

PRELUDE TO A READING OF ARISTOTLE'S *METAPHYSICS*: BETA 1, PARAGRAPH ONE

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With regard to the science which is the subject of our inquiry, we must first state the problems which should be discussed first. (995a24-25)

Opening treatise Beta, we are opened onto that which remains concealed as a result of our regimes of relevance, our steadfast concerns, our habits of inquiry. “With [the] regard [that opens us] to the science which is the subject of our inquiry,” that is, with the regard that opens beyond our regional concerns onto the science of wisdom, we are opened at once beyond ourselves and onto ourselves; for, it is the broadening of the scope of our concern that enframes our more habitual inquiries and interests in such a way that they become available in their narrowness. We are both ek-statically projected beyond our habitual limits and returned to what is most proximate. “With regard¹ to the science which is the subject of our inquiry,” we will learn that it is precisely the modes of our concern with the beings that proximally and for the most part concern us that conceals “the problems which should be discussed first” if we desire to know in the highest degree, if we seek the ultimate telos (the good without qualification), if we seek the science of wisdom. The problems that regularly organize our methods of inquiry and the interests they express, then, are themselves rendered problematic, even uncanny, by this regard, this unsettling gaze attuned to the science of wisdom.

That through which we become aware that “we must first state the problems which should be discussed first” is the regard responding to and organized by “the science which is the subject of our inquiry.” “With regard to the science which is the subject of our inquiry,” with a broadly circumspective regard, with a gaze expansive enough to encompass previous modes of concern and in this encompassing redirect attention toward the science of wisdom such that we can hope to discern the order of that science (the order that allows one to “first state the problems which should be discussed first”), the order of the *cosmos* that science discloses, and the situatedness, relationality, or positioning of ourselves as inquiring beings within that *cosmos* (whereby our gaze turns back upon and envelops us), we surely are attuned elsewhere and otherwise, but that does not mean that we become oblivious to or ignore our various regional concerns. Rather, acceding proleptically to the science of wisdom and thus attending to these habitual concerns in their regionality, in their inability to disclose the *why* of beings to the highest degree, we are afforded the opportunity to investigate other modalities

¹ Here it may be useful to heed the resonance of *pros* (with regard) in its configurations as *pros-agoreuo* (to address), *pros-erkomai* (to approach), *pros-eko* (to attend, to heed).

of emergence of the beings we find ourselves concerned with in our habitual modes of inquiry and to investigate ourselves as prone to concern ourselves with beings in the manners that have become habitual. Attending to that which exceeds and contains the human and its regional concerns, we are offered anew that which is most intimate: both the objects of our concerns and ourselves as concerned beings. Spanning beyond and rounding back, the regard that opens us onto the science of wisdom is both unsettling and itself unsettled, a kinetic force, as if a matter of *physis*.

Gathering and consolidating our focus into the “regard [directed toward] . . . the science which is the subject of our inquiry,” it seems as if Aristotle paradoxically opens our inquiry into the science of wisdom by declaring the necessity [*anagke*] of having already undertaken such an inquiry. For it seems that only a retrospective gaze, an experienced gaze already aware of what problems should be stated and discussed first, can “regard . . . the science which is the subject of our inquiry . . . [and] first state the problems which should be discussed first.” As if returning from the end of an inquiry into “the science which is the subject of our inquiry,” Aristotle enticingly yet vexingly inveighs us to “state the problems [*aporias*] that should be discussed first,” thereby posturing as if he is already able to discern such an order, as if he had already stated certain problems (perhaps those which we will state and discuss in the ensuing paragraphs, perhaps others), inquired into them to the greatest possible degree, determined which are the most fecund and which lead astray, and is thus in a position to tell us which problems (*aporias*) must be stated and discussed first.² In the name of the science of wisdom,³ Aristotle, speaking as a privileged representative of this science, as if initiated and thus able to direct us, perhaps so well initiated as to direct us through the process(es) *necessitated* by the science we are opening onto, conveys its injunction (thus, in an extremely complicated gesture, assimilating its authority) that “we first state the problems that should be discussed first.”

Unless we are to concede that Aristotle, in an uncharacteristically self-assertive and authoritarian manner, simply *posits* the necessity of stating first the problems which should be discussed first and then, audaciously, continues Beta One by stating and discussing what we must, on the ground of their site of enunciation (i.e., Aristotle’s authority), deem necessary problems, it seems best to situate the force of the normative injunction (“we *must* first state the problems which *should* be discussed first”) as arising from, or at least professing to arrive from, a cultivated responsiveness to the science of wisdom and/or that which is disclosed therein. If we accept this interpretive hypothesis, in asking that we “first state the problems which should be discussed first,” Aristotle does not expect us, who are at best incipiently emerging from the habitual hold of our regional concerns, to have even a vague inkling of the contours and order of such *aporias* or any great aptitude to discuss them well. Rather, it seems a great deal more plausible that we who are only initiating

² If we are to believe that only upon return from the completion of inquiry into the science of wisdom can one demand that problems are stated first that should be discussed first, and so if we are to conclude from this injunction that Aristotle is, or at least believes himself to be, returning from the culminating apex of insight into the science of wisdom, we would have to wonder what it is about the achievement of insight to the highest degree into the science of wisdom that sends him back? Why does Aristotle not rest content, reposing in a paroxysm of contemplative fulfillment?

³ Whereas *pros theon* may be rendered as “in the name of the divinities,” *pros tan* . . . *epistemen* may be rendered as “in the name of the science.”

this inquiry are expected to “state the problems which should be discussed first” precisely by “stating” them along with Aristotle, by assenting to Aristotle’s determination of these problems, at least for the time being, and by accepting Aristotle as a guide who will direct our ventures into the science of wisdom.⁴ A troubling condition for thoroughgoing (self-)inquiry, Aristotle seems to suggest, is acceding to the perhaps irredeemable authority of inheritance, to the risk of receptivity.

To be sure, although Aristotle implores us to “state the problems which should be discussed first” as if what is stated and discussed first is a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of a predetermined end, this end to which we (are lead to) aspire is not necessarily the exhaustive finality of inquiry. Nor is it necessary that we think the end to come, the end in view of which it is necessary that we state and discuss certain aporias first, as a systematically organized set of contents that constitute “the science of wisdom”—at the very least, that would risk the grossest anachronism. It is not incidental that what is necessary is that we state and discuss *aporias* first. Regardless of how well these aporias are determined and discussed, perhaps they remain aporias none the less.⁵ Perhaps what is at stake is less a methodologically regulated path to a predetermined end than an “ethical” reorientation, a concomitant change in the character of the inquirer and the inquiry. Furthermore, whether the discussion of aporias is confined to treatise Beta or in a way constitutes the entirety of *The Metaphysics* is extremely difficult to say, especially since it is yet quite unclear what constitutes a “discussion” of aporias⁶ and thus quite unclear what would constitute the end of such a discussion.

Attending to the polysemic range of the dictate to “first state the problems which should be discussed first,” it is quite indeterminate exactly what it would mean to *discuss first* the aporias laid down by Aristotle—especially since this call to order does not develop into a remarkably ordered discussion. The injunction may dictate something like ongoing, recursive inquiry: the discussion of aporias would be the first discussion of a great many, perhaps indefinitely many discussions required for a proper investigation of the science of wisdom, in which case such stating and discussing would be *merely*, however foundationally, first. In this case, the end of our inquiry, the trajectory from what is most known to us to what is most known according to itself, may be quite far from the stasis of investigative exhaustion. Insofar as the discussion remains concerned with aporias, it may remain, in principle, interminable.⁷ On the other hand, the injunction to “first state the problems which

⁴ Regardless of whether we are inceptively emerging from the hold of our regional concerns or we are experienced thinkers attuned in various ways to the question of being qua being, whether we are still for the most part held fast by our regularized interests and inquiries or initiated into the science of wisdom in our own ways, we would still do well to accede to Aristotle’s determination and discussion of these aporias in order to inquire into the necessity to which they are said to respond.

⁵ What it is to remain an aporia will be discussed below.

⁶ Would this entail a dissolution of the aporias, a discerning of those questions that do not admit of thorough dissolution and those which do, a reflection that gives rise to another way of proceeding—a way that detours around the aporias, a listing and/or brief overview of certain aporias, a sustained engagement with the unsurpassability of the aporetic, a traversal of the aporia as such, some combination of the aforementioned possibilities, or something else altogether?

⁷ Of course, the variegated destinies of the various aporias require a great deal of further attention. This paper only seeks to pave the way for such investigations. While some of the aporias formulated in Beta One

should be discussed first” may be understood as requiring us to engage in a discussion of a finite set of aporias in order to move on along a prescribed path to the peaks of insight. This is as yet undecided.

Crucially, the question of whether Aristotle’s formulations and discussions of these aporias are *necessitated* by the science of wisdom would only be decidable, if at all, after we have tarried along the path he paves for us, only, if at all, after we too are able to respond to the science of wisdom and the *cosmos* it discloses as they are opened by the initial problems posed and the subsequent discussions and developments of those problems. The venture of Aristotle’s discourse would be that only by proceeding in the manner that he lays forth could we either experience or fail to experience the retrospective necessity of the problems posed and the ensuing discussions. Only after we have followed Aristotle along the paths paved by the questions posed, only after we have become open to the phenomena investigated as well as the mode of their investigation, only then, if at all, may we undergo the failures or successes attendant thereto and on that basis decide upon the propriety of the initial claim too necessity. But it may (also) be that only having inquired along with Aristotle may we attain a more cultivated sense for the problematics incumbent to the science of wisdom and only then find ourselves in a position to re-begin with other problematics that we feel compelled to state and discuss first. If indeed we are as neophyte as the text suggests, then the condition for exceeding Aristotle’s authority, the condition for beginning and/or proceeding otherwise, is to initially accede to Aristotle’s trajectory such that it leads us to our own grounds for saying otherwise, to our own experience of the necessity of posing problems otherwise and/or engaging in discussions in a manner divergent from Aristotle’s. For the meantime, in stating and discussing these problems as the ones which should be stated first, in accepting Aristotle as our guide, we ratify a normative orientation for our inquiry—already redoubling and thereby subverting its authority. Embracing the necessity of an initial ground-laying, we are saved from the vertiginous experience of inquiry without determinacy of direction. We thus acknowledge our utter dependence upon guides and grounds, upon previous thought and thinkers as a condition for inquiry, for thinking at all.

They are concerned with matters about which some thinkers expressed different beliefs, and besides them, with some other matters which may happen to have been overlooked. (995a25-26)

As noted, the determinations of the aporias are not quite our own; we are to accept those laid down by Aristotle as provisionally, however necessarily, appropriate. But after following the paths of inquiry paved by Aristotle, we too may become “concerned with matters about which some thinkers [namely, Aristotle] expressed different beliefs, and besides them, with some other matters which may happen to have been overlooked.” We may confirm the necessity to “first state the problems which should be discussed first”

are maintained in their original form as they are thought through later, others are significantly reformulated. It is thus incumbent upon us, if we are to explore the paths opened herein, to inquire into how and why these reformulations occur within the respective contexts of their elaborations. Further, if we are to pursue the trajectory broached herein, we will have to inquire into why some of the aporias laid out in Beta One later receive what may be called decisive treatment—even answers—while others are handled in a manner that more or less explicitly maintains their aporetic status.

precisely by reserving the prerogative to disagree with the propriety of Aristotle's specific determination and discussion of these problems. Aristotle's seeming didacticism paradoxically opens the way to a critical contestation of his teachings. If the *telos* of *physis* as such— if there is one—does not guarantee for *anthropoi* a linear progress toward wisdom, if some matters perhaps crucial for the inquiry into the science of wisdom may have been contingently overlooked (“may happen to have been overlooked”) by our predecessors, it may be that Aristotle too contingently overlooks certain matters imperative for the inquiry into the science of wisdom. This is what his discourse gives to be seen, however dimly. Aristotle's (assimilated) authority is dislocated from the other side as it relays to (is re-assimilated by) his addressees. More precisely, Aristotle's authority manifests an uncanny structure: self-undermining yet persistent, it is a condition of its own transgression and so abides in what claims to exceed it.

Since it is undecidable from here whether or not various matters will have been overlooked, that is, precisely because the aporias which will be discussed first *may* have been taken up by previous thinkers in ways that are inaccessible to or misconstrued by our particular modes of inquiry as much as they “*may* happen to have been overlooked,”⁸ and since regardless of whether or not such matters have been considered previously, contingent overlooking seems to remain an inevitable danger, we are bound to return, perhaps interminably, to the formulation and discussion of the initial aporias that structure our inquiry into the science of wisdom. The science of wisdom is perhaps a radically inceptive project—projecting us into a future of inquiry illimitable in principle. And even were we to later confirm the necessity of Aristotle's formulation and discussion of the guiding aporias, this necessity would only be confirmed or denied from the perspective of an inquiry emerging from Aristotle's initial statement and discussion of the aporias, the statement and/or discussion of which may inevitably, Aristotle intimates, simply overlook some crucial matters and may, in bringing certain problems into fine relief, concomitantly conceal others, which means that even then the inquiry may not rightly come to a rest.

Investigations that begin with aporias may remain irremediably partial and provisional, *but this is not to say without ends at all.*⁹ Rather, it is to say that perhaps our ends are always responsive to our beginnings—beginnings formulated without the (perhaps ends-constitutive) knowledge acquired as we move toward our investigative ends, even if formulated in view of them, and thus perhaps perpetually in need of reformulation. We must then heed the formulation of initial aporias with the utmost attention, which may mean returning to them time and again in order to acknowledge the incessant task of the inquiry into the science of wisdom, the inquiry that *by necessity* begins with the stating and discussing of *aporias*. How far the determination of necessity seems to have drifted . . .

However, proceeding, let alone returning, will not be easy. This inquiry will likely provoke resistance insofar as we will be dealing with matters that “may happen to have been overlooked,” that is, with matters that may be more or less, perhaps even thoroughly, unfamiliar. Seeking wisdom, of necessity we run headlong into the depths of obscurity. If the matters into which we investigate are rather distant from the themes that

⁸ Notice the effort to attune us to opacity and obscurity as perhaps irreducible dimensions of insight, as shadows forever clouding the transparency of knowledge yet perhaps themselves knowable to some degree.

⁹ Although “no one would try to do anything if [s/]he did not intend to come to a limit,” the limit is not necessarily identical with an exhaustive stasis (994b14-15).

tend to dominate our concern, matters with respect to which we may have little or no footing, the vertiginous sense of beginning an inquiry without any known way of proceeding may generate quite some resistance, leading to the denial, trivialization, or facile mischaracterization of the problems rather than more serious confrontations with them.¹⁰ Or so Aristotle intimates and the history of commentary on Beta One symptomatically corroborates. Thus without Aristotle's determination and discussion of the initial aporias, the starting point of inquiry may be experienced as abyssal, paralyzing rather than aporetic. Moreover, in that we will be "concerned with matters about which some thinkers expressed different beliefs," we will be taking a stand against the sedimented authority of doxa; and so, out of reverence for certain thinkers or commitments to particular thoughts, we may again find ourselves resisting.¹¹ "Concerned with matters about which some thinkers expressed different beliefs," thus with matters that are familiar but taken up in unfamiliar ways, we will be engaged in an inquiry that we are told in advance will be contestatory vis-à-vis received opinion, and as such, likely to evoke some measure of resistance. Were it not for Aristotle's claim to proceed via necessity, were it not for the channeling of our desire to know and our pleasure in having seen into the search for wisdom to the highest degree, that is to say, without the seductive allure of Aristotle's initial posture, what we called his seeming didacticism, we may not have the courage to proceed at all.

Gathered around the formulation and discussion of aporias, we are gathered into a community, a community of (self-)inquiry bound inexorably to no particulars of time or place. Though perhaps illimitable, such a community is not without criteria for participation. We are convoked to this community in virtue of a willingness to think with and against received opinion (and by implication, a willingness to work through the resistances this may provoke at various stages of inquiry). We are not gathered as a community of the purely contestatory, as if this were possible; this is no matter of negative self-identification or mere contentiousness. Our community is less an-archic than para-doxical. We begin with differences, with the possibility of resistances, with the abiding yet unsettled authority of received problematics and opinions, but we begin, even so, with guides and grounds because we begin in dialogue with our predecessors. And because we begin under the tutelage of Aristotle: in order to proceed, we will have embraced Aristotle's initial determination of "the problems which should be discussed first," etc.

¹⁰ Precisely what such a "serious" confrontation may be remains a question to be explored throughout this paper.

¹¹ Compounding our difficulties, our concern "with matters about which some thinkers expressed different beliefs" may generate resistance from the opposite angle. Concerning ourselves with the diversity of opinions about matters of common concern, we will come to see that the seemingly established authority of doxa is never free from critical contestation, never beyond reproach. Exposed to the intervallic periodicity of established opinion and the ongoing dislocations of settled authority that subtend it, exposed to what may be the irreducibility of interpretive plurality about certain matters of ongoing interest, we may find ourselves strangely unsettled, resisting what seems to be the hounding out of authority from its historically established haunts or what we anticipatorily construe as the paralyzing effects of skepticism induced by a resolutely historical perspective. That is, resistances may arise out of piety as much as out of fear of the dissipation of the sort of authority that can command piety.

We are gathered as a community of (self-)inquiry in virtue having undergone an antecedent solicitation, in virtue of having been exposed to an unsettling force—one name or variant of which might be wonder, but in all cases it is a question of *eros*—to which we feel compelled—yet ill-equipped—to respond. The community in question is marked by a common compulsion to thoughtfully, inquisitively respond to something moving, affectively significant, inspiring, something demanding that the exhalation subsequent to this in-spiration is overfull with *logoi* that seek a responsiveness to the science of wisdom as much as possible.¹² Such a community, then, however illimitable, is hardly amorphous. Now, whether this in-spiration issues from Aristotle’s didactic authority, from his proximity to what Lacanians would call the *sujet supposé savoir*, from a proleptic experience of the science of wisdom, or from the authority Aristotle assimilates and channels from the genuine successes of his investigations, remains to be determined. For now all we can say is that, thus gathered, we can confirm the necessity—in this case the affective necessity, the necessity of passionate compulsion—to state the aporias that should be discussed first (whatever they may be). As those tantalized by the prospects of wisdom to the highest degree (or its harbinger), as those desiring the pleasure of having seen to the greatest extent (or captivated by the bearer of the promise thereof), as those willing to stand out from the accepted positions of the communities in which we find ourselves,¹³ we gather as the community of the aporia. It is perhaps only a community of the aporia that can be opened to an inquiry into the science of wisdom in its fullest, non-exhaustive dimension. Perhaps a reorientation of character—the ethical dimension—is a condition of insight here as elsewhere.

Now those who wish to succeed well in arriving at answers will find it profitable to go over the *difficulties* well; for answers successfully arrived at are the solutions to *difficulties* previously discussed, and one cannot untie a knot if [s/]he is ignorant of it. (995a27-30)

Calling attention to “those who wish to succeed well in arriving at answers,” Aristotle concerns himself with appetitive structure as it bears on the ethos of inquiry. Aristotle is here concerned with those who wish to “succeed well,” that is, with ethos, character, and what gratifies. Of course, those to whom Aristotle refers may be inquirers who wish to bring their inquiring to a close, those who wish to repose in necessarily complete insight. But they also may be those who pursue the science of wisdom not simply out of a desire for answers as static finalities. Perhaps “those who wish to succeed well in arriving at answers” are not those who wholeheartedly desire the utter dissolution of aporias, the stillness of what once provoked and challenged, the exhaustion of striving, but rather those who desire another type of answer altogether: answers well arrived at. Over against those who only “wish to succeed . . . [by] arriving at answers,” say, in order to bring the difficulties of inquiry to an end, over against those for whom the desire to bask in the accomplishment of full and final comprehension dominates so strongly that it promotes a self-subverting readiness to rest content with less than might be possible to achieve, there are perhaps “those who wish to succeed well *in arriving* at answers.” These would be inquirers for whom what is at stake is their character upon arriving and the

¹² Cf. *Physics* 253a12-14: “the cause of . . . motion is not the animal itself [at least not in an unqualified sense] but perhaps its environment.”

¹³ Treatise Alpha has already established that this will be the case—at least for the most part.

character of their arrival, those for whom it is crucial that the provocation to inquiry is preserved, the initiating state of exposure is sustained *in the experience of arriving*. These would be inquirers who, no less enamored with the science of wisdom than those seeking contemplative completion—perhaps even more so—are, precisely in virtue of this desire, interested in the experience of arriving as in certain respects indistinguishable from sending. These would be lovers of the practice of inquiry, those who “love to have seen” [*eidena*] both for its own sake and insofar as having seen, having made discriminations and determinations, generates refinements that allow for further differences to come into view, for further opportunities “to have seen,” perchance for development. These inquirers would no doubt be eminently interested in the yield of their various regional inquiries, but their desires would not be rigidly attracted thereto, nor would they be monofocally set on the systematic integration of insights attained from regional investigations as if system and knowledge to the highest degree were simply *one*. Rather, these investigators may be lovers of the prospect of knowledge to the highest degree to such an exorbitant extent that they would be willing to consider knowledge attained as partial and provisional, as ever in need of refinement, if only to keep on their horizon the possibility of knowledge to an even greater degree.¹⁴ A curious madness indeed.

To be sure, these two appetitive structures are not entirely incompatible. Perhaps the desire for and pleasure in the practice of inquiry as such, the desire for continual differentiation, specification, and openness to that which—putatively—remains forever on the horizon, can be the periodic *effect* of pursuing an inquiry predominantly organized by a desire for answers in the sense of a culminating terminus. Perhaps the transformation of desire, the generation of an ethos of incessant openness from out of a desire for totality, and this in the service of the science of wisdom, is, in part, the venture of *The Metaphysics*.¹⁵ If so, the project would be, in principle, resistant to completion. And if so, if one of the essential movements of *The Metaphysics* is a to-and-fro between a urge to totalization and an interest in what stands apart, what remains abrasively particular and/or persistently opaque, perhaps the nature of dialectics needs to be reconsidered in its wake.

Perhaps, like those undertaking an effort geared to epistemic mastery, the latter sort of inquirers also “*wish to . . . arriv[e] at answers,*” but are more circumspect about this desire. Perhaps, like those fixated upon the attainment of terminal conclusions, these inquirers “*wish to . . . arriv[e] at answers,*” but do not allow this wish to overwhelm their “*wish to succeed well*” in arriving, do not allow this interest to deaden their receptivity to its potentially detrimental impact on its own fulfillment as well as to other goods. Perhaps these latter have come to believe—perhaps they have been lead to believe—that the only way to successfully arrive, to arrive well, is to remain open to, and sometimes this means vigilantly, willfully *keeping open*, questions of whether or not one has actually arrived and how one can arrive more successfully. Arriving well, for such inquirers, may involve re-traversing ground well covered, and not only in this respect would it be hardly the

¹⁴ Here we see again how the regard directed beyond, the interest in transcendence, is itself manifest in the investigative return to what is familiar, how the pursuit of transcendence and the adventures of immanence are one.

¹⁵ More on this thought below.

contrary of the experience of *aporia*.¹⁶ “Those who wish to succeed well in arriving at answers,” then, “will find it profitable to go over the *difficulties* [*aporias*] well.” And if “to go over the *aporias* well” is in principle interminable pursuit, if such an endeavor requires sustaining exposure to the interruptive and at times subversive efficacy of *aporias*, to the ongoing perplexities they induce, as much as to the ways they can be gotten around or worked through (e.g., specified, reformulated, partially resolved, mined for various resources) and the knowledge yielded thereby, if this “going over,” in order to be done well, may be a simple glancing over as much as it may be an incessant retraversing (returning again and again to the initial formulation of the *aporias* so as to generate new and, hopefully, ever more refined lines of inquiry), what it is to arrive well seems, though not altogether unclear, radically underdetermined.

If the “solution to *difficulties* [*aporias*] previously discussed” is not the final resolution of the *aporias*, the dissolution of all disquietude, if we are still unclear what constitutes an adequate discussion of *aporias* (might this vary substantially from case to case?) and therefore remain uncertain whether or not we have attained to successful solutions insofar as “answers successfully arrived at are the solutions to the difficulties previously discussed,” then it seems that, again, we must keep open (to) the question of whether or not we have actually arrived and how we can arrive more successfully. Although “one cannot untie a knot if [s/]he is ignorant of it,” and so one must push toward the utmost specification of the problems at hand, it is as yet unclear, and perhaps will remain so, whether this analogy implies that the unbinding of the knot entails its successful (dis-)solution or rather requires the re-solve to confront the further problem of the threads constitutive of the knot as bound in their own way. With Aristotle as our guide, we encounter *aporias* again and again, as if there were nothing else.

Yet, as was noted earlier, Aristotle insists that we would not engage in any activity whatsoever if we did not intend to arrive at a limit. But perhaps a viable end is a provisional end, an end pervaded by the possibility of continuing otherwise: a self-surpassing end, but an end none the less. If the *telos* of all but the utterly simple is never exhaustive insofar as it is the actualization (*energia* naming a certain being-at-work, a continuity of directed motion) of a being that remains pervaded by potentiality, if teleological orientation (*entelechia*) names the prospective directedness of a process, the anticipated end in view of which the process takes upon a determinate shape and thus becomes knowable, then we must reconsider the way “*telos*” tends to resound with a sense of exhaustion and insurpassability. If, phenomenologically, an end is situated within a whole that exceeds it such that its status as an end does not exhaust its discernable operations within the whole, then an end is not in all registers identical with a final determination. If actuality precedes possibility for Aristotle such that the claim that we would not do things if we did not intend to arrive at a limit corresponds to a phenomenological perception of actions always arriving at ends within *physis*, this is quite different from claiming that actions necessarily arrive at exhaustive ends. Consequently, perhaps “to succeed well in arriving at answers” is not necessarily to succeed at the stopping point of inquiry beyond which nothing else can be

¹⁶ Also, if arriving well implies re-traversing ground well covered, then the indistinguishability of arriving well from a stale, repetitive, obstinate going over of the same raises the specter of a madness from which the pursuit of insight would never be free.

known, beyond which no further determinations, differentiations, or qualifications are possible. Rather, answers may be contextually provisional—responsive to their beginnings and the interests borne thereby—and nonetheless ends. If there can be no full and final solution to a *difficulty* but only further inroads to exploring the depths of the problem [aporia] and those it branches off into, then a successful arrival at a solution is a non-arrival at investigative exhaustion. In a curious sense, the inquiry into the science of wisdom seems self-moving

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But what of the hierarchies established and ends posited by Aristotle throughout this inquiry? Are these to be understood as provisional and contextually relevant, that is, as hierarchies and determinations located in an in principle perfectible if interminable inquiry? Or are they responsive to a necessity that dictates a singular path toward knowledge in the highest degree from which deviation would amount to failure? Are the hierarchies (of the sciences, etc.) and conclusions of the various lines of investigation unsurpassable and irreplaceable within the inquiry into the science of wisdom or are they, precisely as elements of an *inquiry* into the science of wisdom that must begin with the statement and discussion of *aporias*, provisional and strategic resting points? Might these hierarchies and conclusions be conditioned by the (im)propriety of the specific inquiry that proceeds to their determinations? If so, what would guarantee their necessity?

Could it be that the various ends and hierarchies are elements of a strategy designed to mitigate the force of the various resistances that this particular inquiry risks eliciting? Again, might Aristotle be interested in putting a given desire for determinate ends, for hierarchies, generally, for the satisfactions of investigative conclusion, in the service of a project that may be, in principle, illimitable? If so, what would this tell us about the nature of the end of his pursuit? If these ends and hierarchies are in the service of advancing an inquiry that, if successful, would allow the inquirers following Aristotle's trajectory to return to the beginning of the inquiry in order to state the *aporias* which must be discussed first in a manner divergent from Aristotle's, if Aristotle understands the success of the inquiry in terms of cultivating the capacity to inquire in a manner other than, though hopefully building on, his own (that is, in terms of cultivating an openness to the emergence of phenomenon on the basis of an emphatic plurality of perspectives that would open the chance for the shortcomings of his investigations to be surpassed by its inheritors), then his push for the determinacy of conclusions to the highest degree, the thrust toward the hierarchization of the sciences, the systematic ruling out of infinite regresses, the decision that the best explanation is the one with the least number of premises, the expulsion of any unnecessary complexity, and so forth may be strategies to generate a taste for specification to the highest degree amongst those who follow him and therewith to induce the desire to attain an even greater degree of specification than his inquiry offers. To seek the utmost specificity while keeping an eye on the conditions from which this determinacy emerges (our premises, previous arguments, structural limitations, etc.) generates an historicization of our account (*logos*), reminds our *logos* of its origins, and thereby works against a fully originary or finalizing (thus perhaps unnecessarily abridged) discourse while at once working toward determinacy to the highest degree. If the success of an answer depends on the interpretation of what it is to arrive at a solution to *difficulties* posed and discussed, so long as we remain without secure ground for such an interpretation, our criterion for success remains indefinitely in question.

Perhaps, then, crucial to the successful performance of Aristotle's inquiries is the cultivation in his addressees of a desire for knowledge in the highest degree, a desire which may be actualized as an ethos of incessant, recursive inquiry. Perhaps Aristotle attempts to hierarchize, to specify, to rule out infinite regresses

and superfluous concerns, and so forth out of an insistently ethical concern, out of a desire to cultivate a habit for or ethos of specification—and so to open us toward the potential need to undermine the hierarchies and determinacies he establishes along the path of inquiry he lays forth. Although Aristotle may not untie all of the knots emergent in the course of our inquiry, it still remains the case that “one cannot untie a knot if [s/]he is ignorant of it,” and this guided inquiry at least allows for some familiarity with a great many of these knots and may even motivate us and provide some of the resources to detect knots indiscernible within Aristotle’s account. For, to some extent, it is the desire for specificity that can eventually lead those who provisionally accept Aristotle’s trajectory of inquiry to inquire otherwise. Thus it may be that *The Metaphysics* is formally self-undermining, potentially destructive of all its determinations, and as such, thoroughly committed to an investigation of the science of wisdom that seeks knowledge to the highest degree. Indeed, it may even be that the striving for knowledge to the highest degree *demand*s the self-undermining of each and every singular discourse; perhaps there is an essential connection between wisdom and plurality. Aristotle’s investigations into the science of wisdom, in determining that to which we may respond, in cultivating our response-abilities, in generating a habit and ethos of openness along with a concern for specification to the highest degree, may be thought, then, as an ethical project *par excellence*.

“Find[ing] it profitable to go over the *difficulties* well,” we, as inquirers, undergo transformations in our appetitive structuration. Habituated to desiring ends as final resting points, we are opened to the labile desire for ends in their potential inexhaustibility and the satisfactions incumbent thereto.¹⁷ Tarrying with Aristotle, we find that it may be to our profit to lay down our regular calculations wherein we can only accept as profitable that which is unequivocally and immediately so, that which fulfills a need defined in advance, and instead open to the possibility of an indefinitely deferred profit whose pursuit may be, para-doxically, profit to the highest degree. In going over the difficulties well, we inscribe hesitation as a condition for the success of our inquiries, inquiries so often characterized by over-great haste. Our desire for knowledge, perhaps due to our pleasure in “having seen,” leads all too often to a rush for conclusions rather than a careful, hesitant approach to answers in many ways. Rather than returning to the inception of our inquiries and considering other, perhaps more fecund trajectories, we become enamored with the fruits of our inquiries and hold fast to them. Perhaps, returning to the issue of what it is to “succeed well in arriving at answers,” success well arrived at is not a condition wherein all the relevant, pre-defined questions have been correlated with their “answers,” but rather a condition wherein the texture of answering becomes a responsiveness to the questions posed, a responsiveness in which the answer’s determinacy is in proportion to the determinacy of the question. This is perhaps the way in which aporias belong to their ends. When specific sets of questions posed are correlated with answers—such as “it is not impossible that ...” or “it may be the case and is not inconsistent that ...” or “such and such a thought does not run into the problems that our predecessors run into,” or “from our inquiries we cannot conclude otherwise”—that are responsive to the quality of the questions, perhaps another mode of answering is at stake than that to which we are accustomed, and perhaps this mode of answering is inextricable from the attainment of knowledge to the highest degree. The cultivation of habits of answering, then, may be understood as a cultivation of proportional responsiveness, that is, as an ethical matter, an issue of justice.

¹⁷ Cf. *Physics* 208a21: “time and motion . . . are infinite, and so is thinking.”

The *difficulties* raised by *thought* about its object reveal this fact: insofar as *thought* is in *difficulties*, it is like those who are bound; and in both cases one cannot go forward. (995a 30-34)

“Insofar as *thought* is in *difficulties* [*aporias*],” although one may not go forward, although one may be bound to *aporias* and the (in)determinacies of inquiry implied thereby, movement is not altogether paralyzed. Rather, in certain cases, the binding of thought, like the binding of limbs, hinders movement in some ways while focusing it in others.¹⁸ Perhaps the aporetic bonds of thought, far from implying a simple paralysis, enable the concentration of thought in ways that would remain neglected given a more full range of motion. In the midst of our hasty rushing toward conclusions, perhaps it is the binding of thought to *aporias* that allows for the development of an even approximately sufficient clarification of the problems requisite for an investigation into the science of wisdom. Although thought remains ensnared by “the *difficulties*,” perhaps beholden to the irreducible status of its aporetic beginnings, although thought may be prevented from an unabashedly forward motion, to be sure, forward is not the only relevant motion—especially with regard to inquiry.

“The *difficulties*” [*aporias*], we should note, are “raised by *thought* about its object,” which is to say, these *difficulties* are products of thought internal to the attempt to articulate its object to the greatest extent. What stands revealed when “thought is in *difficulties*” is not only that “like those who are bound . . . one cannot go forward,” but also that the difficulties impeding uninhibited progression are “raised by thought.”¹⁹ Paradoxically, the striving for utmost clarity gives rise to *difficulties* that require the project of clarification to focus on delimiting as precisely as possible the obstinate opacity of these *difficulties*. The aspiration for clarity, to remain true to its course, must swerve into its obverse: the precise clarification of concealment as concealment and opaqueness as opaqueness to the highest degree. The attempt to articulate the object of thought to the highest degree, paradoxically, suffuses thought with *aporias* and binds it to the study of those *aporias*. Compounding the paradox to the point of irony, the *aporias* internal to the attempt to specify the object of thought to the greatest extent may be understood as at once liberatory and binding (in aporetic appropriateness, as liberatory shackles); for, thought’s self-binding to the specification of *aporias* consequent upon its commitment to clarification of its object to the highest degree appears as a mode of constraint that produces possibilities for thought that would likely remain suppressed by our habitual freedoms. Were thought able to simply gloss over the *aporias* to which it gives rise, were we to hastily march through problems on the way to exhaustive conclusions, thought, bereft of crucial opportunities for thinking the aporetic status of its objects, would remain precluded from determining its objects to the highest degree if doing so entails thinking the object *as* aporetic. *Difficulties*, although they may hinder a simply forward trajectory, open up lines of inquiry that structure our investigative topography and perhaps thereby facilitate investigative successes in their own way.

¹⁸ Cf. Stephen Shainberg’s (2002) *Secretary*.

¹⁹ Such thought, to be sure, is itself beholden to phenomena and thus the *difficulties* are decidedly emergent from phenomena.

Insofar as “thought is like those who are bound,” insofar as thought is attuned and responsive to aporias, a hasty rush forward is thereby hindered, and thought, emancipated by shackling, is allowed to be thoughtful all the more. Constraint becomes evident as a condition for self-actualization (once again). Binding may thus operate as a transfixed rapture, as an erotically charged attuning to the complexities of an object of inquiry, as a force liberating the energies of thought that become free to pervade their objects again and again. Directed inquiry here shades into reverie without regression, or at least this is the hope. Freed from the need to think only toward an exhaustive conclusion, liberated from the project of self-annihilation whereby thought dissolves in resolving its problems, thought, attentive to the aporias to which it is bound (perhaps attentive to such a degree that it is able to distinguish between problems that admit of a more thorough resolution and those that may not) is allowed to seek the greatest degree of specification of its objects. This would be the case even more so if the highest determination of the object of inquiry consists in its being spoken in many ways, that is, if the polysemic determinations of an object are intrinsic to its being articulated to the highest degree.

However, aporias also impose limitations. Too extreme a focus on a particular aporia or on the aporetic status of a particular object or range of objects, and all the more so, too extreme a focus on the aporetic dimensions of objects as such or the aporetic nature of inquiry may hinder progress in other directions. We are thus left to wonder: when is attunement to the aporias “raised by thought about its object” superfluous, or even worse, a mode of resistance to further developments and clarification there where they are possible, a hasty preclusion of the capacity “to go forward” when such a forward momentum is precisely what the inquiry requires? When is careful attention to the aporetic dimension of a particular investigation or to that of the general horizon of inquiry a mode of superficial stasis that forecloses careful consideration of issues looming on the horizon? Might over-enamored attention to aporias collude with various resistances to investigative progress? Might lavishing attention on the aporetic conspire with defenses against the contingent difficulties of working through and moving on? At this level of generality, all that can be said is that the productive and/or destructive status of attention to aporias remains, appropriately enough, undecided in advance, in its own way aporetic. We can not say for sure, once and for all, if aporias are on-balance helpful or harmful for thought. Attuned to aporias, thought seems both constrained and liberated. “One cannot go forward,” but thought is nonetheless very much concerned with its object. On the other hand, perhaps contextualization would allow for more refined judgment.

Accordingly one should study all the difficulties both for the purposes stated and because those who inquire without first going over the *difficulties* are like those who are ignorant of where they must go. (995a34-36)

“One should study all the difficulties” “for the proposes stated,” that is, because (1) “answers successfully arrived at are solutions to *difficulties* previously discussed,” (2) it is *necessary* that “we must first state the problems which should be discussed first,” and (3) insofar as thought remains *simply* in difficulties, which is to say, wrapped up in aporias without generating any further determinacies or productive questions, “one cannot go forward” with the inquiry. “One should study *all* the difficulties”: does this imperative not resist fulfillment? For how can one study all the difficulties if one is only beginning to inquire and is thus profoundly unaware of what the relevant difficulties are, let alone the proper order of their statement and discussion. If this account of

the developments of Beta One is not wholly off target, appealing to Aristotle as an authoritative guide is not sure to resolve the difficulty. Since “those who inquire without first going over the *difficulties*,” that is, *all* the difficulties, “are like those who are ignorant of where they must go,”²⁰ it seems that, if Aristotle’s pedagogical practice is anything like what was sketched above, we will remain forever uncertain of the proper topography and trajectory of our investigation, consigned to dwell between ignorance and wisdom. It seems that we will remain liminal beings wondering whether we are being lead toward a specification of the science of wisdom to the highest degree or not. Recall that, as a matter of contingency or structural necessity, we may “overlook” the determination and study of one or more *difficulty* and thus deviate from the proper course, if there is one, from the beginning.

Consequently, the stakes of the question of to what extent we are to allow thought to tarry with any particular aporia are significantly raised. If “one should study all the difficulties” it is unclear whether that requires thought to “first go over the *difficulties*” in a careful although somewhat casual manner or rather “*study all the difficulties*” in a much more sustained engagement. Aristotle’s habit in *The Metaphysics* of variously leaving and coming back to the same problem time and again is highly suggestive in this context. It remains quite indeterminate whether thought should be pushed from aproia to aporia in order to attain a synoptic view of *all* the relevant aporias of an inquiry (assuming that one’s sense of relevance is absolutely astute from the beginning) or whether refusing to push thought beyond the aporia to which it is currently attuned until one is thoroughly satisfied—given that what seems to be a single aporia may resolve into many—is the only hope for the discernment of all the aporias relevant for the inquiry.²¹ And even then, what sense of satisfaction would guarantee that the aporia is fully worked through, if there is such a thing as a thoroughgoing working through of an aporia? The tension is between the need for a survey that lays the ground for study and the need for study which determines the field to be surveyed.

Perhaps, given the seemingly irreducible ambivalences—the aporias—of the mandate to “study all the difficulties,” it may be that to “study *all* the difficulties” requires more than one effort, and not just a two-track inquiry by a single inquirer. Perhaps what is required is a differential return to and development of the aporias structuring the inquiry, and perhaps this is connected with the illimitability of the community of the aporia.

. . . besides, such persons do not even know whether they have found or not what they are seeking, for the end is not clear to them, but it is clear to those who have first gone over the *difficulties*. (995b1-3)

Sure enough, if one has not studied or at least “first gone over” all the aporias, “the end is not clear.” But who has “first gone over [all] the *difficulties*” such that the end is clear? Is this to suggest that Aristotle, impelled by a force of necessity emergent from his unqualifiedly successful inquiry into the science of wisdom, has “gone over the *difficulties*” in their entirety, or at least to a sufficient degree? What in the character of his investigative performance would suggest this? If we are not to attribute an uncharacteristically hubristic tenor to Aristotle’s intimation of investigative success, it may be best to understand that claim to “have first gone

²⁰ Concerning our status between ignorance and wisdom, compare *Symposium* 201dff.

²¹ Aristotle’s investigative performance throughout Beta is, to his credit, undecided between these options.

over the *difficulties*” such that “the end is . . . clear” as involving not the secure knowledge of the issues which, once known fully, amount to wisdom to the highest degree, but rather involving clarity concerning the incessant task, the interminable, recursive end of the investigation into the science of wisdom. Is the clarity we seek clarity enough to locate that which would constitute the end of our inquiry or is it perhaps the clarity of the self-reflective realization that we cannot “even know whether . . . [we] have found or not what . . . [we] are seeking,” that is, clarity concerning the difficulties of our condition? Taking the latter option seriously, it may be that, perhaps surprisingly, a form of self-knowledge is, in part, the end of the inquiry into the science of wisdom. Perhaps for those who have “gone over the difficulties” so as to become as clear as possible about their objects of inquiry, for those who attempt as much as possible to study all of the *difficulties* in the right order, success in arriving at the end names an affirmative appetitive comportment toward the interminability of the investigation. Over against the founding prejudice of those who “do not even know whether they have found or not what they are seeking” precisely as a result of their conviction that they are seeking an exhaustive determination of the aporias structuring the inquiry into the science of wisdom, perhaps “the end” is only clear, to the extent that it can become clear, in its indefinite deferral, which is to say, in its partial, ongoing obscurity. Even if so, is this the only end of the inquiry into the science of wisdom? Isn’t the end, or at least an end, the determination of the primary mover to the highest degree? The end, whatever it may be, is, although necessary (or so Aristotle avers), apparently unverifiable: at the limit, a question. Such an end thus appears to be more of a methodological postulation in the service of an ethical and investigative project than the finality of totalized knowledge.

Further, one who has heard all the arguments, like the one who has heard both parties in a lawsuit or both sides of a dispute, is necessarily in a better position to judge truly. (995b3-4)

“One who has heard *all* the arguments,” presumably analogous to the one who has studied and/or “first gone over” all the difficulties, in fact, has not heard the totality of arguments. “One who has heard all the arguments” is rather “like the one who has heard both parties in a lawsuit,” that is, like one who has heard the sides admissible by the standards of the particular juridical apparatus. “Both parties in a lawsuit” may not be the totality of those involved in the issue at hand; for, to give an example from Aristotle’s day, slaves, women, children, and foreigners (except under highly restricted conditions) were not admitted as parties in lawsuits. “One who has heard both parties in a lawsuit” is not “one who has heard all the arguments,” but rather all of the arguments admissible. Similarly, “the one who has heard both . . . sides of a dispute” may not have “heard all the arguments,” for there may be more sides to the issue than are admitted by conventions of conversation (think here of Aristotle’s failure to enter into dialogue with women when developing his treatises on sexual difference), and especially disputation. Or there may be some parts of an argument left unspoken for various strategic, ethical, or other reasons. “One who has heard all the arguments” and presumably by analogical extension, one who has studied “all the difficulties,” is not one with unimpeachable access to a systematically complete totality but rather one who is acquainted with a contextually relevant whole. Those acquainted with *all* arguments (or aporias) in this sense end up (that is, arrive at a limit) not with methodically guaranteed certainty, not with definitive and final answers, but “in a better position to *judge*,” perhaps in a “better position to judge truly.”

As should be clear:

Concerning all these problems, not only is it difficult to arrive at the truth, but it is not even easy to discuss the problems well. (995b4-5)