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# Aristotle and the Ends of Eros, or Aristotle's Erotic Sublime?

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## Abstract

While Eros has a central philosophical function in the dialogues of Plato, it all but disappears as a philosophical term in the thought of Aristotle, and is replaced by the more rational and reciprocal relation of friendship, *φιλία*. This essay asks what becomes of Eros in Aristotle's thinking, whether as deity, natural or cosmic force, or mode of human relation. Drawing on the ancient epithet of Eros, "Ἐρως λυσιμελής, unbinder of limbs, Aristotle's usages of both ἔρως and λύσις (loosening, unbinding), respectively are traced in their ambivalence for his fundamentally organismic philosophy, insofar as they disturb the organism's ontological integrity. With the assistance of Kristeva's notion of the abject, it is argued that while Aristotle's overt stance is a polemic against eros, his principal metaphysical innovations – the recasting of ἀρχή as divine τέλος, and the separation of material and moving causes – are solutions (λύσεις) to aporias that may involve a traversal of the sublime that is also irreducibly corporeal and erotic.

## Keywords

Aristotle – Kristeva – eros – love – sublime – sublimation – abject – abjection

What becomes of Eros, erotic love, in the thought of Aristotle?<sup>1</sup> Eros, as is well known, is a key philosophical term for Plato, richly elaborated in dialogues such as the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Lysis*, and often haunting if not actively animating the dynamic between Socrates and his younger interlocutors with varying degrees of explicitness.<sup>2</sup> Eros is also one of the oldest and most powerfully determinative deities in Hesiod's archaic, 8th century *Theogony*, one of our earliest Greek texts, appearing fourth in the genealogy of the gods after Chaos, Gaia, and Tartarus, in the following famous lines:

First of all Chaos came into being. But then Gaia broad-chested, always the unshakable seat of all the immortals who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and dark Tartaros in the recesses of the wide-wayed earth, and Eros, the most beautiful among the immortal gods, loosener of limbs (λυσιμελής), who subdues the mind and thoughtful intention in the chests of all gods and of all men. (*Theogony*, 116–122)

Eros, an ancient and originary power, superlatively beautiful, affects both gods and men in both mind and body through subduing, taming, or seduction (δάμναται), and dissolves bodily boundaries in the melting or loosening of limbs. Traversing the registers of divinity, cosmological or natural force, as well as a particularly fecund and electrifying mode of human interrelating, the significance of eros for philosophy becomes immediately apparent, indeed

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- 1 My interest in this question was piqued by Claudia Baracchi's extraordinary essay, "In Light of Eros," in *Antiquities Beyond Humanism*, ed. E. Bianchi, S. Brill, and B. Holmes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), where she develops a powerful thesis about ancient eros as beauty, light, luminosity, from which I depart in my emphasis on bodily unbinding. In this essay I use "eros" uncapitalized, as a cognate of the Greek word ἔρως, love or desire. Especially in a philosophical context it functions less as the personified deity, Eros, than a force or drive that plays across multiple registers: divine, human, natural, and cosmic. The ideas herein have been presented at numerous venues and have benefited from the input of multiple interlocutors including Claudia Baracchi, Valeria Campos Salvaterra, Chris Cuomo, Sara Brill, Sean Kirkland, Elissa Marder, Noëlle McAfee, Paul Allen Miller, Mario Telò, and Iván Trujillo, as well as two anonymous peer reviewers – my heartfelt thanks to all, and especial thanks to Sara Brill for the invitation to speak at the *Collegium Phaenomenologicum* as far back as 2018, which set this thinking in motion, and to Noëlle McAfee for the invitation to speak at the Kristeva Circle, which spurred the essay's turn to Kristeva. A Spanish language version of this essay appeared as "Aristóteles y los fines de Eros ¿O el sublime erótico de Aristóteles?" in Emanuela Bianchi, *La Naturaleza in Disputa: Physis y Eros en el pensamiento antigua*, trans. Valeria Campos, Mariana Wadsworth, and Franchesca Rotger, Editorial Hueders, Santiago, Chile, 2022.
- 2 See for example the playful introductory section of the *Charmides*.

its centrality in Plato's erotic dialogues directly depends on this extraordinary ductility.<sup>3</sup>

In Aristotle, however, eros meets a strange fate. Appearing only sporadically in the ethical, rhetorical, political and even the logical works, eros in human relations, we learn, is generally best avoided, since it gives rise to all sorts of excessive distress. In fact, we find a relentless polemic mounted against eros throughout Aristotle's corpus, its place in human relations replaced by that more measured, chaste, potentially reciprocal, and beautiful form of love called *φιλία* or friendship. But this anti-erotic stance is not the end of the story. There are also other appearances of eros and the verb from which it is derived, *ἐράω*, to love, perhaps the most resounding and significant of which is found in Book Lambda, in a strong sense the narrative pinnacle of the *Metaphysics*. Here we learn of the prime mover, the divine good "for the sake of which" (*τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα*) all things act or move, which has the power to move things without itself being moved, and which does so precisely by *being loved*, *ἐρώμενον*, in the passive voice (XII.7 1072b4). This passive, or really impassive being, defined essentially as thought thinking itself, has no matter, no force of its own, no outwardly directed concern or action, but rather it is as the pure "activity" of thought that it becomes the consummate object of desire. Indeed, it is the erotic desire possessed by the celestial spheres *for this thought thinking itself* that provides the source of cosmic motion. If we follow Heidegger in understanding the significance of Aristotle as primarily a thinker of *κίνησις*, or motion, then this appearance of *ἔρω*, or more precisely the verb *ἐράω*, to love or desire, heard in the passive voice, can hardly be more significant, insofar as it lights the way toward an understanding of the motion of the cosmos as a whole as fundamentally erotic. The heavenly spheres in *Met. Lambda* move in perfect circular motion out of a kind of identificatory love for the perfect unmoved mover,<sup>4</sup> while from *De Anima* and *De Motu Animalium*, we know that animals and humans are likewise moved by what is good or seems good, out of desire (*ὄρεξις*), as well as by thought (*διανοία*).<sup>5</sup>

3 On Eros generally in Greek myth and literature, its initiatory role in educational and religious practice, and its function in philosophy, see Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Calame calls Eros a "divine personification of love," a "physiology," and a power that institutes a "whole network of social relations." (1999: 8). Aristotle, tellingly, barely receives a mention in this comprehensive study.

4 See Emanuela Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) Ch. 4, 123ff, for an analysis of heavenly eros as identificatory and homoerotic.

5 The question of whether self-moving sublunary beings move toward what is *actually* good or merely *apparently* good (*φαντασία*) is treated by Aristotle at some length in *De Anima* (e.g. 433a10–433a31), *De Motu Animalium* (passim) and the *Eudemian Ethics* (e.g. "Impulses

Anyone with a passing acquaintance with psychoanalysis will recognize the operation apparently at work in this transformation, in which eros is suppressed at the level of corporeal, human relationality and then reappears as a generalized motive force of the cosmos. It is what Freud calls sublimation – the operation by which erotic bodily drives are transformed into “finer and higher” civilizational activities: science and art.<sup>6</sup> But how and why does such sublimation take place? What can a close reading of Aristotle’s texts tell us about the fate and transformation of eros in his philosophy? We shall return to the question of sublimation, but before we do so the question of analysis itself, and in particular the very idea of the *solution of a problem*, will need to be traversed.

In what follows, I would like to trace these threads of eros, which peter out at one level while returning at another “higher” level, via another route, namely by taking a cue from that most vivid, ancient, and pervasive epithet already encountered in our passage from Hesiod, namely “Ἔρος λυσιμελής, Eros the loosener, melter, or unbinder of limbs. The epithet λυσιμελής, is composed of λύσις, loosening, releasing, delivering, melting, unbinding (and found within “analysis” as ἀνά-λύσις); and μέλος, limb, but also “musical member,” song, strain (hence melody), and is used frequently of sleep and death as well as love. As well as in Hesiod, it is found in Homer (*Od.* 20.57, 23.343), and throughout the lyric poets: Archilocus (Fr. 196), Alcman (Fr. 3, 1+3, 61) and perhaps most famously in Sappho, Fragment 130. It will also reappear in the classical period in Euripidean tragedy (e.g. *Suppliants* 47), and in a host of later Hellenistic

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(ὄρμαι) arising from reasoning are prior to those arising from irrational desire (ὄρεξις ἀλόγου). If this were not true, ὄρεξις would merely by nature proceed towards what is good in every case.” *EE* 1247b20). Note that ὄρεξις or desire is contrasted with νοῦς or διανοία, intellection or thought: only the latter faculties are capable of discerning what is truly good, while ὄρεξις is subject to errancy (see also Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*, Ch. 5, 171ff). “Eros” seems thus to be reserved by Aristotle for the perfect circular mode of movement found only in the superlunary realm, unaffected by errancy of any kind, while ὄρεξις is more error-prone and indifferent to truth.

- 6 In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud explains that sublimating the libidinal drive into scientific or artistic production is a protection from frustration, but risks a loss of intensity: “At present we can only say figuratively that such satisfactions seem ‘finer and higher’. But their intensity is mild as compared with that derived from the sating of crude and primary instinctual impulses (*Triebregungen*); it does not convulse our physical being.” Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962 [1930]), 26–7. My intention here is not to psychoanalyze Aristotle the man as repressing his own erotic instincts, as Freud did in his study of Leonardo Da Vinci: “Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood,” trans. A. Tyson, in ed. J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey, and A. Tyson, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XI: *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, (London: Hogarth Press 1957 [1910]) 57–138), but rather to trace the operations by which *eros* is transmuted in his texts.

poets. Sappho's fragment, as translated by Anne Carson, reads as follows: "Eros the melter of limbs (λυσιμελής) (now again) stirs me – sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in" (Fr. 130). Carson suggests that this bodily melting brought on by eros is profoundly ambivalent for the ancients – delicious yet threatening: "Alongside melting we might cite metaphors of piercing, crushing, bridling, roasting, stinging, biting, grating, cropping, poisoning, singeing and grinding to a powder, all of which are used of eros by the poets, giving a cumulative impression of intense concern for the integrity and control of one's own body."<sup>7</sup> Aristotle himself, significantly as I will argue, does not use λυσιμελής as qualifier for Ἔρος, even when he cites Hesiod.<sup>8</sup> By attending to this absent term, I want suggest that it is the threat to bodily integrity raised by eros, and the profound anxieties that attend this danger, that will be decisive if we are to shed light on the question of eros's fate in Aristotle's discourse. To assist in this investigation into the Aristotelian ends of eros, then, I will draw on Julia Kristeva's exploration of abjection, which names precisely the terrain of existential terror and horror that accompanies this notion of bodily dissolution. Through careful attention to the vagaries of λύσις, and the verbal form λύω-λύομαι throughout the Aristotelian corpus, it will become clear that the Aristotelian organism, and Aristotle's thinking in general, might be understood as haunted by eros, as a force at once destructive, disaggregating, and abject and thus inadmissible in Aristotle's philosophy in general, and yet also bearing some relation, yet to be properly clarified, to analysis as ἀνά-λύσις, to resolution as re-solution: to organismic equilibration and to the solving of philosophical *aporiai* via a traversal of the sublime.

To clear the way for thinking through the fate of eros for Aristotle, we will need first to separate out its varied registers within philosophical thinking, and here Plato's *Symposium* lights the way. Following the succession of speeches in this dialogue, we may thus first discern a Phaedrian, Pausanian, and, skipping Erixymachus's speech for now, an Aristophanic register, in which eros appears as a dynamic between humans, whether of the same or different genders, that is, as a relational force operating in the strictly human sphere, drawing individuals together and inspiring them to overcome their limitations as singular beings. We may recall Phaedrus's description of the great deeds of valor that are accomplished by lovers in the name of eros (*Symp.* 178a–180b), Pausanias'

7 Carson 1998: 40–1.

8 Unless we count a fragment from Plutarch's *Amatorius* in which Aristotle is named as a source for a story about the hero Cleomachus and his bravery on the battlefield inspired by the presence of his ἐρώμενον (Plutarch, *Amatorius*, 761b2). We should note the echoes with the characterization of eros given in Phaedrus's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, and its distinct variance with Aristotle's view of the effects of ἔρωσ on courage in the ethical treatises.

depiction of Uranian or heavenly love accompanied by virtue (180c–185c), as well as Aristophanes' narration of the intense desire that draws one towards one's previously lost other half, whether of the same or different sex (189c–193d). (It perhaps should not go unremarked that each of these accounts also has a tragic dimension: one may die for one's lover, virtuous love is always haunted by the specter of vicious or self-gratifying love, and in order for one to have an "other half" one must have first been violently sundered from the being, male or female, with whom one was once united).

Returning to the third speech, we find the doctor Erixymachus's discourse on eros as a cosmological force. Here we find echoes of the Empedoclean cosmic forces, love (*φιλία*) and strife (*νεῖκος*), that attract and repel the elements and lead to their combination and separation in the formation and destruction of beings. For Erixymachus, however, there are not two opposed forces. It is the erotic force alone that encompasses these two opposed forces; eros itself is doubled and internally ambivalent, with a side that attracts, combines and harmonizes, leading to pleasure, new life, and flourishing in nature, as well as a hubristic side that causes cacophony, plagues and blights. We have already encountered this duplicity within ancient eros and will return to it, but for now let us follow the thread of the *Symposium*. Agathon's speech reveals eros as a source of divine inspiration, whether of great age and grandeur, or of youth, delicacy, and charm, enchanting and seductive. The Socratic or Diotimean register of eros (201d ff), in which eros is portrayed as a way of proceeding philosophically towards the being of the forms, as an essentially ambivalent mediation between the sensible and the transcendental, is perhaps the largest stake of the present inquiry. Eros is presented as the child of Πενία (poverty) and Πόρος (resource, the way through), and is thus constituted both by lack and the possibility of plenitude or arrival at the being of the forms. Kristeva, in *Tales of Love*, analyses the Diotima episode as an example of movement toward the sublime, claiming that the otherwise homosexual and polymorphous libido investigated by Plato is permitted this idealization as a result of Diotima's femininity, the feminine "aura surrounding maternal power or wisdom."<sup>9</sup> Before we equate too quickly this mode of sublimity with the sublimation of eros

9 Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 75. The question of gender is complicated here, since women's bodies are often associated by Plato with what is uncontrolled and appetitive, although Socrates also notoriously appropriates feminine roles at times (see Page duBois, "The Platonic Appropriation of Reproduction," in ed. Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1994), 139–56). David Halperin, in "Why is Diotima a Woman? Platonic *Erôs* and the Figuration of Gender," in ed. D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and F. I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) has argued compellingly that Diotima's femininity has little

briefly noted in Aristotle's text, we should notice two things. First, no-one would accuse Aristotle of proceeding erotically in his writing, nor poetically for that matter, nor of fostering eros as a philosophical method. Secondly, and decisively, there is no explicitly transcendental movement that seeks to arrive at the intelligible by departing from the sensible to be found in Aristotle's thought. But before returning properly to the question of the possibility of an Aristotelian eros, some final remarks on the *Symposium*.

The final episode of the dialogue consists, as is well known, in the great drunken party-crash by Alcibiades (212d). Here, we return to the human dimension of eros in the dramatization of the explicitly erotic dynamics acted out among various players, namely Socrates, Alcibiades, and Agathon. Rather than an encomium to Eros, we find an encomium to Socrates himself, who may therefore be understood as a stand-in for Eros. There is something enigmatic in this episode, which Lacan offers as a classic scenario of the transference dynamic, at once philosophic and psychoanalytic. The enigma for Lacan lies in the notion of the ἄγαλμα, the sacred image that, according to Alcibiades, lies hidden within Socrates' ugly Silenus-like exterior (216d–e), which, once glimpsed, proves “so godlike, so golden, so beautiful, and so utterly amazing” (217a). For Lacan, Socrates is desirable precisely “because Socrates knows that he does not have it.”<sup>10</sup> That is, this idealized “something extra” that incites eros, this “sublime object of desire,” is revealed as an absence, something that is not there at all, and the secret of possessing it turns out to be simply the possession of the knowledge of its non-existence. The appearance, once again, of a sublime element within the thoroughly corporeal Alcibiades scene complicates Kristeva's identification of a clear contrast between a “raving” or “manic” Platonic eros identified with Alcibiades, and a “sublime eros” identified with the transcendent movement of Diotima. A question arises: is the sublime that appears in the philosophical discourse on eros a passage to the plenitude or positivity of being, as in Diotima's discourse, or something more insubstantial, something glimpsed but never possessed – evanescent, even deceptive, like the Socratic ἄγαλμα? And what might its connection be to what we have called the operation of sublimation in Aristotle's discourse? From here, then, I would like to draw out two threads that issue from this dialogue. The first is the question of the nature of eros itself as it is transmuted in the thought of Aristotle – is it a singular force, one whose movement is combinatory and synthetic, or is it rather, as Plato sometimes seems to suggest, twofold or internally

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to do with actual women, but is rather “a figure by means of which Plato represents the reciprocal and (pro)creative erotics of (male) philosophical intercourse” (297).

10 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII, Transference*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 159.

doubled – both attractive and repulsive, creative and destructive – whether in origin, aim, or being? And secondly, to follow the psychoanalytic thread, if eros is intimately bound up with sublimity or sublimation for Plato, how might we see this playing out in the thought of Aristotle?

It is with these concerns in mind, then, that we may return to our original question, “whither eros in Aristotle?” In the doxographical section at the start of the *Metaphysics* (983b6ff), where Aristotle reviews previous thinkers on the question of ἀρχαί – first principles, sources, or first beginnings, he first considers the early philosophers of nature who propose various elements: water, air, fire, etc., as first principles, as well as thinkers like Anaxagoras who propose an infinite number of them. A central question is whether the “source/principle/beginning of motion” (ἀρχή κινήσεως) itself ought to be considered separately from the matter so moved: “It is surely not the substrate itself which causes itself to change. I mean, e.g., that neither wood nor bronze is responsible for changing itself; wood does not make a bed, nor bronze a statue, but something else is the cause of the change. Now to investigate this is to investigate the second type of cause: the source of motion (ἀρχή κινήσεως), as we should say” (*Met.* 984a21–27). The kinetic principle cannot ultimately be understood as simply inhering in certain kinds of substance, as we observe with fire (984b5–8), but Empedocles, with his theory of love and strife as separate and opposed forces that move the elements, begins to get at the truth, if “vaguely and indefinitely” *Met.* 985a13. The truth of the situation is then stated clearly as Aristotle’s theory of the four causes: matter, source of motion, formal cause, and final cause. This particular move, in which material and moving causes are prised apart, which Aristotle makes almost unnoticeably, is of quite extraordinary philosophical significance. Indeed, Richard A. Lee has argued in *The Thought of Matter* that this separation accomplished in thought of the cause of motion on the one hand and the matter so moved on the other may inaugurate philosophical “critique of what is given.”<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, however, is keen to move in this section to what interests him most of all, namely what causes things to come-to-be as well-ordered individual beings, rather than as haphazard composites. It is here, as we approach for the first time the key question of *individuation* – and this I think is quite telling – that he turns to the figure of Eros. As Claudia

11 Richard A. Lee Jr., *The Thought of Matter* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 12. To this, I would add that this separation simultaneously, in its Aristotelian formulation, inaugurates a certain metaphysics of sexual difference. The separation of the source of motion from matter also inaugurates a certain metaphysics of gender with which we, both as feminist philosophers and as humans, continue to grapple today. See Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*. Ch. 1.

Baracchi's "In Light of Eros," has prepared the ground for this project, I will lean on and engage her review of this material. Baracchi points out that Aristotle, like Phaedrus in the *Symposium*, quotes both Hesiod and Parmenides on Eros's great antiquity and primacy, as follows:

It might be inferred that the first person to consider this question was Hesiod, or indeed anyone else who assumed Love (ἔρως) or Desire (ἐπιθυμία) as a first principle in things; for example, Parmenides. For he says, where he is describing the creation of the universe, "Love she created first of all the gods ..." [Parmenides Fr. 13 (Diels)] And Hesiod says, "First of all things was Chaos made, and then/Broad-bosomed Earth ... And Eros the foremost of immortal beings" thus implying that there must be in the world some cause to move things (κινήσει) and combine them (συνάξει). (*Met.* 984b24–30)

Aristotle here has moved on from the question of the creation of the universe or nature as a whole, and is broaching the key question of individuation or ontogenesis, the coming to be of the individual being that is arranged well or beautifully (*Met.* 984b11), arguably his primary metaphysical problematic. And it is as a very ancient and originary principle of motion that eros, as Baracchi notes, foreshadows the role it will ultimately play in cosmic motion in *Metaphysics* Lambda. But here it is not just motion or κίνησις *tout court* that is the function of eros, but a force of combination or gathering together, συνάξει, that is, a specifically individuating force. Baracchi is sensitive, however, to Aristotle's perhaps deliberate omission of Hesiod's line where ἔρως is described as λυσιμελής, limb loosening, which we may attribute here to his emphasis on binding and holding together (συνάξει) as opposed to unbinding. Indeed, as we read on, he immediately turns to consider the fact that disorder (ἀταξία) and ugliness (τό αἰσχρόν), are also endemic in the cosmos, and then cites Empedocles on love (in this case φιλία) and strife (νεῖκος), glossing love as the cause of good and strife as the cause of evil. Moving thus from considering a single principle to two, he then relates these two movements within eros – gathering and pulling apart – to two of his own four causes from the *Physics*, namely the source of motion (ἀρχή κινήσεως), what Aristotelians call the "efficient cause," and the material cause. "Ερος thus remains here connected to the source of motion as the good, while the material cause is explicitly connected with strife and evil, dispersion and destruction. We cannot fail, in the present context, to hear the force of the doubled Freudian drives of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: libido and death drive, Eros and Thanatos, and indeed in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" Freud remarks at some length on the Empedoclean provenance

of these dual psychic drives.<sup>12</sup> Is it notable that Empedocles, like Aristotle, suppresses the term “eros” in favor of *φιλία*, since he too seems to divest eros of its disturbing ambivalence.

Baracchi, however, insists that the dispersive, limb-loosening action remains at the heart of the being of *ἔρως*, and she returns to Hesiod’s description of this pathos which “overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men.” (*Theog.* 121–2, Baracchi’s translation). Like Erixymachus’s eros in the *Symposium*, Baracchi’s eros encompasses both movements, creative and destructive, combinatory and disarticulating. She writes: “But if *eros* operates as a cosmic force gathering, providing sustenance, and balancing the flow of all, *it cannot not include its counterpart*: that which moves in the mode of counter-movement, which proves intractable and recalcitrant, resistant and even destructive in the face of the unifying and creative thrust. *Eros* is the name of an inherently agitated, self-differing unity” (291, my emphasis). To what extent, though, is it possible to discern these opposed tendencies or thrusts within the thought of Aristotle himself? Baracchi draws attention to Aristotle’s unusual suspension of judgment in the face of Hesiod and Parmenides on the primacy of *ἔρως* (rather than dispensing with them, he says, in Baracchi’s translation, “As for the preeminence to attribute to these thinkers for such opinions, let us postpone judgment ...” 288). This way of retaining the primacy of eros through a kind of suspension is related for her ultimately to the luminous shining forth of the divine source of motion or motive cause, the *ἀρχή κινήσεως*, as *ἐρώμενον*, beloved. But given Aristotle’s own clear and extensive remarks on the motionlessness of the prime mover (1072b–1073a), for instance, “it cannot be otherwise in any respect” (1073a8–9), it cannot be either the subject of nor the bringer of destruction. It may be a living thing engaged in the activity of thinking, but its being will not admit of agitation or self-differing.<sup>13</sup> It is true that in his review of the Empedoclean doctrine of *φιλία* and *νεῖκος*, love

12 Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” trans. J. Riviere, in ed. J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey, and A. Tyson, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXXIII: *Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1964) 209–254; 244–5.

13 To perhaps add fuel to Baracchi’s thesis, it is worth pointing out that by calling the Divine Prime mover an *ἐρώμενον*, or beloved, in the passive voice, Aristotle uses the word that, for the Athenians of the time, more ordinarily designates the boy in a pederastic couple. In designating the erotic divine as a kind of luminosity, we might be reminded of the final scenes of Luchino Visconti’s *Death in Venice* (United States: Warner Bros., 1971), in which the dissipated Aschenbach views the luminous beloved boy, Tadzio, on the beach, almost merging with the sun’s rays in a kind of Platonic apotheosis, while he himself succumbs to the ultimate dissolution.

and strife, Aristotle is carefully attuned to the doubleness of the tale to which Empedocles himself famously attests: “At any rate Love often differentiates (διακρίνει) and Strife combines (συγκρίνει), because whenever the universe is differentiated into its elements by Strife, fire and each of the other elements are agglomerated into a unity, and whenever they are all combined together again by Love, the parts of each element are necessarily again differentiated” (985a24–29). But while he is thus sensitive to the paradoxes of Empedocles’ dividing discourse, which, we should note, is a discourse on φιλία rather than ἔρως, perhaps also signifying a move toward the clarification and rationalization to which Aristotle is profoundly committed, this doubleness nonetheless functions for him as a sign of what he calls an insufficient and inconsistent use of causes (985a23–4), one which he will discard as he moves on to his more adequate fourfold analysis of causation.

It is not, then, within the divine or the motive cause that we will find echoes of eros’s primary ambivalence in Aristotle’s discourse. Recall once more Aristotle’s engagement with Hesiod, “And Hesiod says, ‘First of all things was Chaos made, and then/Broad-bosomed Earth ... And Eros the foremost of immortal beings’” (*Met.* 984b28–30). Discernible here is a second significant omission in his citation in addition to Eros’s epithet λυσιμελής, namely the deity Tartarus, who appears in Hesiod’s text after Gaia and before Eros, personification of the deep abyss, site of punishment and torment. One is reminded of Kristeva’s comment, writing of Diotima’s discourse on eros in the *Symposium*, in which she relates that man, in warding off death through the appropriation of symbolic fecundity, “goes round the feminine, which is his abyss and his night.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike Plato, then, Aristotle will elide and suspend the troubling ambivalence inherent within eros, giving us instead a *Theogony* in which an originary opening or gap (*Chaos*) produces a benign broad-breasted Gaia, and in which the horrors of Tartarus are neatly traversed to deliver us an Eros cleansed of unsettling elements, no longer even the *most beautiful*, as Hesiod has it, but now the *foremost* (μεταπρεπής): the most distinguished, or even heroic (I owe this observation to Claudia Baracchi).<sup>15</sup> Now, without pretending to finally resolve the sticky problem of whether as a matter of psychoanalytic *fact* there are two opposed drives, or just one drive, a libido that encompasses an aspect that gathers and unifies alongside an aspect that disarticulates and destroys,<sup>16</sup> I want to ask whether, with Kristeva’s assistance, we might detect

14 Kristeva, *Tales*, 76.

15 Baracchi, “In Light,” 290.

16 The later Freud, following Empedocles as we saw, insists on two drives, while Lacan will assimilate the death drive to a will to create and to *jouissance* (pleasure understood

traces of eros the limb-melter in Aristotle. Kristeva, unlike Aristotle, with his polemic against eros in human relations, recognizes an unsurpassed value in love; she even makes life itself coterminous with love: "If it lives" she writes, "your psyche is in love. If it is not in love, it is dead. 'Death lives a human life,' Hegel said. That is true whenever we are not in love or are not in analysis."<sup>17</sup> Where then, might we detect the workings of eros, melter of limbs, bringer of corporeal dissolution, within the Aristotle's clarifying and distinction-making philosophical procedure?

## 1 The Organism

Aristotle's teleological thinking is, as I have argued elsewhere, fundamentally grounded in the figure of the organism.<sup>18</sup> His primary phenomenological insight is that an organism develops from a simple seed into a complex yet unified whole which, when it flourishes, is complete in ἐντελεχεία and active in ἐνεργεία, and comprises a functional system of parts and wholes. Even beyond his extensive biological writings, throughout the corpus he relies pervasively on analogies with the healthy and flourishing organism, whether he is speaking of proportionate speeches in the *Rhetoric*, political harmony in the *Politics*, moral balance in the *Ethics*, or well-made literature in the *Poetics*. The healthy

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beyond the economic model of equilibration), resonating with ancient eros as understood here (see, for example, Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 212. Jonathan Lear in "Give Dora a Break! A Tale of Eros and Emotional Disruption," in *Erotikon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern*, ed. S. Bartsch and T. Bartscherer, 196–212 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) argues (in quite Aristotelian fashion) that there is one constructive, libidinal drive subject to breaks or accidents from outside, while Žižek, responds, in "The Swerve of the Real" in the same volume, that erotic experience is itself a kind of break. Rosaura Martinez Ruiz, in *Eros: Beyond the Death Drive*, trans. R. McGlazer, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), also argues for a single, multidimensional erotic drive. Beyond psychoanalytic conceptions, Reiner Schürmann in *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. R. Lilly, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) speaks of two "traits" or modes of "traction" within existence – natality and mortality – not as symmetric opposites but rather as a kind of thrust and an undertow, a movement always accompanied by a countermovement (23). Shannon Mussett, in *Entropic Philosophy: Chaos, Breakdown, and Creation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022) argues, invoking Nietzsche, that entropic force is essential to creation (157ff).

17 Kristeva, *Tales*, 15.

18 See Emanuela Bianchi, "Aristotle's Organism, and Ours" in *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Metaphysics*, eds. Abraham Jacob Greenstine and Ryan J. Johnson (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

organism is often referenced by Aristotle as a paradigm of anything that lives well, that is, that lives in accordance with the good, to which all things in the cosmos seem to tend, even if they rarely reach this condition in actuality. In this light, it is not hard to see why Aristotle might polemicize against eros and the bodily disaggregations it may induce, described so vividly in Sappho's famous Fragment 31, translated here by Anne Carson:

He seems to me equal to gods that man  
 whoever he is who opposite you  
 sits and listens close  
     to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing – oh it  
 puts the heart in my chest on wings  
 for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking  
     is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin  
 fire is racing under skin  
 and in eyes no sight and drumming  
     fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking  
 grips me all, greener than grass  
 I am and dead – or almost  
     I seem to me

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty<sup>19</sup>

We have this poem fragment in a state of relative completion due to Longinus' extended citation, several centuries later, in *On Sublimity*, 10.1. As Carson reminds us, Longinus argues that the poem achieves a sublime effect because Sappho is able to integrate so many "overstretched" (ὑπερτεταμένα) elements into a unity. He writes: "[Sappho] is cold and hot, mad and sane, frightened and near death, all by turns" (*On Sublimity*, 10.3). The word he uses to indicate this integration of extremes is σύνδησαι, binding together, the verb δέω, to bind, being more or less the antonym of λύω, to loosen. In Aristotle's *Poetics*,

19 Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 63.

the noun form δέσις indicates the setting up and complication, the knotting of the plot, which precedes the λύσις, the plot's unbinding or denouement. The integrity of the poem, the binding it performs, thus moves against the bodily unbinding indicated by eros. We might say it is the very ambivalence within eros itself that creates the upward, transcending, sublime effect (in the Greek sublimity is ὕψους, quite literally "height," sharing a root with ὑπέρ and ὑπό). As Carson has it, "Sappho's body falls apart, Longinus' body comes together: drastic contract of the sublime."<sup>20</sup> Aristotle will of course treat the question of textual integrity as he anatomizes the well-made plot in his *Poetics*, but before we broach the question either of poetics or of sublimity in Aristotle, let us return to his more explicit anti-erotic polemic. Aristotle raises the theme of eros in several contexts throughout the discourses on ethics as well as in the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*, and quite strikingly in the *Prior Analytics*, in a spirit that resembles at least in some respects Lysias's speech on the superiority of the nonlover in Plato's *Phaedrus*, without, of course, the ultimate end of seduction that animates that dialogue.

To mention just a few examples: Aristotle begins the *Eudemian Ethics* by quoting the poet Theognis' claim, inscribed in the temple of Leto at Delos, that, more than justice's beauty or health's desirability, to gain one's love (ἔρα) is the most pleasurable thing (ἡδίστον) of all (*EE*, 1214a1–8). He offers this, however, only in order to immediately dismiss it, avowing instead the primacy of εὐδαιμονία, (happiness; living well with your δαίμων) as simultaneously the most pleasurable, most beautiful, and best thing. In the same text we learn that both love and spiritedness or anger are instances of a πάθος ἀλόγιστον, an irrational or incalculable undergoing or suffering, since they render one ecstatic, beside oneself (ἐκστατικόν) (*EE* 1229a20). Love, as he puts it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is moreover an excessive state of emotion (ὑπερβολή) of a kind that is felt by nature towards one only, rather than for many, and it is therefore exclusive and strife-causing (*EN* 1157b10), and in the same text love is listed alongside poverty, pain, and sorrow as a possible ground for the cowardly act of suicide (*EN* 1116a13–16). In the *Politics* he describes how love among the ruling classes can have large-scale political consequences; for example an ancient Syracusan ruler's love affair with a friend's ἐρώμενον, or beloved boy, is said to have led directly to revolution (*Pol.* 1303b19–26). Not only does eros create factions, but for Aristotle it also seems to immediately raise the specter of incest, invoked in the *Rhetoric* in the context of refuting an enthymeme asserting that love is always good (*Rhet.* 1402b1–4). We also find this threat of

<sup>20</sup> Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 364.

incest at work in Aristotle's critique of Plato's *Republic* in *Politics* Book 2, where are told that in such a polity father-son or brother-brother love will pose an ever-present danger: "it is curious that a theorist who makes the sons common property only debars lovers from intercourse and does not prohibit love, nor the other familiarities, which between father and son or brother and brother are most unseemly, since even the fact of love between them is unseemly" (*Pol.* 1262a33–5). Arguing once again for the preferability of friendship over erotic love, he states that the Aristophanic conception of eros in the *Symposium*, in which two lovers, originally one being having being rent asunder, seek to meet and merge, would lead to annihilation of the individual personalities and indeed of friendship itself: "in such a union it would be inevitable that both would be spoiled, or at least one, and in the state friendship would inevitably become watery in consequence of such association, and the expressions 'my father' and 'my son' would quite go out" (*Pol.* 1262b11–17).

In addition to these directly liquifying and destructive effects of eros upon the organism, there are ill-effects upon our conduct, and disastrous problems that arise from the asymmetry of the typical Greek paederastic relationship between lover and beloved. In the *Eudemian Ethics* we learn that the kind of bravery or daring inspired by a lover is not true courage for it is merely rash, and will fade after the feeling of love subsides (*EE* 1229a21–4). The *Rhetoric* reminds us that love moves us to sometimes do wrong to people in order to gain favor with an ἐρώμενον (*Rhet.* 1373a19), as well as listing those in love alongside the thirsty, the sick, the necessitous, and those engaged in war as especially prone to anger insofar as they might be thwarted in the pursuit of that which they lack (*Rhet.* 1379a17). And we learn, again in *EE*, that disputes will necessarily arise from an asymmetrical relationship because "in erotic matters one party may pursue the other for the sake of a pleasurable shared life,<sup>21</sup> while the other may pursue the one as useful," and further, because "the lover does not see that they have not the same reason for their affection" (*EE* 1243b15–25). In the *Prior Analytics*, we find the following striking syllogistic demonstration. Aristotle provides us with two pairs of opposites: first, A, we have a lover disposed to sexually gratify us, versus one, B, not so disposed, and second, C, a lover who does not actually engage in our sexual gratification, versus D, one who does in fact gratify us. The distinction between the pairs relies on the Aristotelian

21 The concept of shared life, συζῆν, in Aristotle is explored at length by Sara Brill in "Aristotle's Meta-zoology: Shared Life and Human Animality in the *Politics*," in *Antiquities Beyond Humanism*, ed. E. Bianchi, S. Brill, and B. Holmes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 97–121, and in *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

distinction between δύναμις and ἐνεργεία: capable of or disposed to X, versus actually engaging in X. His argument, quite valid but possibly not quite sound, proceeds as follows: If the best case scenario is not available, namely that of having a lover who is both disposed to gratify and who actually gratifies us, what is the next best choice? He judges it preferable, in the less than optimal case, to have a lover disposed to gratification, but who does not actually engage in it, over a lover not so disposed, who does actually engage in it. Given the priority that Aristotle establishes more generally in his thinking, and developed specifically over the course of the *Metaphysics*, of ἐνεργεία (activity) over δύναμις (potential), this is a surprising conclusion indeed. Impulsive, instrumentally gratifying, or otherwise pragmatic “undisposed” sexual love is apparently not worth it all.<sup>22</sup> The conclusion is as follows: “To be loved (φιλεῖσθαι), then, is preferable to intercourse (συνουσία), according to the nature of eros.” Ἔρως, then, is a matter of φιλία rather than intercourse. If it is most of all that, that is also its end (τέλος). Either intercourse, then, is not an end at all, or it is for the sake of being loved (φιλεῖσθαι)” (*Prior Anal.* 68b2–6). The syllogism entirely dispenses with carnal eros, which is judged not to be an end in itself at all. It is certainly tempting to align its subsumption within φιλία, as the right *telos*, with a certain contemporary puritanical disposition, not to mention with what Elizabeth Grosz has called the “profound somatophobia” of the history of Western philosophy.<sup>23</sup> The radical queer consequences of this incommensurability between erotic desire and sex suggested by Halperin notwithstanding,<sup>24</sup> eros itself is determined to be really a subset of φιλία and, according to Aristotle’s analysis, should just be subsumed into the greater and more sober end of friendship. We might say that what Aristotle accomplishes here is a simultaneous sublation *and* sublimation of eros, along with all the encumbrances that accompany physical love, via the operation of logic. Hence Aristotle’s well-known preference for friendship or φιλία over what he sees as the inevitable inequalities and fleeting nature of the erotic relationship. As he puts it rather pithily in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “a friendship between two witty people is preferable to the erotic dynamic, which often fades as beauty fades” (*NE* 1157a5).

22 This kind of sex is presumably “consensual,” if we may be permitted the anachronism. The sense seems to indicate something more in the region of “sex without love” rather than forced sex, i.e., as in the position of the “nonlover” advocated in Lysias’s speech in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

23 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 5.

24 David Halperin, provoked by Aristotle to title his essay “What is Sex For?” *Critical Inquiry*, 43.1 (2016): 1–31, supplies a thoroughgoing and comprehensive analysis of the syllogism.

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle pushes the problem of the hierarchical relationship between lovers further still, comparing it to that between ruler and ruled, or benefactor and beneficiary. The parties of the hierarchical relationships typical of pederasty cannot find reciprocity nor pleasure in the same thing according to Aristotle, since “it would be ludicrous if one were to accuse the god because he does not return love in the same way as he is loved or for a subject to make this accusation against a ruler; for it is the part of a ruler to be loved, not to love, or else to love in another way” (1238b28–30). Here, the model against which human hierarchical relationships are measured is that between the divine and whomever loves him, a superlative or transcending – sublime – form of love. In particular, we should note that it is the beloved, the one who “is loved,” who is identified with the divine or the ruler, rather than the active older lover, which rather complicates or vitiates our understanding of the nature of hierarchy in the realm of love. Rather than using the term ἐραστής that normally denotes the older, active, male lover, Aristotle uses the participle ὁ ἐρῶν, the loving man or the man in love. This inversion, or rather, modification of the standards of Greek pederasty in erotic matters, elevates the ἐρώμενον and renders the lover less transitively “active,” but, rather, *susceptible to* or bound up in love, and seems to pave the way for Aristotle’s identification of the divine with the ἐρώμενον in the *Metaphysics*.<sup>25</sup> It also forms an important bridge between the registers of personal love and cosmic or divine love as that force which moves us and the whole world. Aristotle’s lover, we learn, is less the older man in command who, like Lysias in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and perhaps Socrates himself (though this raises complex questions which we will touch on later), puts to work well-honed arts of rhetoric and seduction in his pursuit of the beloved. Rather, he is one swept up by the beloved’s radiance, as Baracchi’s analysis of eros as luminosity would insist.

Instead of engaging one another erotically, then, men bound together by the equal and reciprocal, non-erotic and non-carnal dynamic of φιλία are prepared to be oriented through this sublation and sublimation towards the divine and the good, a triangulation wherein the erotic, vertical axis is the specific preserve of the relation between mortal and divine. In the cosmological context, of course, the beings moved out of love for the divine are not human lovers of flesh and blood but the heavenly spheres, themselves immortal and

25 A precedent for such erotic reciprocity across hierarchy can be found in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, where the herald describes his love of the fatherland, and the chorus replies “you were struck by longing for those who returned your love” (τῶν ἀντερώντων ἰμέρω πεπληγμένοι) (540–45). I thank an anonymous reviewer for *Research in Phenomenology* for this reference.

subject to no form of change except circular motion, and certainly not coming to be or passing away. It is thus in the theological register that eros legitimately reappears, now along a desiring and teleological vector, moving the heavenly spheres who are moved by their love, as well as inaugurating the movement of the rest of the cosmos. What, then, has become of the threat that eros cannot fail to bear, its everpresent danger of limb-loosening, of unbinding, of destruction? Returning now to the vision of "Ἔρος λυσιμελής, we will seek to bring into focus a kind of love that undoes us not just at the human levels of ἦθος, ἄνθρωπος, or ψυχή, but also, it would seem, at the level of the organism and even at the level of the cosmos, and thus at the levels of nature (φύσις) and metaphysics.<sup>26</sup>

## 2 Kristeva and the Bodily Boundary

In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva tells a dialectical narrative of love and its role in the development of Western subjectivity, at once psychoanalytic, phenomenological, historical, and dialectical. She relates that the subject *fascinated* by its image in the mirror is exemplified by the figure of Narcissus, who is given his first literary treatment in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, composed in the first decade of the Common Era. The advent of Narcissus, for Kristeva, gives rise to a new kind of psychic interiority, an "internalization of reflection in order to transform Platonic ideality into speculative internality"<sup>27</sup> that could not have been dreamt of by Aristotle. That, for Narcissus, the fascinating object of love turns out to be merely himself is, according to Kristeva, a cause of great anguish, but one that inaugurates a psychic *space* as its own object: "the object of Narcissus *is* psychic space, it is representation itself, fantasy."<sup>28</sup> The risk borne by this fledgling interiority is twofold: not only does the narcissistic structure

26 The role of nature (φύσις) in human action is a theme in a passage from *EE*, but appearing long before the one under discussion, in a discourse about voluntary and involuntary actions. Here, we learn that ἔρωσις, and some kinds of θυμός too, anger or spirit, and other natural impulses (τὰ φυσικά) are reckoned by many to be involuntary, because "their power is even beyond nature (ὑπὲρ τὴν φύσιν); and we pardon them as naturally capable of constraining nature" (1225a20–23). The strangeness of this hypernature, the forceful or violent overpowering of nature *by nature* (πεφυκότα βιάζεσθαι τὴν φύσιν) should strike us, and, in addition to a hint of the sublime at work here, I would also like to suggest, in a preliminary way, that where we find in Aristotle's discourses elements within nature that have somehow turned again nature itself, the παρὰ φύσιν against the κατὰ φύσιν, manifesting as βία, force or compulsion, what I have called the operation of a "feminine symptom."

27 Kristeva, *Tales*, 115.

28 *Ibid.*, 116.

forms a block to loving another, but it also indicates the presence of “infantilism and perversion on the brim of western internality.”<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, as she also claims, “Platonic dialogism is transformed ... into a monologue that must indeed be called speculative” – narcissism thus initiates, for Kristeva, the entire Western tradition of speculative thinking. Here, I would like to follow Pleshette DeArmitt’s sensitive reading in *The Right to Narcissism*, which emphasizes the primacy of this narcissism for Kristeva not only as a closed ipseity, but also as the condition of possibility of all subsequent genuine love relationships.<sup>30</sup> DeArmitt saw in Kristeva’s narcissism the possibility that *all* love of or identification with another is *lined* by narcissism, rather than positing narcissism as an affliction or threat to be necessarily evaded. But if the mirror image opens up for Kristeva the possibility of a genuine love for the other, we also need to attend to what precedes it at the level of corporeity in the infant’s experience and being. So to get to the meat, or should I say viscera, of the matter, which we have kept at bay for too long, we will need to consider the infant’s vulnerable, uncontrolled and unboundaried body in its precarious separation from the maternal body. This is the terrain of the abyssal, engulfing, visceral, primal relationship with the mother and its role in individuation so vividly described in Kristeva’s famous account of abjection in *Powers of Horror*. For Kristeva the disgust response characteristic of abjection is provoked by a threat to bodily integrity, illustrated by her vivid example the “skin on the milk,” whose filmy insubstantiality revolts and nauseates me, makes me “spit myself out” as I retch, in a somewhat vain attempt to reestablish wholeness and separateness.<sup>31</sup> The vile sensation of abjection she relates to the ever present threat of engulfment by the maternal body (this dripping trope is familiar to us from horror scenes ranging from Aeschylus’ depiction of the Furies in the *Eumenides* to movies such as *Aliens*<sup>32</sup>), evoking the abyssal, horrifying, primal dimension of the relationship with the mother. It is the maternal body, I propose, in addition to simply the dissolution of the organism, that gives a certain name, place, substantiality, and motivation to that which is suppressed in Aristotle’s elision of “Ερος λυσιμελής.

In Kristeva’s dialectical discourse, following Freud, narcissism emerges as “a third realm supplementing the autoeroticism of the mother-child dyad.”<sup>33</sup>

29 Ibid., 115.

30 Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Im-possible Self-love* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

31 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

32 *Aliens*, directed by James Cameron (1986; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox), film.

33 Kristeva, *Tales*, 22.

Individuation is not therefore just a drama taking place between subject and a captivating specular image, but rather arrives as a necessary interruption of a relationship that has its pleasures as well as its terrors: those of protection, nourishment, warmth, care, touch, sensuousness, rhythm, sonorousness. The qualities here of rhythmic motility and vocality are also present in her discourse on *chora* in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the semiotic ground that for Kristeva finds expression in poetic language, the archaic maternal place or container of the subject. And yet even in the discourse on language, we are told that “the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora* is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death.”<sup>34</sup> She goes on to say that “For although drives have been described as disunited or contradictory structures, simultaneously ‘positive’ and ‘negative,’ this doubling is said to generate a dominant ‘destructive wave’ that is drive’s most characteristic trait: Freud notes that the most instinctual (*plus pulsionnel*) drive is the death drive.”<sup>35</sup> In the face of this comes the utmost necessity of violent separation, as she describes it in *Powers of Horror*, the need to “reject, ab-ject” the maternal, with its “constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.” “Abjection,” she continues, “is a precondition of narcissism. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle.”<sup>36</sup> But beyond this love for one’s specular image and the threat of abjection that lines it, for Kristeva, is the possibility of a more secure ground for subjectivity, represented as the correlate of the Third Party, an Other – one who the mother desires – that will serve as a “the guarantee of a love relationship between the mother and the child.”<sup>37</sup> This Other, beyond both mother-child dyad and narcissistic identification, can be occupied by many different figures, identified variously by Kristeva as the father, as symbolic language itself, as God, and, finally, as the analyst, all of whom may take the place of this Other. But, as we also learn in *Tales of Love*, the contextualizing of the Narcissus story within the Neoplatonic thought of Plotinus and the subsequent emergence of Christianity also supplies a loving God as one who loves us *first* as an originary ground.<sup>38</sup> And it is through this Other who is prior to us, in the dialectic of *Tales of Love*, that the precarious psychic interiority inaugurated by Narcissus may receive its subsequent security and guarantee. The symbolic position of the divine Other who loves, *a priori* and in the active

34 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 37.

35 Ibid.

36 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 13.

37 Julia Kristeva, “Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward (1984),” in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. K. Oliver, 333–350 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 336.

38 Kristeva, *Tales*, 111, 139ff.

sense, is a key to psychic stability. Returning now to the Aristotelian register, we saw that it is indeed erotic love for the divine that moves the entire cosmos. However, this Aristotelian big Other, the good, the divine, the “for the sake of which,” standing beyond the organism’s own form as telos, and indeed beyond the being of the whole cosmos, is constituted only by thought thinking itself, entirely impassive (*ἀπαθής*) and uninterested in anything outside itself – a beloved God, but certainly not a loving God, perhaps even a figure of divine narcissism, fully self-sufficient and without bodily precarity or material exigencies. The highest activity of the human organism, therefore, is philosophical contemplation, where it becomes most *like* the divine and enacts the thinking of thought itself. There is a kind of asocial and solipsistic union with divinity made possible for mortals here, and at the same time, motion has come to a halt and eros is no longer in operation; its price is the living body itself.

Aristotle, let us be clear, is nowhere interested in the individual’s process of separation from the mother, having already dispensed with her quite neatly. At least a century before, in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, Apollo defends Orestes’ matricide on the grounds that the father is the real parent, while the mother merely safeguards the offspring, as a stranger would a stranger, *ξένω ξένη* (660), and is not a real parent at all. Providing an innovative scientific and metaphysical scaffolding for this polemic, Aristotle separates the stuff from which things are made, the matter, from formal, motile, and teleological causes, which means that in sexual reproduction the mother provides the matter as menstrual blood. The mother’s contribution is thereby divested of its motility and is now rendered passive, to be acted upon by the sperm, carrier of form and the source of formative motion.<sup>39</sup> Aristotle’s great innovation, namely

39 Numerous authors have sought to downplay the passive/active distinction, and thus the demotion of the female contribution to that of passive matter, in Aristotle’s account of reproduction by noting that the female residue possesses potentiality for the parts of the embryo and soul, as well as actual nutritive soul (evidenced by unfertilized bird eggs), and is thus already enformed and ensouled. In this lineage we might include A.L. Peck, “Preface,” in Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. by Peck A. L., v–xxxvii (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942); Daryl Tress, “The Metaphysical Science of Aristotle’s Generation of Animals and Its Feminist Critics,” *Review of Metaphysics* 46. 2 (1992), 307–41; Aryeh Kosman, “Male and Female in Aristotle’s Generation of Animals,” in *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle: Essays in Honor of Allan Gotthelf*, ed. J. G. Lennox and R. Bolton, 147–67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robert Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle’s Biology: Reason or Rationalization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Jessica Gelber, “Females in Aristotle’s Embryology,” in *Aristotle’s “Generation of Animals”: A Critical Guide*, ed. A. Falcon and D. Lefebvre, 171–87 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Devin Henry, *Aristotle on Form, Matter, and Moving Causes: The Hylomorphic Theory of Substantial Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Sophia

the separation of matter and motion, thus radically deactivates the physical, psychical, and ontological power of the maternal body, and its role in the formation and individuation of the human organism, entrapping it within the presumptively passive placeholder that is “Aristotelian matter.” This is, I submit, an act of philosophical ab-jec-tion rarely matched in the history of Western metaphysics for its violence and summary effectiveness.<sup>40</sup>

With the help of Kristeva, then, we can see how the thoroughly masculine world of Aristotelian *paideia* and ethical cultivation, the development of the noble Athenian virtues such as courage, temperance, and friendship, the governing of the well-ordered polis through rational deliberation and ruling in turns, and the motionless activity of philosophical contemplation in which the rational soul emulates the divine, can arise in a way that is relatively free of trouble, once the disordering threat of Ἔρος λυσιμελής is kept at bay. Even if we agree with Martha Nussbaum on the rarity, fragility, and vulnerability of the good in any given human life for Aristotle, we might name the teleological ideal at the level of the organism that shines forth here as the Apollinian, Nietzsche’s heroic *principio individuationis* from *The Birth of Tragedy*, with

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Connell, *Aristotle on Female Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Adriel Trott, *The Matter of Form: A Feminist Metaphysics of Generation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), among others. I cannot do justice to the range of arguments offered here in a footnote, but is certainly true, as these authors variously note, that for Aristotle there is no actually existing thing that is not comprised of both form and matter, and that the hylomorphic stuff that is menstrual blood is of the right kind and possesses appropriate potentials to act as a substratum for an animal, and is thus uniquely suited to its role in mammalian reproduction. Nonetheless the observable phenomenon of sexual reproduction in the animal kingdom fundamentally anchors Aristotle’s metaphysics of form and matter: matter and form as metaphysical causes are paradigmatically separated by sex in generation, so that the latter may *act upon* the former, as a carpenter *acts upon* wood, imparting both motion and form at once, when they reunite in the womb. Aristotelian metaphysics thus finds its primary empirical illustration in sexual reproduction, while the observable, empirical situation provides the evidence that justifies the metaphysical account: a mutually reinforcing deductive-inductive circuit. Aristotle does in fact use in this context the locution “prime matter” (πρώτη ὕλη), referring to the menstrual blood (*Gen. Anim.*, 729a33), which, while not designating a substance that is “matter as such,” conveys just how divested of form he intends us to understand the female contribution to reproduction to be in conjunction with the apportionment of the formal and moving causes to the male. While “prime matter” can, in other contexts, refer to the most immediate or “proximate” matter something is made out of – the bricks for a house for example – the reasons given above give grounds for understanding this key instance in a more fundamental, metaphysical sense (see Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*, Ch. 1, 36ff).

40 For a development this reading of matter as abject in terms of racial violence in modernity see Emanuela Bianchi, “Matter” in *The Bloomsbury Companion to 21st Century Feminist Theory*, ed. Robin T. Goodman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019). 392ff.

the shadow of Dionysus and his dispersive, dismembering, dissembling, and immersive force quite eclipsed.<sup>41</sup>

It is in the specter of bodily disaggregation, in the image of the limbs deliquescing and separating from the body, in the softening of the body that signifies vulnerability and might permit penetration, in the physical symptoms of love that render one beside oneself and even destroyed in the *έκστατικόν*, or in excess of oneself in *ύπερβολή*, in the possibility of thoroughly merging with another and the accompanying loss of bodily boundary and self in *jouissance* – in this venturing to the very limits of the psyche, we conjure or travel close to the psychical horror of organismic dissolution and maternal engulfment. To put it bluntly, it is this very element of the maternal-feminine lining the psyche, whether as terrifying danger or desired identification, that erotic *jouissance* threatens at any time to reactivate.<sup>42</sup>

Now, while Kristeva's thought in these respects has great explanatory power, it poses a problem insofar as it may be seen to reinscribe misogynous attributions as well as normative heterosexuality as the inevitable core of human development, while arguably treating the body over-literally, threatening essentialism, and so on.<sup>43</sup> These problems are not easily resolved. But it is specifically through the phenomenon of transference love that Kristeva will argue that psychoanalysis is capable of effecting a reorganization in and of the symbolic that provides greater possibilities for movement and connection for the subject, that has the potential to *loosen* the grip of neuroses, anxieties, phobias, threats of psychosis and other forms of psychical and even political entrapment. In other words, even in this overliteral account, it is precisely by means of transference love, a force capable of presenting the greatest possible psychic threat, namely the terrifying disaggregation or dissolution that accompanies the abject, that the possibility of a cure, or at the very least a reduction of distress, may also be detected.

### 3 *Λύσις* as Unbinding: Solution and Resolution

At this point in the investigation let us turn to the other term which marks the mechanism of this breakdown occasioned by eros, namely *λύσις*. What is the

41 I thank an anonymous reader for the contrast of my position with that of Martha Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

42 Kristeva, *Revolution*, argues that poetic language itself also carries this force.

43 See, e.g., Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15–16.

role of λύσις in Aristotle's thinking, what work does it accomplish? Λύσις, and the related verb λύω or in the middle-passive voice λύομαι, to loosen, unbind, dissolve, but also to solve and resolve, might also be seen to bear within itself a similar tension between a great danger on the one hand, and a teleological orientation toward what is desirable on the other. The λύσις of λυσιμελής is, after all, also the λύσις of *analysis*: ἀνά-λυσις. Λύσις, melting, dissolving, undoing, is also an unknotting, a solving, a solution. Ἀνά-λυσις is a revisiting, an intensification and redoubling of that operation, ἀνά- being the prefix that signifies up, against, back, or a doing again, analogous to the Latin *re*-.<sup>44</sup> We find Aristotle putting λύσις to work throughout his corpus – in the physical, biological, and medical treatises, in the political sphere, as well as in his poetics, logic, and metaphysics.

Looking first to the realm of elemental science, λύεσθαι, in the middle-passive voice, means putting into solution, dissolving, melting, or liquefaction in general. In the pseudo-Aristotelian text *Meteorologica* it is opposed to a movement of solidification, *pēxis*, and set alongside melting, or *tēxis*, with which it is sometimes used interchangeably. It has a close connection to water or moisture – thus those things that solidify owing to dry heat, such as clay, are dissolved, λύνται, by moist cold, while those that solidify owing to cold, such as metals or water itself, are dissolved or loosened, technically melted, by heat (*Meteor.* 4. 382b32). In the biological context, in *History of Animals* it refers to loose attachments such as that of the tongue (*HA* 492b32), or to the relaxation of organs, such as the neck of the uterus (*HA* 635a20). In the medical treatises of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* it refers to the loosening of the bladder or the bowels (*Problem.* 869a4, 877a32, 884b38), the relieving of fatigue (*Problem.* 863b22), or the relief of a hangover (with cabbage!) (*Problem.* 873b16). The medical context is a revealing one, since here in particular, the valence of λύσις is strictly speaking undecidable. It can be positive or negative depending on the condition – it may signify a freeing or release from some ailment, permitting nature to unfold as it should, or on the other hand an unhealthy flux, moving now against the demands of nature. This destructive sense is also found in *De Anima* 2.12, where it describes an obliteration of the senses by an excess of stimulation “precisely as,” he says “concord and tone are destroyed by too violently twanging the strings of a lyre” (*DA* 424a31). We might usefully compare this with cacophonous, destructive Eros in Eryximachus's

44 Jacques Derrida has emphasized the eschatological and death-bound aspiration within “ana-lysis” alongside its inherent return to origin and birth. See *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 20.

speech in the *Symposium*. In Book 5 of the *Politics* (1307a and b), *λύεσθαι* refers to the breakdown or dissolution of laws, constitutions, and aristocracies, due to internal deviations from justice, external powers, or to gradual relaxations, where he repeats his perhaps timely dictum that, “even a small change may cause a revolution” (*Pol.* 1307b4).

*Generation of Animals* provide a particularly revelatory scene, insofar as *λύεσθαι* is a major mechanism via which ancestral characteristics might appear in the offspring. Essentially, *λύεσθαι* signifies a loosening of the grip of the father's form which allows individual ancestral characteristics such as those of the grandparents to emerge. *Λύεσθαι* functions here alongside *ἐξίστασθαι*, the middle passive verbal form of the adjective *ἐκστατικόν*, which signifies an ecstatic displacement, destruction or overthrow (*μεταβάλλει*) of the paternal principle and a transformation into its female contrary (*GA* 768b14ff.). In *λύεσθαι*, loosening, the “movements which are fashioning (*δημιουργοῦσαι*), shift into those nearby” (*GA* 768a16). Moreover, the agent, the *ποιιδόν*, or masculine principle, is, he tells, us in turn acted upon by that upon which it acts – the patient, *πάσχον*, or feminine principle – such as “when a thing which cuts is blunted by the thing which is cut, and that which heats is cooled by the thing which is heated” (*GA* 768b18–19). Aristotle falls short of the idea that the feminine matter transitively acts back upon a formal or moving principle, but *λύεσθαι*, a slackening of masculine agency or mastery, nonetheless permits something to appear or manifest in the offspring that would otherwise be occluded. *Λύσις*, we might say, is the precondition for a kind of monstration of the constitutively passive or feminine which Aristotle countenances and yet prefers to keep at bay, since mastery is always preferable. Here, there is a subtle relaxation of a process that gives rise to a shift to what is nearby, rather than a transformation into an opposite, the mildest possible instance of a kind of teratology or monstrosity, while the teleology of reproduction in the fullest sense, that is, the transmission of the father's form, is impeded.

These biological instances of *λύεσθαι*, then, while they may point to salutary or healthful processes at least some of the time, also seem to consistently point to a threat to bodily integrity that, like *eros*, involves an undesirable relaxation, softening, or abatement of masculine form. By contrast with these destructive or mildly teratogenic instances of *λύεσθαι*, the *Physics* and *On Dreams* offer situations in which *λύσις* instead permits the actualization of a potential as a kind of allowing or bringing to light. At *Physics* 8.4 (256a2), he refers to the releasing of a hindrance so that heavy and light things can move downward and upward freely, and here *λύσαντος*, an active participial form of *λύσις*, functions as a kind of internal mover, alongside what makes something light or heavy. In *On Dreams*, Aristotle speaks of residual sensory movements in the

soul which are only permitted to actualize in sleep, “when the impediment to their doing so has been relaxed (λυόμεναι)” (461b18), and, in an odd comparison with artificial frogs rising to the surface as salt is added to water, we are told such movements begin in the blood within the sensory organs and thence give rise to images, φαντάσματα. It is this sense of λύω/λύεσθαι as the removal of an impediment to the realization of a *telos* in the domain of φύσις that leads us to perhaps the three most significant of Aristotle’s usages of λύσις in the active sense, in the domains of logic, philosophy, and poetics: the refutation of an argument, the solution of an *aporia* and as the resolution of a plot. But that one of these natural usages leads to φαντάσματα or dream images rather than true solutions ought also to remind us that there are no outcomes that can be guaranteed in advance.

Turning first to the *Poetics*, we learn that every plot has a binding or complication, a δέσις, and a λύσις: an unbinding or denouement (the French word literally means an unknotting). Λύσις has a clear scope here: “from the beginning of the change to the end” (*Poetics* 1455b28), the change being that from bad to good fortune or from good fortune to bad, namely from the moment of reversal, or *peripeteia*, to the conclusion. The ἀρχή of the λύσις is coterminous here with the point at which fortunes change. It marks a fulcrum, or a point of instability or perhaps undecidability, but one which portends an eventual or hoped-for resolution. The effect upon the audience, or rather on the body of the audience member, at the decisive moment, will be an affective dazzlement leading to *catharsis* or purgation, which we might relate to the medical usages of λύεσθαι. The entanglements of a plot, we might say, are disequilibrating, obstructing, perplexing, while the resolution or denouement returns us by purgation to a state of equilibrium, cleansed.

This central role of λύσις in the *Poetics* resonates strongly with the more strictly philosophical conception of λύσις as the solution of an *aporia*, or the refutation of an argument, a usage that is endemic throughout the corpus, from the logical works such as *Sophistical Refutations*, *Topics* and the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* to the works of natural philosophy such as *De Caelo* and *Physics*, and perhaps most notably for our purposes the *Metaphysics*. *Met.* Beta is devoted to *aporia*, and the first chapter, which André Laks has appropriately called “Aporia Zero,”<sup>45</sup> treats the relationship between *aporia* and λύσις both generally and directly. Both Laks and Aubenque take us through the passage identifying three stages of the path (πóρος) of philosophical difficulty: the

45 André Laks, “Aporia Zero (*Metaphysics* B1, 995a24–995b4),” in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Beta: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. M. Crubellier and A. Laks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

initial *aporia*, the *diaporia* – an exploration or “development” (Laks) of existing opinions as well as of the difficulty itself, and then lastly the *eúporia*, or way through, involving *λύσις*.<sup>46</sup> In a 2010 essay, “Réhabilitation d'une Notion Aristotélicienne Négligée: la 'Lysis,'" Michel Bastit argues that a prevalent understanding of Aristotle as primarily an aporetic thinker must be supplemented by an understanding of the centrality of *λύσις* to his philosophical process. He emphasizes that “le τέλος de l'aporie n'est pas l'aporie elle-même mais il est l'euporie et la λύσις.”<sup>47</sup> In high Aristotelian fashion he argues that while *aporia* is methodologically primary, *λύσις* is primary in philosophical importance and by nature: “L'aporie est première méthodologiquement, indispensable même, et si l'on veut essentielle puisque l'on ne saurait s'en passer pour parvenir à la λύσις, à l'eúporia, et même à la science recherchée. Inversement le but, la science actuelle, découverte, qui constitue le débouché de l'aporie, autrement dit la λύσις, postérieure dans la découverte, est première dans l'importance philosophique et de nature.”<sup>48</sup> He calls *λύσις* “un acte par lequel l'esprit est mis en contact avec la chose même dont on peut alors prédiquer une vérité.”<sup>49</sup> In this, then, he echoes Heidegger, who writes in his 1924 lecture course, *Basic Concepts of Aristotle's Philosophy* “To ἀπορία belongs πορεύν, that one is in progress in general, that one maintains oneself in an exhibiting. The τέλος is εὐπορεύν, getting-through-well. Ἀπορία is not itself a τέλος, but is at the service of a determinate getting-through; it is always the on-the-way to ..., with regard to which one initially does not get through. The function of πορεύν is δηλοῦν in the mode in which one exhibits 'knots' in the πρᾶγμα.”<sup>50</sup>

46 For Aubenque's aporetic Aristotle there are three possible outcomes of diaporetic examination: a return to common sense after rigorous investigation, the addition of a new hypothesis to explain confusing phenomena, or both sides of a conflict coming to be understood as true and false in different respects. See Pierre Aubenque, ‘Sur la notion aristotélicienne d'aporie,’ in *Aristote et les problèmes de méthode*, ed. S. Mansion, (Louvain and Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain; 2nd ed. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980), 3–19, 14.

47 “The τέλος of the *aporia* is not *aporia* itself, but it is *euporia* and *λύσις*.” Michel Bastit, “Réhabilitation d'une Notion Aristotélicienne Négligée: la 'Lysis,'" *Méthexis* 23: 103–111 (2010): 105, my translation.

48 “*Aporia* is methodologically primary, indispensable even, and, if you like, essential since we cannot do without it to achieve *λύσις*, *eúporia*, and even the knowledge sought. Conversely, the goal, the actual knowledge, the discovery, which constitutes the egress of *aporia*, in other words *λύσις*, posterior in discovery, is primary in philosophical importance and by nature.” Bastit “Lysis,” 105. My translation.

49 “An act by which the mind is put into contact with the very thing from which a truth can be predicated.” Bastit “Lysis,” 105. My translation.

50 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotle's Philosophy*, trans. R. D. Metcalf and M. B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 108.

In *Metaphysics* Beta, Aristotle states: “the later εὐπορία is a λύσις from an earlier state of perplexity, and release (λύειν) is impossible when we do not know the knot (τὸν δεσμόν). The *aporia* in thinking shows this in the subject at hand (πράγματος), for in its *aporia* it is in much the same condition as men who are fettered: in both cases it is impossible to make any progress” (995a28–33). The image of men fettered, trapped and immovable, in a state of questioning, inevitably evokes the prisoners in Plato’s cave and their eventual unbinding by the intervention of the philosopher, but of course for Aristotle there is no exterior saving power who will descend into the prison to loosen the bonds. From where, then, might a possible solution appear? It is in this consideration of the intimate brush between the immobilizing *aporia* that must be faced by one who questions, and its λύσις, that we may turn once again to a consideration of eros.

In *Plato’s Erotic World*, Jill Gordon draws out a connection between eros and questioning, or more specifically an erotics of questioning, by first referring to Plato’s deliberate play on the words for “hero” (ἥρωες), “ἔρωες,” and “I question” (ἐρωτάω) in the *Cratylus*.<sup>51</sup> She then goes on to demonstrate how, in his retelling of Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, Socrates insistently uses the verb ἐρωτάω, to question, in close proximity to different forms of ἔρωες and the verb ἐράω (to love), inviting us to attend to Plato’s playful admixture of loving, desiring, speaking and questioning in the text. Taking Diotima’s specific question, “What is it that the lover of good things loves?” (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν ἀγαθῶν: τί ἐρᾷ) (*Symp.* 204e), Gordon reminds us that in some manuscripts ἔρω is shown instead of ἐρᾷ, a word that is both the present indicative aorist first person singular of ἐράω, to love, “I love,” as well as the future indicative aorist first person singular of εἶρω, to say or speak, to read “I shall say.” As we will recall, the parentage of ἔρωες is given as Πόρος and Πενία; Πόρος being literally a path or way forward, or as Gordon puts it, “the plenty that stands in opposition to confusion, or lack, in the face of questions,”<sup>52</sup> and Πενία being the poverty or lack of completeness that stimulates the search. Plato is therefore nothing if not attuned to the internal ambivalence of eros. Noting that Plato uses *aporia* to refer to the state of perplexity or confusion brought on by Socratic dialectic, Gordon makes the case that eros thus stands at the heart of philosophical questioning, the stretching out toward knowing, mediating between the known and the unknown, and, referring to Anne Carson’s reading of eros in Plato, she maintains that this questioning is naturally the activity that Socrates himself

51 Jill Gordon, *Plato’s Erotic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2012, 61.

52 Ibid. 62.

loves. Eros is thus precisely what animates the quest for truth. As Gordon puts it, "questioning creates *aporia* and ... *aporia* can create desire to know."<sup>53</sup>

Now Aristotle's conception of dialectic is quite different from that of Plato, and, as Bastit argues, the *διαλέγεσθαι* or dialectic that is undertaken in relation to the arguments of the predecessors, in which an opinion is denied and its opposite asserted, necessarily remains, contra Plato, at the level of *doxa*, opinion. Aristotle tells us in *Met. B* that in an enquiry into first principles one must examine, "all the divergent views which are held about the first principles; and also any other view apart from these which happens to have been overlooked" (995a25–27). A few lines later, as we saw, Aristotle says, "Release is impossible when we do not know the knot. The *aporia* in thinking shows this in the subject at hand" (λύειν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγνοοῦντας τὸν δεσμόν, ἀλλ' ἢ τῆς διανοίας ἀπορία δηλοῖ τοῦτο περὶ τοῦ πράγματος) (955a29–31). Λύσις, the solution that delivers what is sought, must therefore come not just from opinion but from elsewhere, "*en deçà et par-delà les opinions*" ("below and beyond opinions") as Michel Bastit puts it,<sup>54</sup> namely from the very thing, the *πράγμα*, under discussion. Aubenque and Laks agree that the *πράγμα* must not be thought of as a transcendent thing in itself, external to discourse, but rather as the "matter at hand," or "subject under discussion," as Pierre Hadot designates one of its principal meanings in Greek philosophy.<sup>55</sup> But Bastit takes the inquiry further, arguing that, "Il serait inutile de chercher à séparer la chose comme sujet de discussion de la chose comme objet,"<sup>56</sup> since it is *what the articulated problem is about*. Digging into the aporetic knot, the *δεσμός*, in *διαπορέειν*, is thus to seek to go beyond what has been already articulated, and to seek a solution elsewhere. Is it in this encounter with something "below and beyond," namely a certain abject or sublime alterity encountered at the heart of the *aporia*, that ἔρωσ λυσιμελής might be discerned?

A quite astonishing passage from the *Parts of Animals* is worth our attention here. Aristotle writes: "For though our grasp of celestial things is but slight, nevertheless the pleasure it brings is, by reason of their excellence and worth, greater than that of knowing all things that here below; just as the pleasure of a fleeting and partial glimpse of the *ἐρώμενον* is greater than that of an accurate view of other things, no matter how numerous or great they are"

53 Ibid., 74.

54 Bastit, "Lysis," 107.

55 Pierre Hadot, "Sur divers sens du mot pragma dans la tradition philosophique grecque," in *Etudes de philosophie ancienne*, 61–76 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1998), 62–3.

56 "It would be useless to seek to separate the thing as subject of discussion from the thing as object." Bastit, "Lysis," 107.

(644b32–645a1).<sup>57</sup> By contrast with his general polemic against erotic love, Aristotle seems to allow here that pleasure occasioned by the apprehension of celestial things, on account of their sublimity we might say, may well be described as the *jouissance* of ἔρωσ λυσιμελής, insofar as it is not the general pleasure of discovering earthly facts and establishing a science, but rather the undoing, dazzling, glimpse of one's beloved here on earth, to which it might be compared. Here, we would need to return to the proposition of the prime mover as ἐρώμενον, the beloved object of erotic desire sublimated into cosmic motion, as perhaps Aristotle's most significant λύσις or solution, discovery or innovation in thought. Namely, that in which in which the source or origin of motion, the ἀρχή κινήσεως, is transmuted by into telos, or the end of desire. This Aristotelian *husteron proteron*, a momentary and imperceptible shiver in which ἀρχή and τέλος, active and passive roles, switch their places, transforms the course of philosophical history. The problem or *aporia* of ἀρχή, the origin or beginning of motion, which inevitably leads back in time both at individual and cosmological levels to the abyssal and maternal (Χάος and Γαῖα in Hesiod's *Theogony*), and their associated abject terrors, is solved, resolved, sublimated, via the sublime pleasure, the corporeal frisson of λύσις granted by the very glimpse of the beloved, the heavenly, the divine prime mover.

Consider, moreover, that other radical Aristotelian innovation, the idea of matter as ὑποκείμενον or substratum, introduced in *Physics* 1, 7 (190b1–4) as that which underlies all passage from not being to being. Aristotle in these final chapters of Book 1 resolves the great *aporia* of coming to be: “We will now proceed to show that the *aporia* of the early thinkers, as well as our own, is solved (λύεται) in this way alone” (191a22–3). He does so by positing a threefold schema in the place of the previous twofold distinction of being and not-being: the entity that has come to be (e.g. the pot), the privation or absence of the pot that precedes its coming to be, and the matter, in this case the clay, that

57 Immediately following this passage Aristotle reminds us that lowly animals indeed have their own beauty too, and by dint of their nearness ought to be studied by the scientist. Further, and germane to the present argument about abjection, he writes, “it is not possible without considerable disgust (πολλῆς δυσχερείας) to look upon the blood, flesh, bones, blood-vessels, and suchlike parts of which the human body is constructed” (*PA* 645a29–31). We are then quickly reminded that it is the “whole shape” (ὅλης μορφῆς) that is the true object of the scientist's study and interest, rather than the materials of which it is made up. I thank an anonymous reviewer for *Research in Phenomenology* for directing my attention to this passage, which is also discussed by Claudia Zatta in *Aristotle and the Animals: The Logos of Life Itself* (New York: Routledge, 2022) 11–13. Zatta poses the passage as an apology for the study of animals, against those (Academicians and Presocratics alike) who afford primary scientific and philosophical attention toward the celestial realm, thus affording centrality to a “new scale of value: knowability” (13).

underlies the passage from not-being to being. The risk, perhaps, of such a moment of λύσις, of solution or resolution, is that beyond what is sublime or transcendent in this great feat of thinking lurks an operation of ab-jection, in this case, as we have argued, that of matter, the maternal, the feminine, the penetrable, now rendered passive and acted-upon. Such an operation results in a foreclosure or closure of the question indexing a flight from difficulty, an installation of an apotropaic barrier to the feminine, rather than an incorporation or incarnation of difficulty within speech.

Analysis – philosophical and psychoanalytic – as ἀνά-λυσις, as λύσις always renewed, denouement, catharsis, arrival, solution, in Aristotle's text travels an erotic trajectory that is once abyssal, abject, and sublime. Is it possible to countenance or retrieve such an erotic alterity within the sober, doggedly anti-poetic Aristotelian discourse? Might we yet discern Ἔρος λυσιμελής lurking in the ineffable moment that intercedes between a problem and its solution, or in the moment of blinding dazzlement where a tragic plot begins to unravel? What other philosophical paths might emerge by attempting to tarry with this moment of erotic unbinding in all of its difficulty? Might this align not only with a queer feminist insistence upon the irreducible enmeshment of the discursive with the corporeal but also, say, with Reiner Schürmann's concern with releasement, especially in the ethico-political sense of "a way of living anarchically or 'without why'?"<sup>58</sup> Such analysis, as ἀνά-λυσις, may remain interminable, but also portends a kind of solution that is never quite free of the pleasure or *jouissance* that may, with luck, accompany termination or dissolution – a dimension that reading Aristotle through Kristeva reveals to be irreducible, if never fully present as such, in erotic love, psychoanalysis, and philosophy alike.

58 See Ian Alexander Moore, "On the Manifold Meaning of Letting-Be in Reiner Schürmann," *Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 2.1 (2021), 105–130. He states: "Schürmann uses the term 'releasement' in a number of ways throughout his published corpus, including: (1) as an appeal to detachment or letting go; (2) as a description of the wandering, event-like identity of the essence of both God and the human; (3) as letting things be as they are; (4) as a way of living anarchically or "without why"; (5) as the very meaning of being itself; (6) as a militant means of radical enlightenment; and (7) as acceptance of the tragic condition of life" (108).