

Nous and Logos in Aristotle

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Nous and Logos in Aristotle

The human capacity for intuitive insight, *nous*, in Aristotle is said to provide a kind of immediate access to its objects.¹ This immediacy seems crucial in the face of certain logical difficulties that emerge in Aristotle's thought. If reason, *logos*, is not at some point provided with an immediate grasp of that with which it is ultimately concerned, then it seems as if *logos* would be caught in an endless retreat back into fundamental principles.² *Nous* is said to stop this infinite regress. This leads to two assumptions about *nous*: first, that it is a purely alogical capacity; second, that it functions merely to serve apodictic *logos*. On such a reading, the task of *nous* is to offer immediate, universal principles to *logos* in order to secure a firm ground for apodictic demonstration.

Although Aristotle sometimes emphasizes this grounding function, *nous* also functions otherwise. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *nous* offers one insight not only into the universal principles of action, but also into the specific situation upon which action always turns. In the *Metaphysics*, *nous* functions as a way of „touching“, and indeed, of „saying“ the essence of some thing. In *De Anima*, it functions as a kind of knowing that does not err about its object. The multiple functions of *nous*, however, point to a complex relationship between it and *logos* that is often overlooked when the two are taken as mutually exclusive, independently operating capacities. When *nous* is understood exclusively in terms of its grounding function for apodictic *logos*, its alogical and universalizing characteristics come to the fore. However, an investigation of the relationship of *nous* and *logos* reveals that neither of these characteristics are central to Aristotle's conception of *nous*. Rather, Aristotle articulates

¹ See, for example, many interpreters find Aristotle's conception of *nous* – rational knowledge – inconsistent with *epagōgē* – empirical state. See, for example, BARNES, Jonathan: *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, 262. See, too LE BLOND, John Marie: *Logique et Méthode chez Aristote, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie*. Paris: J. Vrin 1970, 131ff. Biondi states the immediacy of *nous* most succinctly: „This noetic perception indicates a direct intellectual knowledge of the universal substantial form itself, the cause of the phenomenal unity“. See, BIONDI, Paolo: *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics II.19*. Quebec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval 2004, 214. Biondi's interpretation seems to come close to that of Aquinas and other medieval commentators.

² Throughout this essay we make no attempt to consistently translate *nous* as „intuitive insight“ and *logos* as „reason“ because these terms have a semantic richness on which Aristotle relies that prevents their simple translation into English. We have therefore left them for the most part untranslated.

an understanding of *nous* that is able to be logical and *logos* that is able to be noetic.

The moments where the complex relationship between *nous* and *logos* emerges most forcefully are precisely those in which Aristotle engages the operations of *nous* and *logos* vis-à-vis the contingent. When speaking of action in a contingent world, Aristotle recognizes that the individual occupies a complex and dynamic site between singularity and particularity. The individual is not determined as the individual it is by an articulation of its particularity, that is, its subsumption under a universal or set of universals. The individual is always already there prior to its instantiation as particular. Yet, if the individual is always more than an expression of the universals that seek to capture it, it is because each individual is also irreducibly unique. The unicity of an individual is its singularity. Although this singularity conditions all appearance, it does not itself appear as such. The individual is that which appears; as a phenomenon, the individual sheds its singularity. Yet, if, in appearing, the individual is no longer singular, it is also not yet particular, a mere instantiation of the universal.³ Aristotle's discussions of *nous* often turn toward the dynamics of an *aisthēsis* that relates (through *logos*, we will argue) to the concrete appearance of an individual. Therefore, the interdependence of *nous* and *logos* must be pursued in relation to the very appearing of the individual. Even in the *Posterior Analytics*, where Aristotle seems to put *nous* in the service of an apodictic *logos* that seeks to establish a universal that grounds epistemic truth, another kind of *logos* emerges that is capable of responding to the individual. When one emphasizes the centrality of apodictic *logos* and the primacy of epistemic truth, the moment in which *logos* recognizes the individual is eclipsed.

In order to expose the extent to which even *epistēmē* requires both a noetic and logical apprehension of the individual, we must turn to *Posterior Analytics* II.19 where the noetic is often read as merely leading to and grounding apodictic *logos*. However, this text will be shown to depend on a *logos* that is irreducible to the apodictic. Once we see this other *logos* operating even at the heart of *epistēmē*, we can begin to discern how *nous* and *logos* together emerge as central to the *Ethics* where Aristotle turns his attention to a kind of knowledge that takes contingency seriously. Because *phronēsis* as a form of knowledge of the contingent must attend to both universals and individuals, it cannot depend on a purely alogical conception of *nous*. Rather, the *logos* of *phronēsis* requires a doubling of *nous* so as to account sufficiently for contin-

³ For a more detailed discussion of this distinction and specifically how it relates to Aristotle's technical use of the term *tode ti*, see LONG, Christopher P.: *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2004, 51–52, 87–89, 135–36 and 53–55.

gent individuals that do not go cleanly into universals. This other *nous* is closely related to *aisthēsis* and thus requires a reconsideration of the manner in which the noetic dimension of perception gives rise to an understanding of *logos* that is other than apodictic.⁴ Such a noetic *logos*, we will argue, is already operative in *Posterior Analytics*. This will allow us to see the *Posterior Analytics* in a new light and to suggest that while it may be natural for *nous* to translate itself into apodictic *logos*, this translation is predicated upon a *logos* that is always already noetic. This implies a more complicated relationship between *logos* and *nous* than is often recognized by interpretations dominated by a reading of *Posterior Analytics* in which *nous* is said to ground an apodictic *logos* that subsumes and consumes the individual.⁵

POSTERIOR ANALYTICS, II.19 – THE LOGIC OF NOUS

There is something strange about grounding an interpretation of *nous* in Aristotle on a text that announces its theme to be apodictic *epistēmē*.⁶ *Nous* appears at the end of a text in which Aristotle establishes the conditions for a particular kind of knowledge oriented toward universal and necessary truth. His concern in *Posterior Analytics* II.19 is to account for the manner in which

⁴ Charles Kahn has emphasized the importance of the close connection Aristotle establishes between *nous* and *aisthēsis*. He suggests that Aristotle links *nous* closely to *aisthēsis* in order to combat the Platonic view that *nous* has direct access to intelligible forms in isolation from sense perception. See, KAHN, Charles: *The Role of Nous in the Cognition of First Principles in Posterior Analytics II 19*. In: BERTI, Enrico (Hg.): *Aristotle on Science*. Padova: Editrice Antenore 1981, 403. In this article too, Kahn recognizes, as we do, the importance of reading *Posterior Analytics* II.19 in conjunction with both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *De Anima*.

⁵ Terence Irwin and Richard McKirahan are examples of such interpretations. Irwin claims that for Aristotle „[t]he knower must grasp self-evident principles as such; for if they are grasped non-inferentially, without any further justification, they must be grasped as true and necessary when considered in themselves, with no reference to anything else[...]. Intuition is needed, then, to secure the epistemic priority that Aristotle demands“. See, IRWIN, Terence: *Aristotle's First Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 134. Irwin sees intuition as a solution to the problem of epistemic justification. He goes on to argue against a reading that would make experience an indispensable condition for the possibility of intuition: „Experience and familiarity with appearances are useful to us as a way of approaching the first principles; they may be psychologically indispensable as ways to form the right intuitions. But they form no part of the justification of first principles“ (IRWIN: *Aristotle's First Principles*, 136). Richard McKirahan argues that the process that begins with sensation, moves through *epagōgē*, and ends in *nous* „consists in enlarging and enriching our awareness from the level where we are limited to the immediate apprehension of individuals by perception to the highest stage, where we see individuals as unimportant except as instances of scientifically explainable universal truths“. See, MCKIRAHAN, Richard D.: *Principles and proofs: Aristotle's theory of demonstrative science*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1992, 249.

⁶ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Analytica Priora et Posteriora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1964, 71b17ff. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are those of the authors.

the universal principles of demonstrations are themselves acquired.⁷ Such principles cannot be the result of prior demonstrations, for, as Aristotle himself says, „the principle of a demonstration could not be demonstrated, and so there would be no ἐπιστήμη of ἐπιστήμη“.⁸ To this end, he appeals to a conception of *nous* as a *hexis*, or active condition,⁹ capable of grounding demonstrations of universal and necessary truths. Aristotle nowhere indicates that this is the exclusive or even most authoritative function of *nous*. Even within this apodictic context, the noetic grasp of a universal and necessary principle remains linked to the perception of contingent individuals by beings possessing a kind of *logos* that cannot be reduced to the apodictic.

Aristotle begins his analysis of that *hexis* that grasps the principles of demonstration by appealing to the power of perception that humans share with all animals. Among animals with the power of perception some, Aristotle tells us, have the power to retain sensations in the soul. However, the simple capacity to retain sensations is not yet the condition for the possibility of a *nous* that grasps universals; for this, *logos* is required.¹⁰

When many such [sense impressions] have come into being, a certain difference now becomes with the result that for some [animals] a λόγος comes to be from the retention of these sorts [of sense impressions], but for others it does not. For from a perception, memory comes into being, as has been said, but from many memories of the same thing experience comes into being; for memories that are many in number is a single experience.¹¹

Here Aristotle emphasizes the intimate link between *logos* and that experience that will ultimately give rise to the noetic capacity to grasp universals. An interpretation that attempts to read *nous* as independent of *logos* in order that it might ground *epistēmē* must do two things. First, it must overlook the con-

⁷ Biondi does an excellent job of summarizing and categorizing the various interpretations of this text. See, BIONDI: *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics II.19*, 21ff.

⁸ ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.* 100b13–14.

⁹ At the beginning of *Posterior Analytics II.19* Aristotle says that the „knowing habit“, ἡ γνῶριζουσα ἕξις, of first principles will be made clear after some preliminary considerations (99b18). At the end of II.19, he considers νοῦς one of the „thinking habits“, „διάνοιαν ἕξεων“ (100b5–14). Although for the most part we leave „ἕξις“ untranslated in the text, we offer the translation „active condition“ here to emphasize that νοῦς is a natural capacity that can only be acquired through active practice and, indeed, an effort of concentration and attention. This active understanding of ἕξις can be lost if it is translated simply as „habit“. To emphasize νοῦς as a ἕξις that is acquired through active work and concentration is to recognize that this „thinking habit“ is not something that merely happens to one, but arises from intense, focused effort. For a detailed discussion of the importance of this understanding of ἕξις, see SACHS, Joe: *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. WHITAKER, Albert Keith (Hg.): *The Focus Philosophical Library* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), xi–xvii.

¹⁰ ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.*, 99b36–100a3.

¹¹ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Analytica Priora et Posteriora*, 100a1–6.

text in which *nous* arises as a *hexis* belonging to precisely those animals with *logos*. Second, it must read *nous* as an act of immediate intuitive knowledge whose object is a universal that captures an essence that can now be considered independent of the individual.¹² However, in this passage, Aristotle emphasizes that *logos* is required to generate the experience that ultimately grounds the noetic grasp of a universal. Aristotle's phraseology indicates that this *logos* 'comes to be' (*gignetai*) for beings with the capacity to organize perceptions in a coherent way. According to Patrick Byrne, *logos* generates experience by bringing about „a nonsensible, nonremembered cognizance of a single connection“.¹³ Many memories are brought together such that they become memories of the same thing through *logos*. Since this gathering is required for noetic insight, that insight must be mediated by *logos* – a *logos* that is grounded in the perception of appearing individuals.

Thomas Aquinas recognizes the crucial role that *logos* (*ratio*) plays in noetic apprehension:

But nevertheless, experience needs some ratiocination about particulars, through which one [particular] is brought to another, for example when someone records that such an herb often has cured many from fever, it is said to be an experience that such is curative of fever. Reason, however, does not consist in experience of particulars, but, from many particulars in which it is expert, it accepts one common, which is firmed in the soul, and it considers that [common] without consideration of any individual (*singularium*); and reason accepts this common as a principle of art and science.¹⁴

Aquinas goes on to show that this common universal that is outside (*praeter*) individuals is not outside according to being (*esse*), but only according to the consideration of the intellect, „which considers some nature, for example human, but not regarding Plato and Socrates“.¹⁵ This nature, according to Aquinas, is in all individuals, according to the notion of the species.¹⁶ Since the soul can consider human nature, without regard to any individuals, it exercises a certain „indifference“ toward those individuals. The „first universal“, therefore, is the „indifference“ that the soul has toward individuals „insofar as some

¹² See, IRWIN: *Aristotle's First Principles*, 135–6. McKirahan argues that in *Posterior Analytics* only principles can be the object of *nous*. These principles, in turn, are directly linked to the universal that is constitutively present in any individual. See, MC KIRAHAN: *Principles and proofs*, 257–59.

¹³ BYRNE, Patrick Hugh: *Analysis and science in Aristotle*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1997, 175.

¹⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS: *In Aristotelis Librum Posteriorum Analyticorum*, vol. I.2, *Opera omnia iussu impensaue*. Roma: Commissio Leonina 1989, L II, l. 20, 11.

¹⁵ AQUINAS: *In Aristotelis Librum Posteriorum Analyticorum*, L II, l. 20, 11.

¹⁶ This reading in which a common nature is ultimately intuited without regard to individuals has given rise to interpretations like that of McKirahan, in which the individual is reduced to nothing more than a particular instantiation of an universal nature.

one is existing in them“. The universal is „that according to which they do not differ“. ¹⁷ This universal, according to Aquinas, may either pertain to the essence of the individuals or not. Socrates and Plato may be discovered to be indifferent in regards to whiteness, and thus „white“ would be a first universal. However, Aquinas goes on to indicate that the grasp of the essence of the individuals, „existing in them“, is one of the primary kinds of *nous*. Whatever universal is discovered by means of *nous*, it is clear that, for Aquinas, this universal already exists in the individuals. ¹⁸ It is not clear, however, that Aristotle maintains the existence of these universals prior to their mediation by *logos* and their being grasped by *nous*. Because *logos* gathers sense impressions into a unity, the universal is perhaps best understood to be drawn out of the individuals in response to their givenness in perception. ¹⁹

If *logos* is the condition for the possibility of both memory and experience, and if the first universal is generated from the direct perception of individuals, Aristotle's conceptualization of the transition from the perceived individual to the first universal becomes central to understanding the relation between *logos* and *nous* in this section of the *Posterior Analytics*. The transition from the individual to the universal is somewhat condensed in the text: ²⁰ „For when one of the things without differences has made a stand, the first universal is in the soul (for on the one hand the individual is perceived (αἰσθάνεται), but on the other hand perception (αἴσθησις) is of the universal, for example, of the human-being, but not of the human-being Callias)“. ²¹ Aristotle's use of a verbal and nominal form of *aisthanesthai* indicates the extent to which he conceptualizes the universal as *emerging out of* the direct encounter with the appearing individual and not as ontologically prior to and immediately grasped independent of this encounter. Although the transition from *aisthanesthai*, the direct encounter with the individual, to *aisthēsis*, the perception of the universal is here compact, nevertheless the universal that makes a stand in the soul requires an activity of perceiving that has as its perceived correlate a concrete, perceptible individual. The name for this process through which the universal comes to make a stand is *epagōgē* – the bringing together of perceived indi-

¹⁷ AQUINAS: *In Aristotelis Librum Posteriorum Analyticorum*, L II, l. 20, 13.

¹⁸ The stronger position that *nous* grasps a universal essence is given by Biondi. See, BIONDI: *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics II.19*, 213f. Indeed, Biondi argues that the entire process of induction makes no sense without the grasping of an already existing universal essence.

¹⁹ While this interpretation might seem to identify *nous* and *epagōgē* too closely, Leshner argues convincingly for just such an identification. See, LESHNER, James H.: *The meaning of nous in the Posterior Analytics*. In: *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 44–68, hier 62.

²⁰ See, APOSTLE, Hippocrates G.: *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*. Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press 1981, 297n16.

²¹ ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.* 100a15–b1.

viduals such that insight into something common to all of them is gained.²² While this process of bringing together involves *logos*, the insight is gained through the *hexis* Aristotle calls *nous*. Perception, memory, experience and *epagōgē* are the conditions that give rise to *nous*. *Logos* is operative in all of these such that *nous* cannot simply be seen as the alogical ground for apodictic *logos*, but *logos* must be recognized as already functioning at the heart of the *hexis* of *nous*.

Yet for *logos* to gather many appearing individuals together under some common term, it must already have a certain insight into that which they hold in common. This kind of insight is normally characteristic of the *hexis* of *nous*. Aristotle indicates a kind of intellectual or noetic aspect at work in the very construction of experience when he speaks of a *logos* that becomes (*gignetai logon*).²³ What is at issue here is how many individuals that are perceived are gathered into a unity such that a universal „makes a stand in the soul“. Such a gathering requires that *logos* must already have an insight into a certain commonality. Here the stark contrast between *nous* and *logos* dissolves: there is a *logos* that is noetic but *nous* itself also becomes logical. If Aristotle is to avoid a circle in this section, a *logos* other than the apodictic must be understood to operate within the process of *epagōgē*. When Aristotle says „[...]all ἐπιστήμη is μετὰ λόγου“ and goes on to insist that *epistēmē* is not of principles in order to reserve that privilege for *nous*, he is attempting to show that there is no apodictic *logos* of the principles of a demonstration, but not that there is no *logos* at all involved in the noetic grasp of universals.²⁴ In fact, it is through a process that involves *logos* that the individual is able to give rise to the first universal and subsequently to the first principles intuited by *nous*. The text itself focuses primarily not on the immediate act of noetic intuition, but on the process through which *nous* is made possible. To purge *logos* from *nous* leaves inexplicable the manner in which the first principles come to present themselves to *nous* by means of logical operations that presuppose the concrete presence of appearing individuals.

²² See, ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, Troels: *More on Aristotelian Epagoge*. In: *Phronesis* 24 (1979) 301–319, hier 305. Allan Bäck has emphasized that the process of *epagōgē* in Aristotle „amounts to a very messy mixture of looking at the available observations, reports, and expert opinions, analyzing and drawing inferences from this material, and then theorizing, testing the outcome, and thereupon revamping the theory, including its first principles“. See, BÄCK, Allan: *Aristotle's Discovery of First Principles*. In: SIM, May (Hg.): *From Puzzles to Principles? Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 1999, 163–181, hier 163. Clearly, such a complex process requires *logos*; yet it is a *logos* that gives rise to *nous*, which, on Bäck's view, is itself fallible.

²³ Biondi emphasizes that here *logos* has an intellectual dimension. He refers to a series of translations and interpretations that bear this out. BIONDI: *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics II.19*, 38ff.

²⁴ ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.*, 100b10–14.

William of Ockham comes close to this interpretation when he says that „[Intuitive knowledge] is knowledge by which experiential knowledge begins, because universally he who is able to accept experience of some contingent truth and, through mediation, to accept experience of a necessary truth, has some non-complex knowledge of some term or thing[...]“.²⁵ This intuitive knowledge of the individuals, or the terms signifying those individuals, is, Ockham argues, at least the „mediated and partial cause with respect to knowledge of some demonstrable conclusion“.²⁶ In this way, if one knows the contingent truth about an individual, for example, „this herb heals such an illness“, that intuition (*nous*) is the partial, mediated cause of the demonstrable conclusion, „every such herb heals“.²⁷ Ockham, therefore, reads *Posterior Analytics* to argue that *nous* is primarily directed toward individuals and that the universal that might result from that grasp requires an additional operation of the soul that depends on this grasp of individuals. „The intellect in the present life knows the individual primarily“.²⁸ In contrast to the interpretation of Aquinas, who links *nous* to the *epistēmē* of universal and necessary truths through the grasp of universal essences, Ockham prioritizes a *nous* that responds to the individual from which the universal is drawn. In this way, Ockham insists that since *nous* is primarily directed toward individuals, these individuals are not „overcome“ when the intellect grasps a universal. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Ockham shows that the noetic grasp of a universal does not allow us to know that universal essences already exist prior to the mediation or the construction of those universal essences through concrete encounters with appearing individuals.

In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle seems to move abruptly from the individual to the noetic grasp of the first universal without thematizing the details of the process of this transition. It is clear, however, that this transition cannot result in a noetic grasp of a pre-existing universal that then grounds apodictic *logos*. This would give rise to the impression that *nous* operates in isolation from *logos*. *Posterior Analytics* II.19 points to a more intimate relation between *logos* and *nous* that hinges on the appearing individual. This very relation, and its ground in the individual, is given more detailed treatment in Aristotle’s discussion of *phronēsis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the transition

²⁵ WILLIAM OCKHAM: *Venerabilis inceptoris Guillelmi de Ockham Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum, ordination.* ETZKORN, Girard J. (Hg.), vol. I, *Opera philosophica et theologica*. St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: St. Bonaventure University 1967, 32–33.

²⁶ OCKHAM: *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum*, 90.

²⁷ OCKHAM: *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum*, 91.

²⁸ OCKHAM: *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum*, 63.

from the individual to the universal is addressed with more nuance in the light of his concern with the contingent world of human action.²⁹

NICOMACHEAN ETHICS, VI – THE NOESIS OF LOGOS

Although he identifies *epistēmē*, *phronēsis* and *nous* (along with *technē* and *sophia*) as ways the soul discloses truth by affirming and denying, it is only as Aristotle delineates the *differences* between *epistēmē* and *phronēsis* that the function of *nous* in its relation to *logos* begins to come into focus.³⁰ In the third chapter of book VI Aristotle, explicitly referring to his discussion in the *Posterior Analytics*, again emphasizes the crucial role *epagōgē* plays in establishing epistemic knowledge: „Ἐπαγωγή is indeed the source [ἀρχή] of the universal, while the syllogism is from universals. Therefore, there are sources from which the syllogism [proceeds] that are not from syllogisms, this is ἐπαγωγή“. ³¹ As the *archē* of the universal, *epagōgē* gives rise to the universal by bringing together perceived individuals. We have seen that this bringing together of perceived individuals is a function of *logos* that gives rise to noetic insight.

Epistēmē names not the way to the principles through *epagōgē*, but the demonstrative knowledge that results once the universals have been established. In this, Aristotle tells us, it differs from *phronēsis*, which concerns both the individual and the universal.³² However, both *epistēmē* and *phronēsis* involve *nous*. When Aristotle illustrates the difference between *phronēsis* and *epistēmē*, he places *nous* on the side of *epistēmē* in order to juxtapose it with the manner in which *phronēsis* must be concerned with the individual:

It is clear that *phronēsis* is not *epistēmē*, for it is of an ultimate individual [*eschatou*], as was said, since the action to be done is that sort of thing. Thus, it is the opposite of *nous*. For *nous* is of ultimate terms [*horōn*] of which there is no articulation [*logos*], but *phronēsis* is of the ultimate individual [*eschatou*] of which there is no *epistēmē*, but only perception [*aisthēsis*].³³

At first glance, this passage seems to present two difficulties for the attempt to show the intimate connection between *nous* and *logos*. First, it seems to reinforce the notion that *nous* is radically distinct from *logos*. Although

²⁹ Leshner recognizes the compatibility of the function of *nous* in the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Ethics*. See, LESHNER: *The meaning of nous*, 66.

³⁰ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*. BYWATER, I. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1894, 1139b15ff.

³¹ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1139b28–31.

³² „And *phronesis* is not only of the universal, but is must discern the individuals as well“ (1141b14–15).

³³ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1142a23–27.

Aristotle says that „*nous* is of ultimate terms [*horōn*] of which there is no articulation [*logos*]“, this ought not to be taken as a claim that *nous* is alogical. Rather, although the moment of noetic insight does not involve *logos*, the conditions that lead to the noetic moment are made possible by *logos* and cannot be radically separated from it. Second, *nous* seems closely connected with *epistēmē*, such that the standard interpretation of the *Posterior Analytics* in which *nous* is exclusively directed toward universals seems to be reinforced. However, Aristotle is here concerned to establish the difference between *epistēmē* and *phronēsis*. What characterizes this difference is precisely that *epistēmē*, unlike *phronēsis*, is concerned with necessary, universal principles. The operation of *nous* that Aristotle describes here is its ability to grasp such universals. However, to establish the distinction between *epistēmē* and *phronēsis* requires neither that the noetic grasp of universals be the only function of *nous* nor that the complex process through which *nous* grasps universals be without *logos*.

In fact, Aristotle develops a conception of *nous* that is not merely directed toward universals but also toward individuals – a *nous* that is central to *phronēsis*:

And νοῦς is directed toward what is ultimate [τῶν ἐσχάτων] in both directions, for νοῦς and not λόγος is of the first terms and ultimate individuals [τῶν ἐσχάτων]; on one hand, in demonstrations, it is of the motionless first terms, on the other hand, in practical matters it is of the ultimate contingent individual and of the other premise; for these individuals are the sources [ἀρχαί] of the that-for-the-sake-of-which, for the universals [are derived] from the individuals.³⁴

Aristotle here emphasizes the multi-dimensionality of *nous*. On one hand, as we saw in the *Analytics*, *nous* is directed toward eternal (motionless) universal principles.³⁵ However, another dimension of *nous* comes to the fore in relation to action and its necessary connection to contingency. In practical matters, the capacity of *nous* to grasp what Aristotle calls „the ultimate contingent individual and the other premise“ (*tou eschatou kai endechomenou kai tēs heteras protaseōs*) is crucial. Yet this very formulation remains provocatively ambiguous, for while the reference to „the other premise“ suggests that Aristotle has in mind the middle term of a practical syllogism, the term ‘*eschaton*’ – which literally means that which is ultimate, the last in a series, or the extreme – seems to be semantically flexible, referring to the ultimate individual thing or situation, or indeed, to a particular judgment

³⁴ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1143a35–43b5.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas argues, in relation to Aristotle’s discussion of *nous* in *Posterior Analytics*, that the universal „comes to rest“ (*quiescens*) in the soul precisely because there is motion in singulars, but not in universals.

about that thing or situation that can function as the middle term of a practical syllogism. Indeed, Aristotle's own examples of practical syllogisms in the *Nicomachean Ethics* illustrate why this semantic ambiguity is crucial: it recognizes that with respect to action the 'eschaton' is always both irreducibly individual and capable of being grasped as particular. „Practical wisdom [φρόνησις] is not of the universal alone, but it must also recognize the individual; for it is practical and practice [πράξις] concerns that which is individual“.³⁶

In a first example, Aristotle insists that people with experience but not knowledge can be more practical, for „if someone knew that light meats were digestible and healthy, but did not know which sorts of meat are light, they would not produce health; but if someone knew that bird meat is light and healthy, they would better produce health“.³⁷ Here, the judgment „bird meat is light and healthy“ serves as a middle term in a kind of practical syllogism in which there seems to be an implicit understanding that all light meat is healthy. Further, *nous* provides the insight into the judgment that bird meat is light and healthy, that is, into a fact that applies to all bird meat. Such a judgment is only about this individual bird insofar as it is a member of a class of beings that, when eaten, produce health; it is therefore a general, if not a universal judgment. But, when we consider what our discussion of the *Posterior Analytics* has shown, experience itself involves a gathering of sense impressions into a unity by means of a kind of *logos*. On the one hand, this *logos* gathers together individuals as individuals and on the other hand, this gathering itself allows the encounter with the individual to serve as the condition for the possibility of a judgment that treats the individual as a member of a given class, that is, as a particular. Thus, even here, what appears on the surface as a straightforward judgment concerning bird meat depends, on a deeper level, on an experience made possible by *logos*. If *nous* provides insight into the judgment that „bird meat is light and healthy“, it is only a *nous* that arises out of a *logos* capable of responding to the individuality of the individual. And yet, this noetic insight seems to require, in practical matters, the other ultimate – an alogical intuitive sense of the presence of the individual lying outside the gathering power of *logos*.

This is made more explicit in a second example. Aristotle recognizes that an error in deliberation can occur on either the universal or the individual level. „[We may fail to know] either that all heavy water is bad, or that *this* is heavy water [τοδὶ βαρύσταθμον]“.³⁸ Here the judgment is not about all water or even all heavy water, but about *this* [*todi*] very water now before me. The

³⁶ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1141b14–16.

³⁷ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1141b16–21.

³⁸ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 1142a23–4.

use of the demonstrative *todi* emphasizes the singularity of the individual under consideration. Here, the *eschaton* toward which *nous* is directed is not a judgment that subsumes an individual under a universal, thus rendering it particular, but the very individual about which an action is concerned that is intuitively sensed. In both of these examples, the action requires an intuition of the singularity of the individual (directly in the case of the heavy water, indirectly in the case of bird meat) that is not yet *logos*.

The importance of the intuitive sense for the singularity of the individual emerges here in relation to action because action is always about a contingent individual. The insight into the universal principle (what is traditionally called the major premise of a practical syllogism) must arise in the way in which Aristotle describes in *Posterior Analytics* – through experience and *epagōgē*. However, there must also be an insight into the individual („this is heavy water“, e.g.) that is not yet moving toward a universal principle, a sense for the singularity of the individual. Whereas in the *Analytics*, the *logos* involved in forming experience was the basis for an *epagōgē* that made the noetic insight into universal principles possible, here the noetic sense for the singularity of the individual is the condition for the possibility of *logos*. This suggests that *nous* as a *hexis* whether it is directed toward the universal or the individual, gains access to that which *logos* cannot grasp. This noetic sense always stands at the limits of *logos* even as it allows that which is intuited to be translated into *logos*. The translation of noetic sense into *logos* opens up both epistemic and practical possibilities. Yet, *nous* serves as a constant reminder that the individual is not exhausted by its logical expression.

At the end of the passage in which Aristotle identifies the dual ultimates toward which *nous* is directed, he emphasizes the importance of what we have been calling the „intuitive sense“ for the singularity of the individual. In fact, Aristotle insists that this intuitive sense lies at the ground of even epistemic *logos*. „Hence *nous* is both a beginning and an end, since the demonstrations are from these [individuals] and also concern them. And of these, one must have perception [*αἰσθησις*], and this perception is *nous*“.³⁹ As in the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle here emphasizes the immediate connection that perception has to the individual. Aristotle is brought to this striking identification of *nous* and *aisthēsis* by recognizing the irreducibility of the individual to the particular in the practical sphere. Yet, what emerges from considerations of practical matters has implications for the very possibility of the appearance of

³⁹ The first sentence of this quotation appears in the Bywater edition at 1143b9–11, but it is recognized there as out of place. Joe Sachs places it at 1143b5 within the context of the discussion of *nous* and its relation to ultimate individuals and universals where it seems to belong. See, SACHS: *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 114. We have followed Sachs in this, although the translation is our own.

the individual. In order to see these implications in more detail, and the role *nous* plays in them, a more thorough investigation of the role of *aisthēsis* in the apprehension of the individual is required. If we take seriously the identification of *nous* and *aisthēsis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it will be necessary to imagine how an account of *nous* as *aisthēsis* might be articulated that resonates with what Aristotle says about *aisthēsis* in *De Anima* II.6.

DE ANIMA, II.6 – THE AISTHĒSIS OF NOUS

For Aristotle, any discussion of a particular sense requires a discussion of that which it senses. He begins his analysis of *aisthēsis* by distinguishing that which is perceived in its own right from that which is perceived accidentally. Of things perceived in their own right, some are proper to one sense (proper sensibles) – as color is to seeing – others are common to more than one sense (common sensibles) – as motion is to sight and touch.⁴⁰ Aristotle identifies two characteristics of proper sensibles: „By proper I mean that which does not admit of being perceived by another sense, and concerning which it is not possible to be mistaken [ἀπατηθῆναι].“⁴¹ If *nous* is an *aisthēsis*, then it should have a „sensible“ proper to it that would have these two characteristics.

In regard to the second characteristic, in *Metaphysics* IX.10, Aristotle in fact asserts that it is impossible for *nous* to be mistaken about that which it intuit. In the context of a complex consideration of the relation of truth and falsity to being, Aristotle asserts: „anything that is in such a way that it is a something [εἶναι τι] and is in its being-at-work [ἐνεργεία], concerning these things, it is not possible to be mistaken [ἀπατηθῆναι], but one either intuit [νοεῖν] it or not.“⁴² The difficulty with this passage is that it appears in a context in which Aristotle deploys a distinction between non-composites (*asuntheta*) and composites (*suntheta*) that is difficult to discern properly. As a result, the above sentence is often read and translated as if it referred exclusively to non-composite *ousiai* whose being is *energeia* devoid of *dynamis*.⁴³ This is indeed understandable given that the trajectory of the text

⁴⁰ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis De Anima*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988, 418a8–20.

⁴¹ ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis De Anima*, 418a11–12.

⁴² ARISTOTLE: *Aristotelis Metaphysica*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, 1051b30–31.

⁴³ For example, Sachs renders this sentence: „So it is not possible to be deceived about anything the very being of which is being-at-work, but one either grasps or does not grasp it in contemplative thinking [...]“. SACHS, Joe: *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press 1999, 184. Ross puts it this way: „About the things, then, which are essences and exist in actuality, it is not possible to be in error, but only to think them or not to think them“. See, BARNES, Jonathan: *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. I and II, *Bollingen Series*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984, 1661. Apostle translates: „Thus one cannot be mistaken concerning that which is just a being and in *actuality*, but either he conceives it or he does not“ (APOSTLE, Hippocrates G.: *Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

moves from considering truth in relation to composites to considering truth in relation to non-composites. However, precisely what Aristotle means by a non-composite, as Ross has noted, remains undefined throughout this passage.⁴⁴ Yet, the „*asuntheta*“ comes into focus when it is juxtaposed with examples of that which is composite [*suntheton*]:

But concerning the non-composites, what is the to be or not to be and truth or falsity for them? For it is not a composite so as to be when it is composed, and not to be when it is separated, like the white wood or the incommensurable diagonal; nor will truth and falsity belong to it as in the above cases [namely, the white wood and the incommensurable diagonal].⁴⁵

Because the text here concerns the relationship between truth and being, the non-composite and the composite must be thought in terms of both their being and their articulation. Articulation and being are intertwined such that when one says ‚white wood‘, its truth is dependent on the wood’s being white. On the other hand, when one says simply ‚wood‘, its truth does not depend on its being combined with something:

Rather, just as truth about these things is not the same, so neither is the to be, but there is the true and the false, on the one hand, the true is to touch [θιγγεῖν] and to say [φάναι] (for affirmation [κατάφασις] is not the same as saying [φάσις]), on the other hand, ignorance [τὸ δ’ ἀγνοεῖν] is not to touch [μὴ θιγγάνειν]. For it is not possible to be mistaken [ἀπατηθῆναι] concerning the what it is, except accidentally; but similarly also concerning substances that are not composed [περὶ τὰς μὴ συνθετὰς οὐσίας], for it is not possible to be mistaken [ἀπατηθῆναι] about them.⁴⁶

The comparison is not between simple and composite substances, but between formulations in which something is *simply* said (*phasis*) as opposed to formulations in which something is said *of something* (*kataphasis*). Truth for non-composites – be they sensible substances, accidental characteristics or, indeed, simple substances, is a matter of touching and saying. Ross puts it this way:

Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press 1979, 159). Sachs, with his „the very being of which is being-at-work“, Ross, with his „essences“, and Apostle with his „that which is just a being and in actuality“ all presume that Aristotle is referring to the intuition of a simple being that exists only as actuality. On the other hand, Lawson-Tancred’s translation (his own commentary notwithstanding) makes no such assumption: „This shows that anything that is in such a way as to be a something and to have being in actuality is something about which it is not possible to be illuded – it is possible only either to intuit them or not“ (ARISTOTLE: *The Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Lawson-Tancred. London: Penguin Books 1998, 281).

⁴⁴ ROSS, W.D.: *Aristotle’s Metaphysics: A revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1924, II, 276.

⁴⁵ ARISTOTLE: *Meta*. IX, 17–22.

⁴⁶ ARISTOTLE: *Meta*. IX.10 1051b22–28.

The terms of judgement are, so far as their function in the judgement goes, simple, but they may be in themselves complex terms, and again they need not be substances, and if substances, they need not be simple substances. 'White', 'incommensurate', 'diagonal', are not substances; 'wood' is a substance concrete of form and matter. What has been said of all terms with reference to their place in judgement may be said without qualification of 'incomposite substances', the things which are free from any admixture of potentiality and therefore eternal [...].⁴⁷

Ross correctly recognizes that what is non-composite in the passage under consideration can in fact be a sensible individual, or indeed, an accidental quality, so long as it is apprehended and articulated simply – that is, when one is concerned with the very what-it-is of each. One can be mistaken about something belonging to sensible individuals, but not about their what-it-is. With regard to substances that are, in themselves, non-composite – that is, God and the intelligences moving the heavenly spheres – and who are always at-work, it is *never* possible to be mistaken about them; for they do not admit of combination at all. What is true for God always is true for sensible individuals only insofar as they are apprehended and said in their very being-at-work. This is why Aristotle can write: „anything that is in such a way that it is a something [εἶναι τι] and is in its being-at-work [ἐνεργεία], concerning these things, it is not possible to be mistaken [ἀπατηθῆναι], but one either intuitively [νοεῖν] it or not“.⁴⁸ Here *nous* cannot be mistaken in relation to the what-it-is of any substance, be it God or a sensible individual, insofar *nous* apprehends it in its being-at-work. This inability to be mistaken, however, directly links *nous* to *aisthēsis*.

That this feature of *nous* does not apply exclusively to God and the intelligences but also to sensible individuals should come as no surprise given that Aristotle makes the same claim about the senses in relation to their proper sensibles. Indeed, the vocabulary Aristotle uses to articulate the relation between truth and being derives from the sense of touch. For Aristotle, touch manifests a relation to its proper sensible that is unique in its immediacy. What is sensed by touch is not only a sensory medium, but also the very thing sensed. In *De Anima* II.11, Aristotle offers the provocative

⁴⁷ ROSS: *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, II, 276. The vocabulary of 'terms' and 'judgements' implies a separation between being and articulation that is not at work in the text. Indeed, it may be an unwillingness to recognize the way being and its articulation are always intertwined that leads Ross to refuse hear Aristotle's suggestion that there is another truth endemic to non-composites that itself is different from the way judgements are true insofar as they correspond to facts. This other conception of truth requires us to think the relation between being and its articulation, that is, between *nous* and *logos*.

⁴⁸ ROSS: *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 1051b30–32.

analogy of being wounded by a spear to illustrate the unique characteristic of touch:

But tangible things differ from things seen and heard, because we perceive [αἰσθανόμεθα] the latter things when the medium acts on us in a certain way, but [we perceive] tangible things not by the medium but at the same time as the medium, just as someone struck through a shield; for he is not knocked by the shield's striking him, but at the same time [ἀμὰ] both [he and the shield] are struck together.⁴⁹

Whereas with other senses, what is sensed is the medium through which the proper sensible operates, here, the medium, though present, does not deliver the sensible to touch. Rather, the sensible seems to impinge on touch in such a way that it is perceived with a certain immediacy. Yet the medium, as the shield analogy illustrates, is perceived along with the sensible, and therefore is not superfluous. The shield precisely holds the spear at bay in order that it may in fact be touched in such a way that the sense itself is not destroyed. The medium remains here, as with other senses, the condition for the possibility of perception. In seeing, hearing and smelling, the sensible as such is never presented immediately to its sense but is always presented by the medium. In touch, however, the medium mediates not by presenting the sensible, but by holding its action back just enough to allow the sensible to act directly on its sense.

In linking *nous* with touch and by arguing that *nous* is unable to be mistaken, Aristotle shows that it manifests the second characteristic of a proper sensible mentioned above. What remains to be established, however, is that *nous* has a „sensible“ proper to it. This point is made explicitly and in language very similar to that of the *Metaphysics*, when Aristotle writes in *De Anima* III.6:

Every act of saying something according to something [φάσις τι κατὰ τινος], just as every denying, is also either true or false. But this is not so for every νοῦς, but [νοῦς] of the what it is according to its what-was-being [τοῦ τί ἐστι κατὰ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι] is true, and is not a [saying] something according to something; but just as the seeing of something proper to sight is true, but seeing if the white thing is a human-being or not is not always true [...].⁵⁰

Again, Aristotle reinforces the analogy between *nous* and *aisthēsis*, but here he delineates the proper „sensible“ for *nous* – the what-it-is according its what-was-being. It seems that the „infallibility“ of *nous* is not only analogous to that of *aisthēsis*, but is based on the same structure: *nous* is not able to be mistaken

⁴⁹ ARISTOTLE: *De Anima* II.11, 423b12–17.

⁵⁰ ARISTOTLE: *De Anima* III.6, 430b26–30. The structure of this passage is strikingly similar to *Metaphysics* IX.10, 1051b18–27.

precisely about that which is proper to it, just as seeing is not able to be mistaken about its proper sensible. This sort of infallibility is not absolute, but belongs to *nous* just insofar as it is engaged with its *noema*: the what-it-is according to its what-was-being.

But this formulation itself draws us back to the complex relation between *nous* and *logos* we found in the *Posterior Analytics*. There, as we have seen, Aristotle shows how the process that involves perception, memory, experience, and *epagōgē* results in noetic insight into a certain kind of universal: „For when one of the things without differences has made a stand, the first universal is in the soul (for on the one hand the individual is perceived (αἰσθάνεται), but on the other hand perception (αἴσθησις) is of the universal, for example, of the human-being, but not of the human-being Callias)“.⁵¹ Aristotle goes on to claim: „It is clear that it is necessary for us to recognize the first [universals] by ἐπαγωγή, for it is in this way that perception (αἴσθησις) too makes the universal“.⁵² Here too, the power of perception is closely associated with the noetic insight into universals. In light of what Aristotle has said in *De Anima* concerning the proper *noema* of *nous*, we are now able to understand „the first universal in the soul“ as precisely „the what-it-is according to its what-was-being“. Indeed, this latter formulation captures beautifully the complexity of noetic apprehension: the direct appearance of the *noema*, which here corresponds to the first universal that is the proper answer to the what-is-it question, is only possible *kata to ti ēn einai*, according to the what-it-was. The what-it-is of something can only be apprehended according to its what-was-being. The perplexing appearance of the imperfect in this formulation – *to ti ēn einai* – is here amplified by the provocative appearance of ‚*kata*‘.⁵³ The ‚*kata*‘ occurs in an articulation of the nature of a noetic apprehension that is supposed to be precisely *not* a „*ti kata tinos*“, a saying something according to something, that is, a *kataphasis* or affirmation. Yet perhaps the ‚*ēn*‘ and the ‚*kata*‘ point precisely to the site at which human *logos* gives way to *nous*, to that enigmatic moment when, having ‚gone down to‘ (*kata*) the individual, having lived in intimate association with it,⁵⁴ having encountered it in *aisthēsis* and building up from this to experience, we are led to (*epagōgē*) an insight into what the being itself in fact is. The insight is beyond *logos*, yet is only possible through *logos*. As beyond *logos*, the insight into the what-it-is of a being is not simply constructed; as only

⁵¹ ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.*, II.19, 100b1–3.

⁵² ARISTOTLE: *Post. An.*, 100b3–5.

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of the role of *ēn* in the formulation *ti ēn einai*, see LONG: *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy*, 65, 81 and 158.

⁵⁴ See, ARISTOTLE: *On sophistical refutations; On coming-to-be and passing-away*, translated by E. S. Forster, and David J. Furley. HENDERSON, Jeffrey (Hg.) vol. 400, *Loeb classical library* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 316a6–7.

possible though *logos*, this insight is not merely passive apprehension. It is in principle impossible to determine if the what-it-is exists prior to and separate from the process that conditions its apprehension.

THE LOGO-NOETIC ENCOUNTER WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

Aristotle articulates the belonging together of *nous* and *logos* in two distinct, but inter-related ways. As we have seen, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he insists that „*nous* is directed toward what is ultimate [τῶν ἐσχάτων] in both directions“: it is capable of apprehending both universals and individuals.⁵⁵ Yet, the very bi-directionality of *nous* is itself predicated on a *logos* that is Janus faced: looking toward both the universal and the individual. We have shown how, in *Posterior Analytics*, *logos*, by bringing together many individuals, is the condition for the possibility of noetic insight into universals. From the other direction, however, we have shown how, in the *De Anima*, a certain *logos* is the condition for the possibility of the very recognition of the individual at all. Although in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle associates the tendency toward the universal with theoretical *nous* and that toward the individual with practical *nous*, his own discussions of *nous* in the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima* point to the necessity of thinking practical and theoretical *nous* together. Both are grounded in the concrete logo-noetic encounter with the individual.

Recalling that touch is identified as the proper *topos* for noetic insight in *Metaphysics* IX.10, the nature of the logo-noetic encounter can be further determined by returning to the analogy of the shield Aristotle introduces in his discussion of touch in *De Anima* II.11. As mentioned, touch is unique among the senses insofar as it senses *both* the medium and the sensed thing. To translate this into the vocabulary of the logo-noetic encounter with the individual: the mediation of *logos* makes possible a noetic relation to the singular that gives rise to an apprehension of the individual. The shield analogy makes this clear. The shield, as the analogue to touch's medium, corresponds here to the mediating function of *logos*. The spear, as the analogue to the tangible, corresponds to the noematic singular that insistently impinges upon *nous*. In order to apprehend the individual, its insistent singularity must be held at bay by *logos*. Without *logos*, there is no accounting for the individual; without *nous*, the individual dissolves into an abyss of unintelligibility. Aristotle's insistence that *nous* is of the ultimates in both directions indicates its movement between singularity and universality.

The process that conditions the very appearance of the individual mirrors the process outlined in the *Posterior Analytics* through which universals are

⁵⁵ ARISTOTLE: *NE*, 1143a35.

discerned. Here, as there, *logos* functions as the condition for the possibility of noetic insight. Yet, if it is *logos* that leads, through perception, memory, experience and *epagōgē*, to the noetic capacity to discern universal *noemata*, the *logos* that conditions the appearance of the individual does not give rise to a full noetic grasp of the singular. Rather, *logos*, as the very medium through which the singular enters into appearance, offers *nous* access to singularity even as this very singularity is translated into individuality. As phenomenal, the singular is transformed; it relinquishes its autarkic independence as it enters into appearance. *Logos* accomplishes this translation, but not without *nous*. Here we must pay attention to another dimension of *nous* – one that is lost when *nous* is thought exclusively on the model of vision and the synoptic insight it has historically been taken to promise. Here, *nous* is less a clear and distinct insight than a vague feeling, a sense for the irreducible presence of the singular.⁵⁶ Aristotle speaks of touch (*thiganein*) in relation to *nous*: the singular touches us. Yet there, too, is a kind of saying (*phasis*). This saying does not yet rise to the level of *logos*, rather, it is the more original assertion by which a relation to the singular is made possible.

We might say, then, that *nous* is a kind of ontological encounter that is determined, as Aristotle says, by touch and saying together. If touch gestures to the role *nous* plays in this encounter, *phasis* gestures already to the role of *logos*; if touch offers a sense for the singularity of phenomena, *phasis* points to the self-expressive assertion of the singular. Thus, although the singular loses something of its autarkic independence as it becomes phenomenal and expressible through *logos*, it retains its capacity for self-assertion – a saying irreducible but always accessible to *logos*. If this saying were the same as *logos*, it would then be a *kataphasis* rather than a *phasis*. The singular gives itself to articulation in *logos*, but is never exhausted by it.

In this way, *nous* relates both to the singularity of a thing and to its ability to be grasped in relation to other singulars. The oddity of *nous* that interpreters like Barnes and Le Blond point out, arises precisely because of its ability to attend to both the singular and the common. The singular appears only as individual, conditioned by the *logos* through which each phenomenon becomes intelligible.⁵⁷ Yet, the being of the individual is never captured

⁵⁶ To resist understanding *nous* in terms of visual acuity is in fact to return *nous* to its etymological origins in words associated with the much less precise sense of smell. Kurt von Fritz tells us that „the words *noos* and *noein* are most probably derived from a root meaning ‚to sniff‘ or ‚to smell‘“. See, VON FRITZ, Kurt: *Nous, Noein, and their Derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Excluding Anaxagoras)*. In: MOURELATOS, Alexander P. D. (Hg.): *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1974, 23.

⁵⁷ This is not to say, however, that the interpretation of Aquinas and Biondi is correct. What that interpretation misses is the relation of *nous* to the singular. Because of Aristotle's insistence that *nous* is directed toward the singular (and, to be sure, to the universal), the

completely by this intelligibility; we are touched, through *nous*, by its resistant singularity; we hear, by a *phasis* that lends itself to *logos*, its inchoate insistence. If *nous* is always related to this insistence and resistance of singularity, then it must also always respond to it. One could say that the insistent resistance of the singular enjoins ontological responsibility. The interrelation of *nous* and *logos* shows the limits of each as well. The relation of *nous* to the singularity of a phenomenon points to the limits of the *logos* that necessarily conditions the very appearing of the individuals that serve, as Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as „the sources (ἀρχαί) of the that-for-the-sake-of-which“.⁵⁸ The relation of *logos* to generality and conceptuality points to the limits of the *nous* that is a saying and a touching but not a logical assertion.

Abstract

This essay challenges the received orthodoxy that in Aristotle, nous, the capacity for intuitive insight and logos, the capacity of combination that belongs to human discursive thinking, are mutually exclusive, independently operating capacities of the human mind. It argues rather that Aristotle articulates an understanding of nous that is able to be logical and of logos that is able to be noetic. The essay traces the complex relationship between nous and logos that runs through the various paths of Aristotle's thinking from the Posterior Analytics to the Nichomachean Ethics and into the De Anima and the Metaphysics, in order to discern the extent to which nous and logos in Aristotle belong together. The relation between nous and logos is shown to be determined by concrete logo-noetic encounters with individuals that at once give rise to the universals of theoretical contemplation and allow humans to effectively respond to the world of practical affairs. The result is an integrated understanding of nous in its relation to logos that enjoins a heightened sensitivity to and responsibility toward the concrete individuals encountered in everyday experience.

intelligibility of any given phenomenon cannot be grounded in a universal essence that constitutes its being. Our argument has shown that a thing „becomes intelligible“ by way of a process that begins with individuals.

⁵⁸ ARISTOTLE: *NE*, 1143b4.