and second, we naturally take pleasure in imitations. The link between learning through *mimesis* and taking pleasure in it is decisive for Aristotle because it is through witnessing something terrible—for example, a corpse—in *poiēsis* that we are pleased with something that might otherwise be devastating to see or is painful to us. Aristotle thus says that learning, which is pleasant to all (but especially to philosophers), shows itself when we are confronted with *poiēsis*, which itself produces pleasure. Learning, as both developmentally mimetic from childhood and pleasant in adulthood, thus relieves the pressure we might feel from coming face to face with a corpse itself.

What happens in this artistic or poetic encounter, however, is not that the painted corpse is a representation of a “real” corpse in itself, for the *poietic* corpse is not a corpse at all. But, the way in which it is *not* so provides a clue to the role of pleasure in art for Aristotle. *Poiēsis* is not mere representation of things in themselves; instead, something *poietic* produces pleasure (remember, a natural affect proper to human beings) on account of the *mimesis* involved in bringing it about. The production of a work of art, in other words, yields something greater than itself, producing pleasure in those who witness the work on account of the poet’s craft. A kinship to nature opens strangely here: *Poiēsis* presumes to be that which is made, the end of which is outside of itself (think of the relationship between an artist and her artwork, with the artwork exceeding the “intentions” of the artist), but it also strikes to the core of human life, resonating with our human “nature,” whatever that might be.

Rhythm, harmony, speech: In what ways are these mimetic aspects tied to the production of a work of art, and in what ways are they natural to human beings? Aristotle says that “to imitate is natural for us, as well as harmony and rhythm” (*Poet.* 1448b20), yet

harmony and rhythm are also indicators of *poiēsis* in its relationship to our human nature. In poetry, rhythm comes through in the meter in which one composes (*Poet.* 1448b22); in dancing, it is kinship with the music's beat (*Poet.* 1447a27). Rhythm is thus not only proper to what we do by nature from childhood, but is also what seeps into things we make poietically. It is, we might say, that which underlies and guides our compositions without itself being anything.

Yet rhythm fixes Aristotle's thinking of *poiēsis* in more than the way in which something is composed or the means by which it achieves its status as a work of art and is evident in *poiēsis*, for the aim of it is something beautiful (*Poet.* 1447a8). Beauty (*tō kalon*) consists in a magnitude and order, and, sticking with his emphasis on the nature of the thing itself (*poiēsis*), has a limit: "the greater is always the more beautiful with respect to magnitude up to the point that it remains manifest all together" (*Poet.* 1451a9-11). It is here that we can recall Eryximachus' emphasis on rhythm as it brings oppositions into harmony and itself is a sign of Eros, if not of health. Recalling how a good physician knows how to harmonize strife in the body, might we not also ask if a good poet, broadly construed, knows how to harmonize poetry with human life, or poetry with nature or life itself? Or, better put, is it not a beautiful poet who brings the nature of things to light? Though this harmonization seems to ask a bit much of our poets, Aristotle notes that "[a]fter undergoing many changes, tragedy stopped when it attained its own nature" (*Poet.* 1449a16). In attaining its own nature—which is itself poetic—the meter for beautiful poetry is exemplified by Homer, one who relies on the *logos* as transformative *mimesis* in tragedy. Yet tragedy, as I've noted, "is an imitation, not of human beings, but of actions [*praxeos*] and of life [*biou*]" (*Poet.* 1450a17); i.e., tragedy dramatically *is* the whole of nature, not as it has happened to unfold in

a historical chronology of events, but as what is possible, and what is possible is persuasive (*Poet.* 1451b16-17)—we might add, the most persuasive of all.

**Section V**  
**Tychē: “That Little Something”**

While much can and should be said about how Kristeva thinks of modern poetry in particular as responses to our peculiarly contemporary experiences of cultural, historical, and individual abjection, what we need most importantly to note is that rhythm, as semiotic *chora*, functions within the symbolic realm as that which both threatens and guarantees the formation of a subject in and through language. It is with her writing in mind, when informed by the earth-world dialectic in Heidegger, that I turn to a poem by Charles Simic:

That Little Something (by Charles Simic)

The likelihood of ever finding is small.  
It's like being accosted by a woman  
And asked to help her look for a pearl  
She lost right here in the street.

She could be making it all up,  
Even her tears, you say to yourself  
As you search under your feet,  
Thinking, not in a million years...

It's one of those summer afternoons  
When one needs a good excuse  
To step out of a cool shade.  
In the meantime, what ever became of her?

And why, years later, do you still,  
Off and on, cast your eyes to the ground  
As you hurry to some appointment  
Where you are now certain to arrive late.

We learn, in the first sentence, that “it” is missing, but we don’t know what “it” is: a lost pearl, an intimation of love, a hint of meaning. Is “it” supplied by the title? “That Little Something” might be exactly what the speaker is looking for, though it’s certainly not clear

what the little something might be. The world created by the poem—a world of loss and searching, hope and finding—occurs in a simile: “It’s like being accosted by a woman,” we learn. But we learn this too late: That “little something” is missing, and the world—the world of the speaker, of appointments and dates—does not care. We thus have two worlds, a world within a world, the world of the speaker’s simile, and the world of the poem, a world of wonderment (“what ever became of her?” She was so beautiful, we might add), and a world in “real time,” i.e., the landscape of symbols, dates, and language. If read in this way, then, the simile might structurally function as the earth in Heidegger less than as world: Jutting through the poem, causing the speaker to more than pause, accosted by a woman who doesn’t exist, she emblazons the speaker’s memory and ruptures an otherwise anticipatable world.

If read with Kristeva in mind, we might say that the speaker’s simile functions like the semiotic, for it is the digressive disruption of the world of the symbolic. Linguistically, we can see how this is the case: Note the ellipsis in the second paragraph, a whiff of thought, a desire that trails off, makes no sense in the world of symbols, a trace of the uncanny. We cannot—though *must*—ask what “became of her,” because, in a sense, the poem demands what has become, and is always becoming, of *us*. “That Little Something,” then, might be both a reminder of earth and the semiotic is it defies any language of “it” that we anticipate in the first line of the poem. (Don’t we want to supply it? “The likelihood of ever finding [it] is small.”) But instead “it’s” missing, and thus we come full circle, recycling back to Heidegger’s poem, and to a question: What, after all, is the poetic character of thinking? In reference to Simic’s poem, the poetic character of thinking might very well be the little something propelling the speaker, jumping to an earth within the world, unveiling beings in their multitude, brilliance, and becoming. Or it might be that the thinking character of poetry



as it anchors and disrupts our lives dynamically recalls us to the topology of Being, characterized as it has been throughout this dissertation by the meddlesome workings of *tychē*, that little something propelling this investigation.

I began this chapter with Eryximachus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* in order to raise a question concerning the relationship between Eros and Aesclepius, love and health, as it comes into being through a knowledge of how to harmonize opposites, or things that repel each other, either within a body or within a life. In turning to Kristeva, we encountered the mutually dependent relationship between the semiotic and symbolic aspects of a human life both in one's experience and in poetic language and how it is that a subject comes into being from a nothing—the semiotic *chora*—to inhabit the symbolic realm, always in constant consultation with the semiotic. I suggested that rhythm, as the semiotic *chora* that shows itself in poetic texts as a language beyond language, functions as the unground that guarantees our possibilities as *poietic* beings, belonging both to nature and to art. In considering Aristotle also on rhythm, I traced his thinking about rhythm as a natural *pathos* for *mimesis*, both developmentally and in *poiēsis*, as well as that which points to the possibility of a beautiful meter (which is a sign of rhythm) in tragedy and human life as that which is possible for us.

Both Aristotle and Kristeva speak of a shared concern, which is the necessity of *poiēsis* in human life as that which destabilizes an otherwise static sense of self and truly allows catharsis—repetition, mimesis, abjection, and action—to happen. For Kristeva, the ultimate recourse for such an experience when thinking about how a subject comes into being is literature; for Aristotle, it's tragedy. Both are poetry. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva says this of literature's power:

Thus perceived, literature appears to me as the privileged place where meaning is elaborated and destroyed, where it slips away when one might think that it is being renewed. Such is the metaphor's effect. Likewise, the literary experience stands revealed as an essentially amorous experience, unstabilizing the same through its identification with the other. [...] We are all subjects of the metaphor. (1987, 274)

The poetic experience, then, is an experience of love, but is a fluid love through destabilization, rhythm, concatenation; it is a love of what is possible. In so being, as Roberto Calasso says, "Eros is the helplessness of that which is sovereign: it is strength abandoning itself to something elusive, something that stings" (1994, 377). In relation to the "metaphor's effect," Kristeva also says that "the ultimate support of Aristotelian metaphor is a being who acts. The poetic as well as the categorical metaphor merely convey 'motion and life'; yet Aristotle stresses that 'act is motion'" (1987, 274). In other words, it is cathartic movement through an affirmation of poetic possibility, in art (Heidegger), the practice of the speaking subject (Kristeva), and tragedy (Aristotle).

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A few concluding words about the role of *tychē* in Greek thought are now warranted. The work laid out in these pages by no means exhausts the importance of *tychē* for the Greeks, but instead is offered as a way to begin tracing its appearance through Aristotle's thought in the *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Poetics*. Further work on *tychē* would require a closer look at a host of related issues mentioned and discussed all too briefly in these pages, from *dynamis* and *energeia* concerning what it means for something to be an *archē kinēseos* (origin or source of motion) in both the *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* to the ways in which tragedy helps us understand the place of human beings in the cosmos in light of what befalls us. Such a discussion would ultimately return us to the relationship between necessity (*anankē*) and *tychē* in the *Physics* and also in the *Metaphysics*, for it's possible that these words are closer together for the Greeks than we might normally think.

Too, seeing how *tychē* cashes out in Greek tragedy itself would be a natural place to turn, for there we would see how Antigone, e.g., finds herself bereft of *tychē*, while Oedipus first deems himself the most unfortunate of mortals (upon recognizing what he's done), but at the end of his life, the most fortunate of us.

As it is, however, we might do well to recall a Native American statement that resonates with the Greek world and hopefully the work begun in these pages. “Whether it happened so or not, I do not know. But if you think about it, you will see that it is true” (Deloria 2001, 6). Said in response to an interlocutor who asks about the origins of a sacred pipe, Black Elk utters these words, and we would fare well to heed them regarding *tychē* for the Greeks.

## CHAPTER VII

### EPILOGUE:

#### THE MYTHIC HORIZONS OF *TYCHĒ*

“And we’ll say,” Glaucon said, “that what the Muses answer is right.”

“Necessarily,” I said. “For they are Muses.”

“What,” he said, “do the Muses say next?”

-Plato’s *Republic* (547a)

As all good stories do, this one begins with a girl. The girl in question is Persephone, and we meet her as she stands on the brink of what will become a precipice, of what will become her life. As Persephone explains to her grieving mother, Demeter, near the end of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, how it is that she finds herself as queen of the underworld, Persephone notes that her story began rather joyously while picking flowers with her playmates (ll. 416-429). We are familiar enough with Persephone’s life to know the gist of the story, i.e., that a chasm opens in the earth and that she weds Zeus’ brother, the Host-to-Many; that the life and death of vegetation on earth come to be determined by her presence and absence on earth; that her worried mother wanders and wails for years in search of her lost daughter, lying and disguising herself to uncover the truth of her daughter’s disappearance. We are familiar enough with Persephone to be skeptical of pomegranates, for they, we think, are the source of death on earth, and we certainly know never to eat more than a few of the bittersweet seeds, lest the consequences of Persephone’s tasting happen to us as well. What we may not be familiar with, however, is *how* this story happens in the moment of its birth, and thus we might reflect on this story as one of a doomed—yet necessary—happening, as a girl blooms (*thaleṛeīn*, Homer l. 79) into adulthood, transgressing the roles

usually assumed by mythical maidens. We might think that Persephone's lot is found in the abduction by her eventual groom, the Host-to-Many, and we may think the story yet another one in a catalogue about old men who prey on young girls. We may also think that the story is one of seduction, of a young girl (provocatively, most often referred to as *Korē* before marrying) being tempted by the power of a god, and we may think her seduction as a thirst for this godly power, unknown to most mortals.

It may turn out that we think all of these things. What we do know for certain is that *something happens* to Persephone, and this happening occurs while picking flowers with her playmates. In Persephone's explanation to Demeter detailing her story, Persephone notes that among her many friends present at the moment of her seduction or abduction, birth or death, is Τύχη [*Tychē*]. Well after the facts of this story, and after *mythoi* of other disappearances of flower-plucking mythical women (Europa and Orithia among them) have woven their way through the streets of Athens and elsewhere, Pausanias tells us, in his *Guide To Greece*, that this reference—Homer's—is the first citation of *Tychē* in Greece (Pausanias 4:30, 4-6).<sup>50</sup> Pausanias notes, however, that Homer makes no explicit mention of *Tychē* being the mightiest goddess regarding human affairs and, according to Pausanias, Homer says nothing else about the goddess *Tychē* (4:30, 5-6). Homer thus marks the birth—if not the life—of *Tychē* as it shows itself at least poetically, at least as a goddess.

However, the presence of *Tychē* in the Homeric hymn appears not only as a playmate accompanying Persephone in her meadow—though this is where *tychē* shows itself as *Tychē*, a goddess—but first appears in discussing the characteristics of Persephone's future bridegroom. Before Persephone and Demeter rejoin near the end of the hymn, and even before Demeter embarks on a journey to find and retrieve her daughter from somewhere she

<sup>50</sup> Πρώτος δὲ ᾧ· οἶδα ἐποίησατο ἐ· τοῖς ἔπεισιν Ὅμηρος Τύχης μνήμην·

knows not, Hekate, in an attempt to answer Demeter's pleas regarding the plight of her missing daughter, notes that the Host-to-Many is not an entirely dismal mate for her daughter, even if he does reside in Hades. In trying to persuade Demeter to consider Aidoneus (one of the many names of the god in question) as a suitable bridegroom, Hekate notes that both he and Zeus, since they are brothers, come from the same godly stock. Furthermore, Aidoneus is honorable, and lives with those who fall to him because of his own chance lot, receiving a third of godly rule over all, with his domain being the underworld (ἀμφὶ δὲ τιμὴν ἔλλαχεν ὡς τὰ πρῶτα διάτριχα δασμὸς ἔτυχθη [ll. 85-86]). On account of *tychē*—strangely, on account of that for which an account cannot, properly speaking, be given—the Host-To-Many comes to inhabit Hades. So we can establish a link, however tentative, between Persephone and her husband in the Homeric hymn, who both, in some relation to *tychē* (be it the child of the gods or otherwise), come to find each other, gaining perhaps both their lots and their lives.

Homer's story involving *Tychē*, however, is certainly not the only one; it is merely first. As such, its precedence is notable, and we'll return to this version of Persephone's story in a moment. Greek mythology being as multifarious as it is influential, let us look at a few other notable sources regarding *Tychē* in order to consider the ways in which it first gets situated in Greek thought. In Hesiod's *Theogony* we learn that *Tychē* is among the eldest Oceanids, the many daughters of Oceanus and Tethys (Hesiod l. 360). Oceanus himself is a backward-flowing river ("Ocean") that bounds the earth and is from which all rivers and seas flow; he might even be considered the origin of all earthly things (and, perhaps, the god of the border between this world and Hades). In order to cross to the underworld, one must cross his river (i.e., him), under the watchful eye of his most terribly clever eldest daughter, Styx (δελυγὴ Στυξ [l. 775]), who lives separated from the gods in a great rocky domain near

Hades' gates. However, Oceanus himself is a gentle god, and the only Titan who did not attack his father, Uranus, in the rebellious Titanomachy. His wife, too, is gentle: Tethys nursed and protected fickle Hera when the Olympians fought the Titans. In Hesiod's story, then, the birth of *Tychē*, arguably the most powerful offspring of Oceanus and Tethys, might be construed as peaceful and loving.

In his "Olympian Ode," Pindar situates *Tychē* as a daughter of Zeus himself (*Orphic Hymn* 72, ll. 1-2), and if we align this version with Homer's, we can perhaps deem Persephone (the daughter of Zeus and Demeter) and *Tychē* as half-sisters, related in sharing a father, but not a mother. In this short hymn, Pindar refers to *Tychē* as a saving goddess who, in being the daughter of Zeus himself, has a hand in seafaring adventures, decisions made about wars, and the general counsel of the *polemoi* (citizens). In addition to having a say in these three areas, according to Pindar, *Tychē* also has a hand in the many things that befall (σύμβολον, Pindar l. 10) us, things that we ourselves could not anticipate. To some people there comes an unseen reversal of an otherwise ordinarily anticipated chain of events, and these things that happen to people—of which they could hardly have dreamed—change the course of everything in a short space of time, according to the hymn (Pindar ll. 10-17). The powerful hand of *Tychē* thus establishes itself here as that which is *ymbōlon*, literally a "falling together" of events that, in being unanticipatable, relinquish the control a person may think that one has over her life. The force of *Tychē* thus shows itself here as a saving goddess (σώτειρα Τύχα, Pindar l. 1) whose saving powers might very well be in the destruction of a life, i.e., in the reversal of one person's anticipated good fortune based on a series of identifiably diligent and willful acts, for whom being "saved" might actually result in being thrust into danger, swept into the sea, or galloping into war.

This moment of falling, described by Pindar, is decisive for Persephone. Relating to *Tychē* as a friend in the Homeric hymn, Persephone disappears through a chasm in the earth, protesting to her mother that it all happened against her wishes (Homer l. 432). However, we might argue that the daughter protests too much in order to soothe her mother, for Persephone notes that it was not by her own desire that she returned from Hades to console her mother, but that, since Persephone's disappearance, Demeter's cessation of vegetative life on earth—compounded with a vengeful ire toward the gods—had its share in an impermissible destruction of living things such that the gods summoned Persephone to soothe her destructive mother (Homer ll. 405-410). Thus we might question Persephone's sincerity in her return to her mother, and we must wonder whether Persephone, now wed to a god, might not prefer her powerful life to that of a mere maiden. After all, not until she descends to Hades is called by her name, "Persephone," in the hymn with regularity (i.e., she is called *Korê* before her disappearance in all cases except when Hekate refers to her as Persephone when first encountering Demeter). After her descent she is called *daiphron* ("thoughtful," l. 359), and *periphron* ("circumspect," Homer l. 359, ll. 370-371), two words that ring of *phronēsis* ("practical wisdom") and that are attributable to Persephone *only after* her seduction/ abduction. Interestingly, she is first deemed to have these attributes by her husband, who, in calling her "thoughtful Persephone," perhaps recognizes something in her that others don't. Also suggestive, Persephone is called *Korê* only one time after her disappearance, when she is reunited with her mother, to whom she plays a subordinate role (Homer l. 439). The narrator of the hymn calls her *Korê*, noting that Hekate, upon the reunion of Demeter and her daughter, often caressed Persephone/*Korê* as mother and daughter themselves embraced. Thus, as the role of daughter, Persephone is deemed *Korê*; as queen of the underworld, she is Persephone: thoughtful, unruly, powerful. In the *Theogony*,



Persephone is ἐπαίνης Περσεφονείης, both praised *and* dreaded (Homer I. 768, 774). In this way, she may be importantly related to her eldest sister, Styx, who resides near her and is herself *deĩnon*, or terribly clever, as mentioned above. It thus remains that Persephone herself, with all of her power, is—as perhaps *Tychē*, embodied, personified, and praised is as well—feared and loved, missing from the earth and yet ever present below or within it.

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