

A Story of Unrequited Love: The Tragic Character of Aristotle's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: Aristotle's *Poetics* defends the value of tragic poetry, presumably to counter Plato's critique in the *Republic*. Can this defense resonate with something larger and rather surprising, that Aristotle's overall philosophy displays a tragic character? I define the tragic as pertaining to indigenous and inescapable limits on life, knowledge, control, achievement, and agency. I explore how such limits figure in Aristotle's physics, metaphysics, and biological works. Accordingly I want to disturb the common account of Aristotle's thought as a neat system of ontological order and metaphysical closure—not to exclude such elements but to place them within a world-view that includes certain limits at the edges of being.

We know that Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, defended the value of tragic poetry, presumably to counter Plato's critique in the *Republic*. I have come to think that this defense might resonate with something larger and rather surprising: that Aristotle's overall philosophy displays a tragic character. I define the tragic as indigenous, inescapable limits on life, knowledge, welfare, achievement, and agency. In a tragic world, both natural and cultural forms are subject to de-formation as a necessary *peras*, a limiting end of form. Time constraints force me to stipulate up front, without details, elements of Aristotle's philosophy that seem to posit tragic limits in ethical life: where virtue and the good are restricted to finite human existence; where bad fortune can ruin happiness for a good person without rectification; where the *Poetics* continues this line of thinking by defending the value of tragic poetry in teaching a difficult truth about moral limits—that good and noble persons can come to ruin through no fault of their own, arising from a mix of chance events and mistaken choices.¹ Here the tragic pertains to irresolvable limits on human happiness in the cultural sphere of life pursuits. What I want to emphasize in this paper are tragic features found in Aristotle's account

of the wider sphere of nature, as exhibited in the *Physics*, *De Anima*, the biological works, and the *Metaphysics*.

Aristotle's ontology of nature is essentially about temporal finitude, motion, and change. In the *Physics*, he investigates the explanations and ordering principles of nature (*phusis*), which is directly identified with movement and change (*Physics*, 200b12). The task of analysis is to make sense out of change and movement, which Aristotle accomplishes by way of the concepts of potentiality (*dunamis*) and actualization (*energeia*). *Energeia* and *dunamis* are coordinated with *telos* (end) in Aristotle's coinage of *entelecheia* (literally "having-an-end-in" one's being), so that the movements of *phusis* involve a being-toward, a self-emerging being on the way toward a not-yet that can-be, which is to say, a coming to presence of an absence.² In thinking *ousia* as a concrete occurrence in natural experience, Aristotle is able to give change, time, and negation their appropriate senses of being.

Sublunar nature, for Aristotle, is ordered and intelligible as a set of definable species-forms. Yet no particular instance of a species in nature is a fixed thing, but rather a material being marked by becoming at every level: generation, movement, change, development, and destruction (*On the Heavens* 270a14ff.). Any being that has nonbeing as part of its nature by definition must be constituted by temporal limits (*On the Heavens* 281a28–30). Yet becoming is intelligible as a teleological process of movement *toward* natural attributes and conditions that are intrinsic to a thing's being. Nature as a whole, however, does not possess a single global *telos*; nor does it display a unified systematic order or even a single form.³ Aristotle's approach simply describes the different kinds of natural phenomena according to their evident characteristics, without assuming the need for reducing all phenomena to a single rubric.⁴

For Aristotle, the material condition of natural things mandates an essential subjection to contrary and opposite states, and thus to generation, change, and destruction. So beings in nature are "always in a state of transition," and given variable environmental forces that are either favorable or unfavorable, different beings will exhibit different rates of endurance, but never permanence (*On the Length and Shortness of Life*, 3). Nature will also exhibit irregular patterns of generation and decay that do not accord with strict numerical order (*Generation of Animals* 778a4–9), and even issue freakish errors in reproduction (*Physics* 199a34ff.). Such is Aristotle's commitment to phenomena as they show themselves, rather than fitted to pre-conceived standards set up before investigation.

Aristotle's omission of a global *telos* and systematic order in nature fits another element in his phenomenology: the recognition of events that do not satisfy explanatory criteria at all, that happen neither always nor for the most part, but by chance (*tuchē*). Chance events involve coincidences that follow no pattern or purpose (see *Physics* II.4–6). Yet chance does not displace purpose in nature, for Aristotle. All natural things move according to their *telos*, but different telic paths are distinct from

each other, with no over-arching coordination. So chance events occur when different telic lines accidentally intersect (*Physics* II.5). Because of the irreducible plurality of beings and their multiple lines of movement, chance is an inevitable part of reality (*Metaphysics* 1065a12–14). And chance is *para-logos*, something counter-rational, elusive, and inscrutable (*Physics* 197a18), something indeterminate and irregular (*Metaphysics* 1065a24–26). Accordingly, Aristotle's natural philosophy cannot support something like generic determinism, systematic order, or global intelligibility.⁵

Aristotle's *De Anima* (On the Soul) concerns *psuchē*, the essential meaning of which is not something like "spirit," but simply life (413a22). The soul, for Aristotle, is not exclusively the possession of human beings, nor is it some kind of nonphysical entity. The *psuchē* is the being (*ousia*) of a natural body (*sōmatos phusikou*) that possesses the capacity (*dunamis*) to live; *psuchē* is the actualization (*entelecheia*) of this capacity (*De Anima* 412a20–22). Consequently, there is *psuchē* in all living things, with three types of soul organized around the capacities exhibited in plants (nutrition, growth, reproduction), animals (adding perception and locomotion), and humans (adding language and reason) (*De Anima* II.2).

It must be stressed that for Aristotle, everything in human existence—from breathing all the way to rationality—is grounded in the visceral nature of organic life. Perceiving and thinking, for instance, are essentially a function of living bodies—unlike the Cartesian project that divided thought from the body in a declared departure from the Aristotelian tradition.⁶ The three types of soul (nutritive, perceptive, and rational) are "nested" in such a way that the higher functions always retain the lower functions (*De Anima* 414b20). Indeed, the nutritive soul, the most primitive of the three types, is a necessary condition for all the other capacities exhibited in animals and humans (413a31–33).⁷ It is the nutritive soul that generates and maintains the very being and nature of living bodies (*Generation of Animals* 741a1). So even when we are thinking, we are not divorced from something like feeding.

The phenomenology of life concerns the active functions of a living body, such that if an eye were a separate animal, sight would be its soul (412b18ff.). Since the soul *is* the body's living functions, it has no existence separate from a body (413a1–5). Since the human soul is essentially an activity, the cessation of the body's activity at death is the end of the soul (*The Length and Shortness of Life* 465a23ff.). So, for Aristotle, human beings are essentially mortal. In *Generation of Animals* (731b24ff.), Aristotle says that individual animals are eternal not in number but in type. Reproduction is the only possible form of immortality for living things. Here the eternal is not something timeless, but the endless appearance of (mortal) member of a species.⁸

With my discussion of chance and mortality in mind, I want to explore some other ways in which Aristotle's account of life exhibits a certain tragic character. Nature is an eternal process of becoming that has no beginning and no end, within

which living things emerge, endure by actualizing their capacities, and then perish (see *On Generation and Corruption* II.10–11). If living things are to endure for their allotted time, they must take in nourishment. This is why the nutritive soul is the most essential of all the capacities of life, because no other capacity could function without nourishment (*De Anima* 413a31–33; *On Youth and Old Age* 474b10ff.).⁹ Aristotle provides several analyses of nourishment in terms of food and feeding, which involve the consumption and ingestion of other living matter, without which an organism would have to consume itself and perish (*On Generation and Corruption* 322aff., 335aff.; *On the Length and Shortness of Life* 466b29–30). It is evident that from a global standpoint, life is a self-consuming family tragedy, where living things must feed on each other in order to survive. Not only are birth, decay, and death natural to all living things (*De Anima* 413a25–27, 415b27–29), the only way a living organism can hold off the *internal* causes of death is to be the *external* cause of death for other living things (*On Youth and Old Age* 478b21–31). Life, then, displays a tragic structure of indigenous negativity, where what it means to *be* alive demands the destruction of other lives. Yet such a tragic cycle is “in order” as the very course of living *phusis*, because life forms are food “for the sake of” other life forms (*Politics* 1256b15–20). Indeed, the overall good of the world is served by the *necessary* dissolution (*diakrithēnai anankē*) of each thing in its time (*Metaphysics* 1075a23–24).

It is clear that in sublunar nature, being is essentially finite and perishable (*On Generation and Corruption* II.10). This is not only because of external limits that figure between beings in the food chain; internal causes of decay and death are inevitable and inscribed within the nature of a living thing, fated as it were. Such causes are marked “from the beginning” in the very constitution of a living being (*On Youth and Old Age* 478b26). Decay is built into the definition of life (*De Anima* 412a14–15) and is a process based in the nutritive soul’s natural arc of growth and wasting away (415b30). Perishing is ultimately explained as a necessary consequence of matter and time: matter is essentially composed of contraries and perishing results from the reciprocal effects of generation and disintegration among the four elements (*The Length and Shortness of Life* 2); and every temporal being is “enveloped” (*periechesthai*) by time, in the manner of destructive, decaying, lapsing effects (*Physics* 221a26ff.).¹⁰

Aristotle’s philosophy of nature is focused on limits, in every sense of the term. A limit (*peras*) locates the being of a thing by marking the boundary outside which there is “nothing” and inside which there is everything pertaining to the thing (*Metaphysics* V.17). And *telos* refers to the dynamic sense in which natural things tend toward limits, which can be understood in a positive manner, as in development toward a fulfilled state, and in a negative manner, as in the biological limit of death (*Metaphysics* V.16)—note that Aristotle specifically calls death a *peras* (*NE* 1115a27). The word *telos*, as end, can capture both meanings: an

end-as-goal, and an end-as-termination. That natural beings, for Aristotle, are essentially constituted by such a “*pera-telic*” complex is shown in the word *entelecheia*, which I earlier called having-an-end-in one's being. An end is built into being as both the completion of an aim and the cessation of activity. *Entelecheia* captures both senses of being-an-end in one concept, which thus connotes an aiming-toward-ends-that-comes-to-an-end.

Another type of intrinsic limit can be found in Aristotle's thinking on *dunamis*, understood as capacity. There are active and passive forms of *dunamis* (*Metaphysics* V.12 and IX.1), of capacities to do things and to be affected by things. And human affects or passions (*pathos*) include natural capacities to suffer and be pained by harmful forces in life (*Metaphysics* V.21). In other words, with *dunamis* as a natural condition, one's being is from the start *extended-out-toward* the world, in ways that are both constructive and destructive of one's being; so that one is *meant* to be both an agent and a patient, both a doer and something done-to and un-done. Here we find a conceptual echo of the tragic sensibility expressed in the Choral Ode from *Antigone* (332–375), namely the simultaneous assertion and delimitation of humanity. Indeed, for Aristotle capacities are co-natural with incapacities and inefficacies, so that human life is fragile and precarious all the way down.¹¹

I now turn to Aristotle's metaphysics and theology, which seem to offer some compensation for tragic limits, at least with respect to cognitive and cosmological matters. Although Aristotle did not share Plato's transcendent hopes for human souls, he did retain a sense of divine perfection that could provide some element of comfort for the mind facing the intrinsic finitude of *phusis*. In both the *Physics* (VIII.4–6) and the *Metaphysics* (XII.6–8), Aristotle takes up the ultimate question of a stable ground for a world of finite becoming. Everything that moves is moved by some prior cause, but if this were the last word, we would face an infinite regress that would prevent the mind from “grasping” the whole of nature in an explanatory fashion. If that is to be avoided, there must be some ultimate cause of motion that itself is not moved—an unmoved mover.

In *Metaphysics* XII.6–7, this matter is cast in a much deeper manner than simply the regress problem, by thinking through to the fullest extent the ontological question of being in terms of the fundamental concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia*. The sublunar realm of *phusis* is a perpetual movement of generation, actualization of potential, and destruction. All natural beings, therefore, lack full actuality because they are marked essentially by potentiality and limits. Accordingly, Aristotle declares his ultimate metaphysical principle: “actuality is prior to potentiality” (1072a9–10). If potentiality had global priority, this would mean that something lacking and negative would come first, but being in an absolute sense cannot come from nonbeing (1072a19–20). What is ultimately first and prior must be sheer actuality (1072a10). Every actuality presupposes another actuality “right back to that of the eternal first mover” (1050b4–6).

Aristotle associates primal *energeia* with the divine and immortality (1072b25ff.). He modifies tradition by equating divine actuality simply with thought, indeed “its thinking is a thinking of thinking” (1074b34). The divine mind, therefore, does not even think about the world. It is utterly disengaged from the movements, changes, and labors of nature (1074b26ff.).¹² The best we can say is that the divine mind is simply pure *energeia*, the sheer actuality of self-contained thinking that functions as the last word in ontology and in causality as the unmoved source of motion.

In this part of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle also offers some interesting remarks concerning how the unmoved mover as sheer actuality moves the cosmos. Since the natural world is eternally in motion with no beginning or end, the unmoved mover is not a creator, is not an efficient cause. It seems to be a final cause, an end toward which and for the sake of which all things move (1072b3–5).¹³ So the unmoved mover moves without itself moving by simply *drawing* things toward it—in fact Aristotle characterizes it as an “object of love” (1072b3–4). Here he is banking on certain Greek notions of love whereby the beloved is supposed to be impassive in attracting the lover. Consequently, all the movements in nature, all the desires that generate movements, and all movements toward the actualization of potential, are ultimately in motion because of the “attraction” of a divine element of sheer actuality.

Even though from an intellectual standpoint, Aristotle’s metaphysics seems to overcome certain tragic limits (especially the elusive mysteries of the divine in traditional thought), I still see something strangely and powerfully tragic in his picture of the cosmos. Let me put it this way: If the world moves by force of the unmoved mover as an object of love, then I would characterize the condition of sublunar *phusis*, ourselves included, as the ultimate story of unrequited love (or of the divine mover playing hard to get beyond all recognition).¹⁴ Natural life, for Aristotle, is essentially finite, and yet the motor of life, if you will, is the attraction of what is not finite, of what is impossible for a finite being to attain. In a technical sense, finitude is defined by something exceeding finitude, and not simply in a conceptual manner. In *Movement of Animals* 6 we are told that the unmoved mover eternally moves living things; it is the primal cause of motion in being that for the sake of which living things move, as the simultaneous *telos* and *peras* of living nature, as its “end” in both senses discussed earlier, its wherefore and its termination. As I have put it, everything in nature is *peratelic*ly finite, so that *to be* is to be *finite*, to move-toward-an-end.

We have seen that a certain tragic structure is built into nature in various ways, and *peratelic* finitude provides a conceptual articulation of such *intrinsic* limits. But Aristotle’s global account of motion adds unusual force to this tragic conception. He tells us that wishing for immortality is wishing for the impossible (*NE* 1111b23). Yet the act of *living* in the world is ultimately motivated by “lov-

ing” what is immortal and thus what is impossible. Aristotle even describes the normal movement of material things, not only as actualization of potential, but as an “urging” toward actualization, where *dunamis* as capacious power involves a natural yearning and stretching-out-toward (*oregesthai*) form (*Physics* 192a18). In all, then, the very activity of living is striving toward the impossibility of sheer actuality. With respect to immortality, all living things yearn (*oregetai*) for it and *everything* they do *by nature* is for the sake of it (*De Anima* 415a23ff.). So it is not simply that natural life is finite; it would not be what it is, it would not act itself out in the way it does, unless it were attracted to what it cannot be. This takes the tragic idea of “necessary limit,” in a new direction. I would not *want* to live my life unless I wanted what I cannot have. Moreover, in the midst of this natural tragedy, Aristotle allows for mortal humans to actually get a temporary glimpse of what it cannot be, the self-sufficient composure of divine thinking in *theōria*, which to my mind surely magnifies the tragedy by giving only glancing access to what is most desirable but ultimately inaccessible. Indeed, I believe it is plausible that Aristotle’s call to “strain every nerve” to reach *theōria*¹⁵ can be compared to the tragic character of heroic pursuits in Homer, in the sense of striving for something noble mixed with deprivation.¹⁶ But that will have to wait for another time.

NOTES

1. Some references: *NE* 1096b30–35, 1178a5–15, 1100b22ff.; *Poetics* VI, XIII, 1453a12ff.
2. Consider Aristotle’s unusual claim that privation (*sterēsis*) is in a way an *eidos* (193b19–20), and that negative states have a kind of being (*Metaphysics*, 1004a10ff.). Change and becoming involve the movement *from* a privation *to* its presence, and thus from non-being to being (*Physics* 191b13ff.). For an important study of negative elements in Aristotle’s ontology, see Walter A. Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
3. See D. M. Balme, “Teleology and Necessity,” in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 278–9; and Andrea Falcon, *Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity Without Uniformity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
4. Aristotle’s phenomenology leads him to acknowledge exceptions to general principles exhibited in nature. Explanations involve either “always” propositions or “for the most part” propositions (*Physics* 198b35), and the latter can provide valid syllogisms (*Posterior Analytics* 87b20–25). Indeed, Aristotle’s specific investigations of natural phenomena do not usually provide strict demonstrative certainty, but rather “for the most part” explanations. See G. E. R. Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 1.
5. Typically, something happening by chance or accident is contrasted not only with purpose but also necessity, and Aristotle at times says as much. But his thinking on necessity (*anankē*) is complicated, in part owing to the history of the word *anankē*

in Greek thought. *Anankē* originally meant force or compulsion, usually in a physical sense. Philosophers came to use the word in reference to rational certainty, i.e., the cognitive “force” of logical relations. Aristotle sees a common meaning in all the different senses of *anankē*, namely what must be the case, what cannot be otherwise. In *Metaphysics* V.5, he specifies the following senses of *anankē*: logical necessity, the necessities of life (food, for instance), and compulsion or violence (*bia*), i.e., painful forces that work against one’s will or rational control. There is a certain incongruity with respect to these meanings that is evident in occasions when Aristotle critiques the idea of a necessity in events that would rule out purposeful movement (*Physics* 200a31–35) or the contingency of an open future (*On Interpretation* 9). Relevant to this critique is the *Posterior Analytics* (94b35ff.), where Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of necessity: 1) that which is in accordance with nature due to material forces, and 2) that which is contrary to nature, as in the forceful disruption of one line of natural movement by another line, an intersection that in this text denotes violence, but that also resembles Aristotle’s description of chance events. In *Metaphysics* VI.3, in an attempt to refute a deterministic necessity of events, Aristotle says that all living things die by necessity, but how and when they die do not always happen by necessity. Death *can* occur as a matter of necessity, as in disease, which (in accordance with nature) is an internal cessation of bodily activity. But death can also occur from violence, which (contrary to nature) stems from an external, separate line of force, an intersection that Aristotle here says is not a matter of necessity, but chance (1027b13). Chance, while contrary to rational necessity, fits another kind of compulsion that for human reason is both inscrutable and inexorable.

6. Descartes initiated a momentous separation of the soul from (animal) life. For Descartes, the soul is coextensive with the thinking mind: See “Reply to Objections V,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 210. Here Descartes specifically rejects the soul-life equation inherited from Aristotle; now the soul pertains not to living but only to thinking. For Aristotle, even thinking is always a function of living.
7. For an exhaustive study of the centrality of the nutritive soul in Aristotle, see R. A. H. King, *Aristotle on Life and Death* (London: Duckworth, 2001), especially chap. 3. There, King argues that nutrition is in fact the “first actuality” of living bodies denoted in *De Anima* 412a27–28.
8. It should be noted that there is nothing explicit in Aristotle that suggests the existence of a single, numerically identical and eternal species-form (as in Plato). Reproduction issues *variable* instances of a common type, not exact copies but “likenesses” (*De Anima* 415b5–6). So it would be wrong to classify Aristotle as an “essentialist” in positing fixed, discernible “natures” in *phusis*. See D. M. Balme, “Aristotle’s Biology was not Essentialist,” in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, 291–312. Indeed, the “substance” and “nature” (*ousia* and *phusis*) of an animal is precisely the particular animal (*The Generation of Animals* 731b32–33), whose species-form is not itself an entity but the secondary *ousia* ascertained in scientific investigation. See James G. Lennox, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 6.

9. In *Phaedo* 66b–c, Socrates complains that the soul's capacity for philosophy is contaminated by the body, especially by being continually troubled (*ascholias*) with the need for food and sustenance.
10. The material and temporal causes of perishing are combined in the following passage: "natural death is the exhaustion of heat owing to the length and completeness of time" (*Youth and Old Age* 479b1).
11. In the *Metaphysics* (IX.2), Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of *dunamis*, one rational (*meta logou*), the other non-rational (*alogos*). Non-rational capacities in nature can produce only one effect (e.g., the hot can produce only heat), but rational capacities are constituted by contraries that mark both an outcome and its privation (*sterēsis*)—so that medical knowledge and skill, for instance, can produce either health or illness, and a physician knows both and inhabits the possibility of both because they are "in the soul" (*en psychē*) of the physician. In general, we are told, the task of "acting well" in life is never a necessary outcome, but always concomitant with the possibility of failure.
12. It is not clear whether Aristotle is talking about any familiar notion of "god." Sometimes he will simply say "the god" in a general sense (1072b26). In Greek thought it is possible to apply the idea of the divine to something of high importance without necessarily designating a divinity per se. See Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 271–2. In any case, whatever Aristotle means by the divine, the unmoved mover has little, if any, typical religious significance. Aristotle did not completely reject the Greek polytheistic tradition, although he certainly aimed to replace anthropomorphic elements with more strictly intellectual features. See Richard Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Garrett (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).
13. Another text (*On Generation and Corruption* 324b13ff.) underwrites the unmoved mover as a *telos*, because it distinguishes between a productive cause that is active and a final cause or *telos* that is not active.
14. Interestingly, Nietzsche compares the passionate drive for knowledge to unrequited love in *Daybreak* 429.
15. *NE* 1166b25, 1177b30–35.
16. See Debra San, "Thinking Mortal Thoughts," *Philosophy and Literature* 19:1 (1995): 16–31. In Homer, heroism involved the tragic scenario of mortal warriors striving for immortal glory by risking and sacrificing everything in momentous acts of courage. There are in *NE* occasions where Aristotle describes qualities and actions that resemble heroic characteristics. In *NE* IV.3, *megalopsuchia*, or greatness of soul, is contrasted with normal moderation (1123b6); such a disposition is proud of great accomplishment and motivated by honor (1123b14ff.). Yet the great-souled person is also fully virtuous and unconcerned with external goods—in the sense that he would sacrifice them, and even his life, for something noble. Such a person also cares more for matters of the mind than worldly things. Another section of the text (VIII.1) describes the proper human condition as dwelling in between animal brutishness (*thēriotēs*) and a god-like heroic nature (with a reference to Hektor), which is something rare but possible for a human being (1145a28). Another section (IX.8) attributes to proper self-love a willingness to give one's life for one's friends or country; indeed any and

all human goods are dispensable when it comes to accomplishing something noble. Moreover, in the face of mortality and temporal limits, Aristotle says that the good person “would prefer a year of noble life to many years of humdrum existence, and one great and noble action to many trivial ones (1169a22–25). This kind of language could easily apply to ancient heroes, especially Achilles, whose fate was a choice between an early but glorious death in battle and a long, ordinary life if he chose not to fight (*Iliad* 9.410ff.). The context of all these remarks in *NE* IX.8 is an account of proper self-love, focusing on the virtue of indulging and following the best part of the self, *nous* (1168b29ff.)—which echoes the coming dramatic call in Book X to practice *theōria* in accordance with the best of human powers, *nous*. Heroic greatness came from achievement within a limit condition, from a spirited reach *across* a limit, without fully crossing it. No longer in a warrior setting, Aristotle is calling for philosophical heroism, beseeching us to *live* according to *nous* and *theōria*, which nevertheless *surpass* us. *Theōria* may indeed involve a detached state of contemplation, but there is nothing detached about the impulse *toward* such a state. It is a rallying cry for a new kind of heroism that stretches out and reaches across the gap between humanity and divinity, mortality and immortality, the unmoved mover and *phusis*—the gap that is the very cause of natural motion in the first place, the gap that can be reached across but never crossed.