



The ontological reappropriation of *phronēsis*

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Abstract. Ontology has been traditionally guided by *sophia*, a form of knowledge directed toward that which is eternal, permanent, necessary. This tradition finds an important early expression in the philosophical ontology of Aristotle. Yet in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's intense concern to do justice to the world of finite contingency leads him to develop a mode of knowledge, *phronēsis*, that implicitly challenges the hegemony of *sophia* and the economy of values on which it depends. Following in the tradition of the early Heidegger's recognition of the ontological significance of Aristotle's *Ethics* and of Gadamer's appropriation of *phronēsis* for hermeneutics, this article argues that an ontology guided by *phronēsis* is preferable to one governed by *sophia*. Specifically, it suggests that by taking *sophia* as its paradigm, traditional philosophical ontology has historically been determined by a kind of knowledge that is incapable of critically considering the concrete historico-ethico-political conditions of its own deployment. This critique of *sophia* is accomplished by uncovering the economy of values that led Aristotle to privilege *sophia* over *phronēsis*. It is intended to open up the possibility of developing an ontology of finite contingency based on *phronēsis*. Such an ontology, because it is guided by and must remain responsible to the concrete individual with which it is engaged, would be ethical at its very core.

Key words: Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer, *phronesis*, *sophia*, ontology

In his influential lectures on Plato's *Sophist*, Martin Heidegger suggests that the Greek understanding of the meaning of being was oriented by a deep admiration for the eternal that accounts for the privileged position *sophia* occupies in ancient Greek thinking.¹ However, in the account of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that opens these lectures, Heidegger also suggests that the notion of *phronēsis* Aristotle develops in book VI is structurally quite similar to *sophia* and thus that it emerges as a genuine rival to *sophia* as the highest possibility of Dasein. Heidegger himself seems to have drawn heavily on Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* in *Sein und Zeit*, although it is a matter of some debate as to precisely which elements of the "fundamental ontology" developed there owe their inspiration to *phronēsis*.² By the end of his analysis of Aristotle in the *Sophist* lectures, however, Heidegger too seems to endorse the priority of *sophia* over *phronēsis* precisely because it employs *nous* which provides the proper access to the disclosing of truth (*alethes*).³ What Heidegger

fails to address, and what his endorsement of the priority of *sophia* prevents him from critically considering, is the economy of values that has historically determined the decision to give pride of place to *sophia* and *nous*. Once the normative assumptions implicit in such a decisive decision are delineated, *phronēsis*, because it points to the possibility of developing a critically self-reflective model of ontological knowledge firmly embedded in the finite world, emerges as a genuine alternative to *sophia*.

Traditional ontology has embraced an economy of values that privileges the eternal, universal and necessary over the finite and contingent. This economy operates already in the Parmenidean response to Heraclitus and in the Platonic obsession with the imperishable. Yet it is Aristotle who consolidates it by establishing the study of being qua being as “first philosophy” thereby directing ontology towards a first, eternal, universal and necessary principle (*Meta.*, 1026a24–34).⁴ Such a directive already operates with an economy of values it is itself loath to recognize, choosing instead to hide behind the aura of authority theory is said to hold over practice. But ontology has never been merely theoretical; it is always born out of and determined by the historico-ethico-political conditions under which it is developed. Indeed, blinded by its love for *sophia* and a concomitant passion for eternal certainty, ontology has historically been reluctant to recognize the concrete conditions of its own birth. In this sense, ontology has for too long been perverted by philosophy.

However, if, with his insistence on the necessary and certain, Aristotle decisively determines the importance of philosophy for ontology, with the dialectical method he uses in developing his thinking in relation to the history of his predecessors, and, more notably, with the introduction of *phronēsis*, a form of knowledge capable of critically considering the conditions of its own operation, Aristotle also offers ontology the tools by which to extricate itself from the hegemony of *sophia*. The significance of the dialectical method Aristotle deploys against his predecessors cannot be over-emphasized, for it establishes him as the first historian of philosophy to explicitly think with and against the tradition in which he is embedded. However, it remains of secondary importance for the present attempt to delineate the extent to which Aristotle both inaugurates and undermines the trajectory of the history of philosophical ontology. The dialectical method remains inadequate in this regard because when deployed, as it is in *Physics*, book I and *Metaphysics*, A and B, it is far more concise and explicit about what is to be rejected of the inherited thinking than what is uncritically accepted. The tendency to value the necessary and eternal over the contingent and finite is an inherited assumption Aristotle never considers calling into question, at least not until, in the *Nicomachean*

Ethics, he turns his attention to the contingent existence of human being. There Aristotle develops the notion of *phronēsis* over against that of *sophia* precisely because *sophia* would not deign to work with the dynamic, contingent principles endemic to ethics. Yet even here, Aristotle remains intent on ultimately subordinating *phronēsis* to *sophia*. So long as the economy of values underlying this condescending attitude towards contingency remains unchallenged, *sophia* will retain a dangerous aura of authority, operating with a set of normative ideals it is constitutionally incapable of critically considering.

Therefore, in what follows, I will first adumbrate the economy of values underlying Aristotle's argument for the preeminence of *sophia* in order to expose the limitations of philosophical ontology. Second, I will argue that Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* has an advantage over *sophia* because it is capable of critically considering the concrete conditions under which it operates. Finally, I will suggest that an ontology directed by *phronēsis* is preferable to one governed by *sophia* precisely because the logic of *phronēsis* includes the conceptual apparatus that enables ontology to remain critically cognizant of the conditions under which it is deployed.⁵

1. Philosophical ideals

A preliminary indication of the ideals that inform Aristotle's conception of *sophia* can be gained if we attend to its six basic aspects as developed in *Metaphysics* A.2, where he considers common beliefs about the subject. The wise person is thought (1) to be able to know all things (*panta*) without needing to know each thing individually; (2) to know things difficult to know; (3) to be more accurate; (4) to be more capable of teaching the causes; (5) to pursue knowledge for its own sake; and (6) to set the order rather than being set in order. Aristotle himself ties all six aspects together under the heading "universal knowledge" (*tēn katholou epistēmēn*) (982a22–3). Denise Schaeffer has recognized the significance of this designation, suggesting that, with the important exception of the aspect of teaching, "all of these attributes have to do with abstracting from particulars."⁶ However, based on what Aristotle actually says in *Metaphysics* A.1–2, it is difficult to see how teaching too does not succumb to this basic characterization.

Aristotle explicitly states that the ability to teach is a sign of the one who understands (*tou eidotos*) and involves stating the causes of each thing (981b7–982a30). Further, he links the dimension of teaching closely to that of accuracy. According to the *Posterior Analytics*, a science is more accurate if it (1) knows not only the facts, but the reasons for the facts; (2) is not concerned

with the underlying subject; and (3) has fewer principles (87a33–39). Only the first of these aspects of accuracy suggests even the possibility that attending to concrete individuals is important, and it recognizes this reluctantly, immediately eclipsing it by emphasizing the importance of *reasons*. Thus, according to Aristotle, what seems to make the wise person more capable of teaching is not, as Schaeffer would have it, the self-reflective ability to reproduce knowledge in the student, but rather, the simple ability to see and accurately state the causes.⁷

Therefore, the dimension of teaching seems also to fit into the basic characterization of *sophia* as a kind of universal knowledge that need not concern itself with the concrete individual. Although Aristotle has a rich understanding of the various ways in which the term “universal” is employed, here it seems that *sophia* is “universal” not because it is knowledge of the highest genus, nor because it knows the forms appearing in each individual being, but rather because it knows the first causes of all things and therefore can determine that which is essential to each individual without needing to attend to each on every occasion.⁸ Thus, *sophia* will be a universal knowledge regardless of whether the principles and causes it knows are themselves universal or individual.

So, if we take the first aspect Aristotle presents in this preliminary discussion of *sophia* seriously, namely, that the wise person knows all things (*panta*) without having knowledge of each individually, then a totalizing tendency seems to emerge as part of the basic operation of *sophia*. When seen in conjunction with the last aspect mentioned, namely that the wise person sets the order, the totalizing tendency takes on a distinctively authoritarian flavor – for in Aristotle, as Joseph Owens rightly suggests, *sophia*, although not itself a practical science, regulates the order of human activity.⁹ The concern to secure order by obedience to those with direct access to the eternal principles guides Aristotle’s thinking about *sophia* throughout; it is evident here in this preliminary analysis and it informs his constant insistence on the preeminence of *sophia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

1.1. *The elevation of sophia*

Aristotle’s brief delineation of the superiority of *sophia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI (1145a7–12) reaches its highest expression in book X.7–9 where the authoritarian tendency suggested above clearly determines Aristotle’s thematization of the *vita contemplativa* as the best because it is (1) the “most continuous,” (2) the most “self-sufficient,” and finally, (3) pursued “for the sake of itself.”

In *NE* VI.7, Aristotle elevates *sophia* above both *epistēmē* and *phronēsis*. Like *epistēmē*, *sophia* is concerned with beings that are “always the same” (1141a24–5).¹⁰ However, *sophia* is more than mere *epistēmē* precisely because it is capable of directly intuiting the truth of the principles with which it operates:

... it is necessary for the wise person not only to know the things that follow from the principles, but also to have the truth concerning the principles, with the result that *sophia* would be *nous* and *epistēmē*, that is *epistēmē* of the most honorable things, holding its own head (*NE* 1141a16–20).¹¹

The superiority of *sophia* lies in its ability to transcend the world of transient finitude by means of *nous* which gives it direct, immediate and infallible access to that which cannot vary (1141a1–9). Despite the fact that Aristotle is a great champion of the Heraclitean maxim that “there are gods here too,” there remains in him a deep Parmenidean bias, fostered of course, by the strong and lasting influence of Plato, that drives him to give pride of place to that which is eternal, permanent and infallible. The tension between these two tendencies in Aristotle can be felt each time he considers the relationship between *sophia* and *phronēsis* in book VI; for although *phronēsis* becomes increasingly important as the *Ethics* progresses, it is never permitted to trump the hegemony of *sophia*. Ultimately, the preeminent status of *sophia* is secured by *nous* with its privileged access to the eternal and concomitant infallibility.¹² Yet, there is a price *sophia* pays for its direct access to the divine. In concentrating its gaze on the eternal, *sophia*, although always already embedded in the world of human affairs, turns a blind eye to the real historico-ethico-political conditions to which it must be subjected as a human form of knowledge. The ultimate expression of this sort of philosophical dismissal of concrete human existence in the *NE* can be found in book X.7–9. A brief investigation into the sorts of characteristics Aristotle praises in his attempt to establish the priority of the theoretical over the practical activity will indicate the extent to which this economy of philosophical values is at work.

1.2. *The priority of contemplation*

It should come as no surprise that Aristotle begins his discussion of the supremacy of the life of contemplation by asserting the preeminence of *nous*. *Nous* is the “best” for two reasons, first because it is the best “in us” and second because it is concerned with the best of the things known (1177a20–22).

This appeal to the central importance of *nous* not only situates the discussion of the life of contemplation firmly within the Eleatic tradition of Greek thinking, but also implicitly links the priority of the contemplative life to the priority of *sophia*.

Aristotle goes on to praise the life of contemplation as the “most continuous” (*synechestatē*); “for,” he continues, “we are able to theorize more continually (*synechēs mallon*) than we are able to perform some action” (1177a21–23). The Greek adjective “*synechēs*,” which literally means “keeping or holding together,” points already to a temporal determination of contemplation insofar as it can mean “continuous, unceasing, and unintermitting.”¹³

The specifically temporal sense of the term can be traced back to Parmenides, when, having traveled far from the “backward-turning” paths of mortals (6.9), he attends to the goddess as she describes true Being as that which “never was nor will be, since it is now, all of it is together one, continuous (*syneches*)” (8.5).¹⁴ Aristotle himself affirms the temporal determination of that which is continuous when he ascribes it to the life of God in *Metaphysics* Λ.7 (1072b29), and again in Λ.9, when he argues that “if God were not thinking but a potency, then it is reasonable that the continuity of his thinking would be wearisome for Him” (1074b28–9). Here continuity seems to be a function of the extent to which potentiality is annihilated; for God’s capacity to maintain Himself in perfect continuity depends upon the total expurgation of potency. Thus, by grounding the preeminence of contemplation in its capacity for continuity, Aristotle not only privileges the eternal over the temporal, he also implicitly endorses the rejection of potentiality. The result, however, is that each time *sophia* turns its attention to that which is contingent and therefore intimately wrapped up in the potentiality endemic to finite time, it perverts itself, sully the purity of its authoritative certainty. By holding up continuity as an ideal towards which all contemplation should aspire, Aristotle necessarily degrades any kind of thinking concerned to critically consider the contingent conditions under which it is deployed.

This capacity for self-critique is further undermined by a second characteristic of the life of contemplation. Aristotle writes: “That which is called self-sufficient (*autarkeia*) also would apply most of all to the theoretical activity” (1177a27–8). Whether he uses cognates of the verb *chōrizein* (to separate) as he does in the *Metaphysics* (1029a25),¹⁵ or the language of predication as he does in the *Categories* (2a11–2),¹⁶ independence has always been a primary feature of those beings in Aristotle’s ontology with the highest status. It is no surprise, then, to find Aristotle presenting self-sufficiency as a primary characteristic of the *vita contemplativa*. Self-sufficiency is precisely what situates the wise person above the just. He continues:

The wise person, the just person and all the rest have need of the necessities of life, but when they have been sufficiently furnished with things of this sort, while the just person needs those towards whom and with whom he will act justly, . . . the wise person on the other hand is able to theorize even when alone, and the wiser the person is, the more that person can do this. Although having colleagues is perhaps better, just the same he is the most self-sufficient (1177a27–34).

Despite the equivocation of the last sentence, the familiar normative calculus is at work throughout this passage: the more self-sufficient a person is, the higher that person is situated in the hierarchy. The just person is situated below the wise person because it is impossible to act justly without the existence of an other with whom to act. This dependence upon others is clearly thematized as a deficit. The deprecation of interdependence and excessive glorification of independence comprises one of the most fundamental underlying normative assumptions of the philosophical ideal. It reveals the fundamentally monological nature of *sophia*.

However, in the *NE* Aristotle constantly struggles with this normative assumption because he recognizes that being with others is a basic fact of human existence, neither to be denied nor unequivocally rejected. At the beginning of the *NE*, Aristotle had attempted to clarify his own use of “*autarkeia*” over against what seems to have been the common Greek (and Platonic) understanding of the term: “For the perfect good seems to be self-sufficient. But we do not call the human being by himself alone, living a solitary life, ‘self-sufficient,’ but also the human being living a life with parents, children and a wife and, in general, with friends and citizens, since human being is by nature political” (1097b7–11). This conception of *autarkeia* coincides well with Aristotle’s tendency to affirm the importance of being with others when discussing the nature of human existence. We may call this “ethical autarky” in order to distinguish it from the “philosophical autarky” that connotes the ideal of the absolute self-sufficiency of those beings that cannot be otherwise.

Because ethics is by nature concerned with the being of human beings, it is natural to find Aristotle affirming the importance of ethical autarky at the beginning of the *Ethics*. By the end, however, when Aristotle comes to determine which activity is the best, he allows himself to be guided by the authority of philosophical autarky. Thus, although the equivocation that appears at the end of the passage cited above – “although having colleagues *is perhaps better*” – suggests that he recognizes that insofar as *sophia* is a human activity, it must be embedded in the world of inter-human relations, Aristotle remains nonetheless explicitly loyal to that tradition of Greek thinking which privileges eternal self-sufficiency over embedded finite interdependence.

The third characteristic of the *vita contemplativa* to be mentioned in this context is the notion that this life is sought for the sake of itself. Aristotle says that “it is commonly thought that this activity alone is loved for the sake of itself; for nothing is generated from it besides contemplation, but from practical activities, we gain for our own benefit (*peripoioumetha*) either more or less besides the action” (1177b1–4). Here the priority of theory over practice is based on a very instrumental interpretation of action, for Aristotle seems to assume here, as he does not elsewhere (cf. *Meta.* 1048b17–37; *NE* 1140b4–8), that *praxis* is a sort of *poiēsis* and thus always done for some external end. Although it would be unjust to blame Aristotle exclusively for the radical distinction between theory and practice that emerges most acutely after Kant, sentences such as these in the context of his profound affirmation of the nobility of the divine over the human, help to facilitate the reified disjunction between theory and practice we have inherited. Here the disjunction is established by means of an utilitarian conception of practice that serves to further remove theory from the concrete conditions under which it operates. The distinction between theory and practice seems designed to elevate theory above the utilitarian perversions of contingent human existence.

However, this “poetic” interpretation eclipses another, more profound understanding of the practical in Aristotle, one that is capable of bridging the gap between theory and practice without reducing theory to mere utilitarian calculation. It is for the sake of this non-poetic conception of *praxis* that Aristotle develops *phronēsis*, a kind of knowledge capable of critically addressing the concrete conditions of its own operation. Before turning to this conception of *phronēsis*, let us summarize our analysis to this point.

What emerges here is a conception of *sophia* determined by an economy of values it is constitutionally incapable of criticizing. This incapacity results from a monological obsession with that which cannot be otherwise. The absolute hegemony of *sophia* depends upon a decisive rejection of the concrete contingency of human existence to which it is unavoidably bound. So long as philosophy remains a human pursuit, any renunciation of this relationship is dangerously delusional. As is clear from this analysis of Aristotle, historically, *sophia* has wrapped itself in a shroud of nobility precisely in order to sequester itself from the sully influence of its own contingency. The aura of this nobility has so captivated ontology that it has taken up these philosophical ideals as its own and come to understand itself as nothing more than the assiduous search for the eternal truth according to which the totality of beings may be determined. By exposing the normative assumptions that drive Aristotle to elevate *sophia* to a position of preeminence, I intend to undermine the mesmerizing effect the aura of *sophia* has had on ontology in order to explic-

itly recover for ontology the capacity for critique. This is the main impetus behind the ontological reappropriation of *phronēsis* that follows.

2. Reappropriating *phronēsis*

Obviously, to suggest that *phronēsis* has ontological significance is by no means original. We have already mentioned Heidegger's recognition that Aristotle's analysis of *phronēsis* has far reaching ontological implications. This direction of investigation was taken up and expanded upon by Gadamer's appropriation of *phronēsis* as a model for hermeneutics in *Wahrheit und Methode*.¹⁷ However, Heidegger never explicitly thematizes a *positive* relationship between ethics and ontology, nor does he really question the ultimate priority of *sophia* and theoretical *nous*. Gadamer, although he recognizes and embraces the specifically *ethical* implications of his appropriation of *phronēsis*, focuses primarily on the important difference between it and *technē*. Here, on the other hand, I would like to re-appropriate Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* for ontology in order not only to *explicitly* embrace the assumption implied by such a strategy – namely, that ethics and ontology are, and have always been, intertwined – but also to suggest that Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* offers ontology the conceptual apparatus for critique *sophia* neither requires nor desires. For this, a complete analysis of *phronēsis* is unnecessary; rather, I will focus specifically on those dimensions of *phronēsis* that can be deployed against two basic features of *sophia* suggested by the above analysis: (1) its attempt to transcend its own embedded contingency by looking toward the eternal, and (2) the philosophical autarky that renders it monological in nature. Over against these, *phronēsis* will be shown to be (1) firmly situated in and directed toward the world of human finitude, and (2) ethically autarkic and thus dialogical in nature. These two dimensions will be shown to give *phronēsis* a capacity for critique unavailable to *sophia*. By establishing the second, dialogical dimension of *phronēsis*, first, I will be able to illustrate how the constellation of concepts – virtue, habit, ethical intuition, and choice – that converge in Aristotle's understanding of *phronēsis* contributes, contrary to what some have suggested, to its critical capacities.

2.1. *The humanism of phronēsis*

Aristotle clearly positions *phronēsis* below *sophia* in the hierarchy of knowledge because the latter is concerned with things that cannot be other than they

are and *phronēsis* is concerned with things human (*anthrōpina*) (1141b8–10). However, from the perspective of the ontological reappropriation of *phronēsis* attempted here, this sort of degradation has a positive effect. By designating human being as the object of *phronēsis*, Aristotle is forced to take seriously his own injunction to expect only so much precision from a subject as it will permit (1094b20–7). These lowered expectations of accuracy free Aristotle from his loyalty to the hierarchy of philosophical values and allow him to develop a form of knowledge radically embedded in the finite world. With this, of course, comes a level of uncertainty with which philosophers have traditionally been very uncomfortable.¹⁸ One way to understand the impetus behind the totalizing tendencies of *sophia* is as the expression of an urgent desire to minimize uncertainty by maximizing that which is permanent, eternal, secure. By directing his investigation into *phronēsis* towards the realm of “things human,” Aristotle turns his eyes away from the blinding light of eternal certitude towards the refracted world of turbid finitude.

As we have seen, the strategic degradation of the human sphere by which *sophia* seeks to secure certainty for itself renders it incapable of critically reflecting upon the conditions of its own deployment. In turning away from the world of contingent existence, *sophia* cuts itself off from those encounters that can critically challenge the authority of the principles with which it operates. It is otherwise with *phronēsis*; for *phronēsis* never operates in isolation. It is constantly held accountable by the other beings with which it is always already involved. I will call this inability to operate in isolation the “dialogical dimension” of *phronēsis*. It directs *phronēsis* towards the other and thus opens up the space for the possibility of critique, for it is in the direct encounter with the other that the secure hegemony of the same is first called into question and the ground for critique prepared.

On its face, this insistence upon the dialogical dimension of *phronēsis* may appear dissonant with Aristotle’s own explicit claims in the *NE*. Surely it is undermined when Aristotle writes: “It seems that *phronēsis* is most of all concerned with matters that relate to the person in whom it exists and to himself alone” (1141b29–30). At first glance this statement seems to testify only to the egoism of the *phronimos*. But its real significance lies in the fact that it establishes both the self-referential and the self-reflective character of *phronēsis*.¹⁹ The self-referential dimension of *phronēsis* opens up the possibility of responsibility. By affirming that each act of phronetic judgment is concerned with and relates to the one doing the judging, Aristotle recognizes that the *phronimos* is ineluctably responsible for the judgment itself. The “self-reflective” dimension of *phronēsis* suggests that the one who judges must be capable of reflecting on the various ways in which she or he is always already

implicated in every act of judgment. This entails an ability not only to critically consider the concrete historico-ethico-political realities that condition each judgment, but also to recognize what Richard Bernstein, in interpreting Gadamer, has called the “enabling prejudices” that always function in human judgment.²⁰ The recognition that all judgment involves prejudice, both “blind” and “enabling,” lends urgency to the attempt to develop a kind of knowledge capable of critically evaluating both the internal and external conditions of its own deployment. If *phronēsis* is to be self-critical and self-referential in the manner suggested, then it cannot be monological.

When taken out of context, sentences like the one cited above seem to undermine the suggestion that Aristotle himself understood *phronēsis* as fundamentally dialogical; for it cannot be denied that Aristotle never explicitly thematizes *phronēsis* as “dialogical.” However, when placed back into the context of the *Ethics* as a whole, and specifically, when understood in relation to the cluster of concepts Aristotle introduces in book VI.11–12, the dialogical dimension of *phronēsis*, and with it, the capacity for critique, comes more clearly into focus.

2.2. *The dialogical dimension of phronēsis*

In *NE* VI.11–12, Aristotle establishes the intimate relationship between *phronēsis* and what he calls “*synesis*” (1143a1–b14). For Aristotle, “*synesis*,” which literally means a “joining or meeting together” and therefore connotes a kind of being with others, indicates the peculiar kind of intelligence exhibited by the *phronimos*. Like *phronēsis*, *synesis* is concerned with beings about which one can raise questions and deliberate (1143a6). However, Aristotle is clear to establish the difference between *phronēsis* and *synesis*, for the latter remains merely an intellectual capacity to judge, while the former is able to and must always bridge the gap between theoretical judgment and the action upon which it is based. *Phronēsis* is never a purely intellectual exercise, yet if the intellectual side of *phronēsis* is permitted to be completely eclipsed, the misconception emerges that it is merely a matter of mechanical habituation. As will be seen in the discussion of *phronēsis* and *aretē* below, the disposition of *phronēsis* is thoroughly saturated by deliberation. Here, however, he is concerned to establish precisely what sort of intellectual operation is at work in *phronēsis*.

In order to do this, however, Aristotle introduces a very revealing analogy. “*Synesis*,” he writes, “is neither to have *phronēsis* nor to acquire it.”

But just as learning is called intelligent (*synienai*), whenever it uses scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), so too is judging called good (*kalōs*) when it judges by using opinion (*doxa*) concerning those things with which *phronēsis* is concerned, when someone else speaks (*allou legontos*) [about them] (1143a10–15).

The seemingly odd insertion of the genitive absolute, *allou legontos*, suggests that *synesis* is not pursued in isolation, but rather, is situated in concrete, dialogical encounters with others. Indeed, this passage suggests, as Gadamer has pointed out, that *synesis* can be and is deployed in cases in which the *phronimos* is not even the one who acts.²¹ Once *synesis* is recognized as the sort of intelligence that is directed toward or exercised in conjunction with another, a more nuanced and indeed stronger translation of it may be suggested. The word itself has an etymological relation to “*syneidēsis*,” or “conscience.”²² Thus, although “*syneidēsis*” never appears in Aristotle as such, and there remains in the term “conscience” dangerously misleading Christian theological and Heideggerian connotations, perhaps we can nonetheless risk the more bold translation of *synesis* as “conscientious apprehension” so as to emphasize the ethical and dialogical connotations it clearly has in Aristotle.²³ “Conscientious apprehension” names the ability to grasp the nature of a given situation in a mode of critical self-reflection that remains constantly conscious of the fact that the judge too is implicated in each act of judgment. The ability to imagine one’s way into the position of the other and to listen as the other speaks (*allou legontos*) are important elements of conscientious apprehension because they disrupt the internal monologue of the *phronimos* and direct it towards that which is outside itself. Here *phronēsis* is understood as dialogical not merely because it can listen as others speak, but also because it recognizes that the concrete situation itself is never exclusively determined by its subjective judgment. Indeed, the fact that *synesis* must operate with *doxa* and not, as *sophia*, with an immediate grasp of the truth, already suggests the extent to which *phronēsis* is itself determined by the world in which it is embedded.

The embedded nature of *phronēsis* is further reinforced by a second concept closely connected to *synesis*: equity or fairness (*epieikeia*) (1143a20–33). Aristotle originally introduced the conception of fairness at the end of his account of justice in *NE* V because he was concerned to hold the absolute authority of the law in check. Here *epieikeia* takes on the meaning of “equity:” “This is the nature of the equitable: a correction of the law when it errs because it is stated universally” (1137b26–7). Equity or fairness serves to correct universal laws that are unable to do justice to the peculiarities of the individual situation and context to which they are applied. Such laws become

unjust because they are too rigid and thus require correction by a special decree made in the spirit of fairness. By introducing the notion of fairness into the structure of *phronēsis*, Aristotle equips *phronēsis* with the capacity to critically question the authority of the universal with which it operates. Here the dialogical dimension is expressed not in terms of the encounter with another, but rather as an aspect of the internal operation of *phronēsis* itself. *Epieikeia* points to the capacity of *phronēsis* to problematize the application of the universal with which it must operate in each act of judgment so as to ensure that justice is done in each case. It emerges as an important feature of *phronēsis* precisely because Aristotle recognizes that the principles with which the *phronimos* operates are never absolute and eternal, but rather, contingent and fallible.

This recognition of fallibility also drives Aristotle to introduce a third concept closely connected with the two features of conscientious apprehension and fairness already mentioned: fellow-feeling, leniency or forgiveness (*syngnōmē*). Aristotle claims: “we say the person is fair who is most likely to forgive, and that fairness is to be forgiving in specific cases” (1143a21–2). Here forgiveness clearly operates with fairness so as to ensure justice in each specific case. By emphasizing not only fairness, but also forgiveness or leniency, Aristotle further equips *phronēsis* with the capacity to recognize the potential fallibility of its own operation. Such a recognition would be absurd for *sophia*, for it concerns only those beings that cannot be otherwise. The deployment of *sophia*, with its capacity through theoretical *nous* to immediately apprehend the truth, is thought infallible. Where one cannot be wrong, there is no need for forgiveness. Forgiveness emerges as a fundamental feature of *phronēsis* precisely because it is embedded in *doxa* and concerned with those beings that can be otherwise. By emphasizing this capacity to forgive, Aristotle further reinforces the dialogical dimension of *phronēsis*, for as Hannah Arendt has suggested, “no one can forgive himself” as forgiving in solitude and isolation remains “without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one’s self.”²⁴ As elements of the dialogical dimension of *phronēsis*, conscientious apprehension, fairness and forgiveness shatter this sort of delusional self-indulgence and equip *phronēsis* with a self-reflectiveness unavailable to *sophia*.

By emphasizing these elements of the dialogical dimension of Aristotle’s conception of *phronēsis* and insisting that they equip *phronēsis* with a critical capacity unavailable to *sophia*, I remain loyal to the spirit of the *NE* in its attempt to do justice to the contingency of human existence. However, it may be argued that, when understood in relation to what Aristotle says about the nature of ethical virtue, habit and choice, severe limits are in fact placed on

the critical capacities of the *phronimos*.²⁵ Yet when the discussion of *phronēsis* is situated back into the context of the constellation of concepts that determine it in the *Ethics*, its critical capacities, far from being limited, are in fact deepened and expanded. In order to appreciate this, however, we must attend to the internal operation of *phronēsis*, and specifically to the respective roles virtue, habit, ethical intuition and choice play in it.

2.3. *Phronēsis situated*

The discussion of conscientious apprehension, fairness and forgiveness already directs us toward the peculiar place in which *phronēsis* is situated: the concrete encounter with the individual. Aristotle insists that *phronēsis* must be directed toward the individual with which it is concerned: “It is not possible for *phronēsis* to be knowledge of the universal (*kath’ holou*) alone, it must also know the individuals (*ta kath, hekasta*); for it is practical, and action concerns individuals” (1141b15–18). Aristotle’s affirmation of the individual here is not an absolute rejection of the universal; *phronēsis* must operate with universals.²⁶ Rather, Aristotle recognizes that true phronetic judgment is always situated precisely between the universal and the individual, that, to borrow from Kant, universals without individuals are empty, individuals without universals, blind. This was the impetus behind Gadamer’s appropriation of *phronēsis* as a model for hermeneutics. He too recognized that in the application (*Anwendung*) of *phronēsis* the universal and the individual are *co-determined* (WM, 328/322).²⁷ This dynamic co-determination of the universal and the individual decisively differentiates *phronēsis* from *sophia*.

The logic at work in *sophia* is driven by the absolute authority of the eternal first principles. As we have seen, Aristotle calls the knowledge of such principles “universal” not because they are thematized as highest genera under which all beings are subsumed, but because such knowledge is capable of knowing all things without attending to each individually. This dimension of *sophia* seems to distinguish it even from *epistēmē*, for Aristotle suggests at the end of the *Posterior Analytics*, that *epistēmē* establishes the “first universal in the soul” by induction and thus that epistemic universals, in some sense at least, are dependent upon the direct encounter with individuals through the power of sensation (100a16–b7). If, however, *epistēmē* seeks eternal certainty, and if *sophia*, by means of its noetic power, convinces itself that it has succeeded in this quest, *phronēsis* is so thoroughly embedded in the world of finite contingency that it no longer permits itself to be seduced by the quest for certainty. *Phronēsis* disrupts the philosophical obsession with certainty and

redirects itself toward the concrete individual from which the possibility of genuine critique first emerges.

2.4. *Virtue*

There is no *phronēsis* without virtue (*aretē*) (1144b31–2). Virtue determines the end of action towards which *phronēsis* is directed (1145a3–5). It is tempting to understand this statement in terms of the logic of technical production according to which *phronēsis* would be concerned merely with the means to establish some end determined externally by virtue. Aristotle himself seems to have originally developed the relationship between deliberation and ends in book III along these lines: “We deliberate not concerning the ends, but concerning the things towards the ends (*peri tōn pros ta telē*)” (1112b11–12). However, once Aristotle establishes the distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis* (1140b4–7), it is no longer possible to understand *phronēsis* according to the logic of production; for the end of *praxis* is not, like that of *poiēsis*, determined from the outside.²⁸ Aristotle’s ultimate identification of *phronēsis* with *aretē* is necessitated by the fact that *phronēsis* concerns *praxis* which is an end in itself; as such, *phronēsis* must be concerned not only with the means to ends, but also with the determination of the ends themselves.

The misinterpretation that reads *phronēsis* as merely concerned with the means towards the ends established by ethical *aretē* is the result of a twofold misunderstanding. First, it results from a tendency – operating throughout Aristotle, despite himself – to understand activities in terms of the means-ends logic of production. That *praxis* and by extension *phronēsis* cannot be captured by this logic is clear once Aristotle establishes the distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*. Second, as Richard Sorabji has suggested, Aristotle’s tendency to treat the different aspects of his ethical theory separately leads to a false impression of the theory as a whole.²⁹ This is particularly acute in the case of the relation between *phronēsis* and ethical *aretē*; for by presenting them in isolation from one another, Aristotle gives the impression that they are really separated – the one determining the means, the other the ends. By calling *phronēsis* itself an *aretē* (1140b224–5), Aristotle corrects this misconception and implicitly grants *phronēsis* the capacity to determine the ends themselves.³⁰ When seen in its intimate connection with *aretē*, *phronēsis* must be recognized as self-sufficient, but ethically so, for the ends are largely determined by the context in which the *phronimos* is embedded.

Insofar as *phronēsis* is an *aretē* and therefore capable of determining the ends themselves, the difference between it and *technē* echoes that between

sophia and *epistēmē*; for as *sophia* must not merely understand the things that follow from the principles, but also possess the truth concerning the principles, so too must *phronēsis* not merely determine itself towards the ends, but as *aretē* it also must determine the ends themselves as good (1144b25–27). However, whereas *sophia* knows the truth about the principles immediately by a pure exercise of *nous*, *phronēsis* must rely on virtue which arises out of lived experience. Virtue is determined by the cultural, political and historical context in which it is embedded. This sort of situated empiricism disrupts what may be called a “logic of domination” that operates in Aristotle’s other forms of knowledge. It undermines the hegemony of the subject at work in *technē*, where the end is pre-determined by the artist and imposed upon the matter from without. It undermines the totalizing function of *epistēmē*, where individuals are subsumed under fixed universal principles.³¹ Finally, it undermines the impetuous tyranny of *sophia*, where the eternally true principles are immediately intuited by *nous* and deployed without any need to attend to each case individually. *Phronēsis*, however, permits no such self-indulgence. The presence of the individual is the very condition for the possibility of its own operation. Ironically, however, what actualizes this encounter with the individual is itself called “*nous*.”

2.5. Ethical nous

Because *phronēsis* is concerned with the ultimate individual and includes *logos*, it seems at first glance diametrically opposed to *nous*, for as Aristotle says:

On the one hand, *nous* is of definitions, of which there is no reasoning (*logos*), *phronēsis* is, on the other hand, of the ultimate individual, of which there is not *epistēmē*, but rather sensation, not the sensation of the proper sensibles, but the sort by which we sense that the ultimate individual [in mathematics] is the triangle. For here too [mathematics] will stand [before the individual]. But this is more properly sensation than *phronēsis*, of that, however, there is another kind (1142a25–30).

This rather cryptic suggestion points to the possibility that there is a sort of sensation at work in *phronēsis* that plays a role similar to that of *nous* in *sophia*.³² For just as *sophia* intuits the truth through a direct encounter with the eternal first principles, so too does *phronēsis* sense the truth through a direct encounter with the individual. Insofar as it determines the truth through direct encounter, this sensation of another kind functions in *phronēsis* very much like *nous* in *sophia*.

This analogy breaks down, however, when the main point of the above passage is considered. There Aristotle is concerned to delineate the difference between epistemic and phronetic sensation. The former must make a stand before the individual triangle only in order to be able to recognize it as a member of the class of beings determined by the definition with which it operates. Its *nous* is of the definition, which is eternal. The sensation involved in *phronēsis* is not categorical in this sense, for it requires both virtue and deliberation. Thus, unlike the *nous* of *sophia*, the sensation of *phronēsis* is never immediate, for it is always mediated by virtue, which is informed by lived experience, and deliberation, which takes time.³³ The sensation of *phronēsis*, is like a kind of *nous* insofar as it is direct, but it is unlike philosophical *nous* insofar as it is, on one hand, unavoidably embedded in and constantly mediated by the context in which it is deployed, and, on the other hand, completely dependent on the actual presence of the individual. The recognition that the operation of *phronēsis* is always mediated by the concrete ethico-historico conditions in which it is embedded is the impetus behind Aristotle's claims that *phronēsis* does not exist without *logos*. This specifically logical dimension of *phronēsis* is developed in Aristotle's discussion of deliberation, habit and choice to which we must now turn.

2.6. *Deliberation, habit and choice*

Deliberation and choice are treated here together with habit in order to counteract the misimpression – exacerbated by Aristotle's own decision to discuss the moral virtues in isolation from the so-called intellectual virtues in *NE* II.1 – that habit is non-intellectual. Richard Sorabji has effectively argued against this misconception, suggesting that habituation “is not a mindless process . . . habituation involves assessing the situation and seeing what is called for. So habituation is intimately linked with the kind of intuitive perception (*nous*) that we have been discussing.”³⁴ This fits in well with the picture of *phronēsis* as an *aretē* presented above; for knowing the right thing in a given context requires both experience and habituation – one must be well practiced in making good judgments and disposed to do so. But Aristotle nowhere states that habit alone is sufficient for virtue, rather, such a view would undermine not only the importance of ethical intuition and thus the centrality of the actual encounter on which all human action is based, but also, it would divorce habit from deliberation, thus severing virtue from *logos*. To cut virtue off from *logos* in this way would be to eliminate the possibility of responsibility, a possibility Aristotle clearly wants to insist upon in his conception of virtue. In-

deed, he defines virtue this way: “Virtue, then, is a disposition toward deliberate choice (*hexis prohairetikē*), being at a mean relative to us, having been defined by *logos* and in a manner in which the *phronimos* would define it” (1106b36–1107a2). As a disposition towards deliberate choice, virtue can never become rote habit.³⁵

Deliberation and choice are of decisive importance for virtue and thus for *phronēsis* precisely because they are bound up with *logos* and thus are firmly situated in the finite field of human being. If practical *nous* orients the *phronimos* toward the direct encounter with the individual, deliberation and choice secure for the *phronimos* the capacity to critically consider that which it confronts. Deliberation (*to bouleuesthai*) is inherently self-reflexive. This is implicitly heard in the Greek word itself, which is derived from *bouleuein*, “to take council, consider,” but which Aristotle repeatedly uses throughout the *Ethics* in the middle voice, thus giving it the self-reflexive meaning: “to take council with oneself.” By intimately linking *phronēsis* to this self-reflexive meaning of “*to bouleuesthai*” (1141b8–14), Aristotle implicitly recognizes that the *phronimos* is always implicated in each act of judgment. This shatters the delusion of the absolute authority of the *phronimos* and infuses *phronēsis* with a dimension of responsibility that *sophia* cannot have. *Sophia* does not deliberate. Its direct intuition of the absolute, eternal truth is at once its immediate judgment according to this truth.

Deliberation, on the contrary, is bound up with finite temporality; like *phronēsis*, it too concerns those beings that can be other than they are (1112a22). The truth of such beings is not the eternal truth of *sophia*, but rather, the murky truth of finite existence. Thus, Aristotle tells us, “those who deliberate take much time” (1142b3–4). Because there is an inherent dimension of uncertainty embedded in *phronēsis*, because *phronēsis* takes human finitude seriously, deliberation is required to negotiate the encounter between the judging subject and that which is judged in each new situation. This takes time precisely because the right choice (*prohairesis orthē*) must be determined by considering the contingencies of the context, historical experience and the idiosyncrasies of the individuals involved. Aristotle himself hints at the sort of temporality involved here when he links deliberation to *prohairesis*, choice (1113a3–13), and suggests that the name “*prohairesis*” itself points to a sort of “taking” of one thing “before” other things (*NE* 1112a15–18, cf. *EE* 1226b5–9). Here Aristotle recognizes that deliberation is embedded in the very succession of finite time.³⁶ The discursive nature of deliberation, however, does not have the structure of motion that determined Aristotle’s investigation of time in the *Physics*.³⁷ Rather, it is the ecstatic temporality of finite

human being according to which each new present is both informed by the past and directed toward the future.

The historical dimension of *phronēsis* is captured by its characterizations as both an *aretē* and a *hexis*. Ethical virtues only arise out of that extensive field of lived experience upon which the *phronimos* must draw in order to determine the right end, and habits are determined by the cultural and historical context into which the *phronimos* is born. The analogue to these dimensions of *phronēsis* is perhaps the “enabling prejudice” that Gadamer recognized as a condition for all judgment; for judgment does not occur in a vacuum. The futural dimension of *phronēsis* is captured in the notion of *prohairesis* itself; for *prohairesis* is precisely directed towards the end (*pros to telos*).³⁸ However, insofar as it is a dimension of *phronēsis*, *prohairesis* must operate with conscientious apprehension, fairness and forgiveness – it can never be the mere imposition of the arbitrary ends of the subject. This suggests the importance of the fact that these two ecstasies of the temporality of *phronēsis* are brought together by and held accountable to the direct encounter with the individual. This encounter, grounded in *logos* but made possible by ethical *nous*, is the core of *phronēsis*, the starting point (*archē*) and the last ultimate (*to eschaton*) towards which it must be directed. In the end, it is this encounter, direct, yet always mediated by the nexus of historico-ethico-politico relations, that secures the critical capacities of *phronēsis*.

It may, of course, be objected that Aristotle himself was too caught up in the prejudices of Greek culture to develop such a radically critical conception of *phronēsis*, that indeed, he was, in the end, intent on placing strict limits on the critical capacities of *phronēsis* in order to secure the hegemony of a very determinate vision of the good life based on the dominant values of classical Greek culture.³⁹ Such a position, however, fails to recognize three important points. First, as Ross has pointed out, Aristotle “nowhere attempts to deduce the necessity of any single virtue from the supreme end to be attained.”⁴⁰ In other words, nowhere is Aristotle dogmatic about the virtues; rather, he speaks of the ethical virtues as examples to illustrate how to aim at the mean in a given situation.⁴¹ He never offers an exclusive or exhaustive taxonomy of virtues. Precisely what is noble in a given context is a matter for the practically wise person, embedded in a culture and situated at a given point in history, to determine. To argue that Aristotle is dogmatic about the virtuous life is to fail to recognize Aristotle’s intense dedication to do justice to the concrete contingency of human existence. The second point such objections fail to recognize is that Aristotle’s conception of *phronēsis* is not caught inescapably in the instrumental logic of means-ends determinations. If Aristotle some-

times emphasizes the fact that *phronēsis* is directed towards the end and does not determine the ends themselves, it is probably, as Gadamer has suggested, in order to contrast his position which emphasizes the primacy of action, with the Platonic position that virtue is a state of the soul.⁴² However, to suggest that *phronēsis* is limited to considering means and never ends is to downplay the difference between *phronēsis* and *technē* and to fail to appreciate the importance of Aristotle's insistence that *phronēsis* is itself a virtue (1140b24–5). Finally, such objections refuse to read Aristotle through any lens other than that determined by the ideals of *sophia*. Reading through the lens of *sophia* forces one to assume that Aristotle here too seeks to secure absolute certainty and so turns dogmatic about the true meaning of the good life. What such readings fail to appreciate is the extent to which *phronēsis* challenges the authority of the very lens according to which *sophia* determines that which it encounters.

3. The ontological reappropriation of *phronēsis*

The notion of *phronēsis* in Aristotle emerges as a genuine challenge to the normative assumptions endemic to the attempt to elevate *sophia*. Where *sophia* seeks divine eternity, *phronēsis* settles into human finitude; where *sophia* posits the absolute authority of its first principles and determines beings without requiring their direct presence, *phronēsis* identifies the concrete encounter with the other as the ultimate ground for the legitimacy of its principles; where *sophia* demeans inter-dependence as a sign of weakness, *phronēsis* affirms its fundamental significance as a determining condition of all judgment. In short, where *sophia* posits the ultimate foundation of order, *phronēsis* recognizes that truth must always be critically engaged, for it does not lie in ultimates but rather in the give and take between actually existing beings.

These are precisely the dimensions of *phronēsis* I would like to reappropriate for ontology. To reappropriate *phronēsis* in this way is, of course, to move beyond anything Aristotle himself actually argued. Yet, it is in no way to violate the spirit of Aristotelian thinking; for not only does Aristotle equip *phronēsis* with the critical capacities outlined above, but also, his own relationship to his predecessors is often marked by a similar sort of appropriation. As Aristotle thinks along with and beyond Parmenides, Empedocles and particularly Plato, so too does he encourage us to think along with and to move beyond his own thinking. Thus, it is possible to follow the trace of an idea in Aristotle which itself is never fully developed. The ontological significance of *phronēsis* is precisely such a trace.

An ontology directed by *phronēsis* rather than *sophia*, would be one that recognizes itself as inherently ethical. It would therefore consider it a part of its duty to question the normative values with which it operates. It would not seek refuge in the realm of the eternal, but would recognize its own inherent embeddedness in the world and would thus be capable of critically considering the historico-ethico-political conditions under which it is deployed. It would recognize that there is an element of violence in every act of judgment and it would actively work to minimize this violence by attending to the concrete otherness of the being with which it is concerned. It would recognize this encounter with the other as the site from which critique first becomes possible and to which it must remain ultimately responsible. Its goal would not be the eternal truth that arises directly out of the immediate vision of supreme, permanent principles, but the finite truth that emerges out the mediated encounters between existing beings. It would resist every temptation to annihilate the uncertainty endemic to this kind of truth, but would assiduously seek the truth in each new encounter. It would be, in short, an ontology no longer perverted by its love of *sophia*.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe: Platon: Sophistes*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, Vol. 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 177–178. For the English see, Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard and André Schuwer Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 122. Future references to this text will be followed by the page number to the German edition preceding the English.
2. Some scholars argue that *phronēsis* is the precursor to *Verstehen*, others to *Entschlossenheit*, or *Umsicht*, and still others to *Gewissen*. Robert Bernasconi provides a good introduction to the entire debate. See Robert Bernasconi, 'Heidegger's destruction of phronesis', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28/supplement (1989), pp. 127–147.
3. This is because *sophia*, unlike *phronēsis*, need not employ *logos*. Heidegger suggests that *legein* must speak of something *as something*, whereas *noein* directly grasps the first principle and the last ultimate. See Heidegger, *Sophist*, pp. 180 & 188/124 & 129. He claims that truth, unconcealedness, is "not at home in *logos*" (ibid., p. 188/129). Heidegger tries to read the dimension of *logos* out of *phronēsis* by calling it structurally identical to *sophia* insofar as "it is an *aletheuen aneu logou*" and suggesting that *sophia* retains a certain privilege insofar as "*sophia* is Dasein's positionality toward the beings of the world in the full sense. *Phronēsis* is Dasein's positionality toward the beings which are themselves Dasein" (ibid., p. 165/113). However, Aristotle is clear that *phronēsis* inherently includes *logos*, and therefore that its grasp of truth is mitigated by the requirement that it think discursively: it must think something *as something*. For that dimension of Aristotle determined to privilege the eternal over the temporal, this is clearly a liability; but so too is it for that dimension of Heidegger concerned to move beyond the existen-

tial analysis of Dasein in order to think Being directly as *alētheia* – for *phronēsis* is, for better or worse, unavoidably bound to the logos.

4. References to Aristotle are based on the Oxford critical editions: Aristotle, *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, ed. Werner Wilhelm Jaeger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Aristotle, *Aristotelis Analytica Priora et Posteriora*, eds. W. D. Ross and L. Minio-Paluello (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Aristotle, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. I. Bywater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894); Aristotle, *Aristotelis Categoriae*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949). References will be given within the text with an abbreviation when necessary followed by the Bekker page. All translations from the Greek are my own.
5. Charlotte Witt has recently suggested that norms and values enter into a given theory from two directions: from the side of the theorizer and from the side of nature. In making this claim, Witt's analysis both deepens our understanding of the complex ways in which theories are normative and lends urgency to the attempt to develop a conception of ontology capable of critically reflecting upon its own normativity. See Charlotte Witt, 'Form, normativity, and gender in Aristotle: A feminist perspective', in Cynthia A. Freeland, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).
6. Denise Schaeffer, 'Wisdom and Wonder in Metaphysics A: 1–2', *Review of Metaphysics* 52 (1999): 641–656.
7. While I am sympathetic with Schaeffer's attempt to develop a specifically human conception of *sophia*, I am skeptical that it can be done based on the attribute of teaching alone. Aristotle himself does not here develop the robust conception of teaching Schaeffer wants to import back into him. Rather, the type of teaching Aristotle seems to have in mind is more like a didactic assertion of the causes – whereby the students simply receive the wisdom of the teacher. (Admittedly, this is an impoverished conception of teaching, one that suggests part of the impetus behind the attempt to rejuvenate *phronēsis*.) Further, if we consider that Aristotle adds the dimension of *nous* to *sophia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a point that Schaeffer justifiably brackets from the discussion of *sophia* in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's use of *eidenai* may take on a significance different from the one she ascribes to it. The perfect tense, with its completed aspect, may be meant to suggest not the dynamic quality of wisdom, but rather, the fact that the wise person *has seen* the truth directly via *nous* – the model of sight being the common metaphor in discussions of *nous*. If this is the case, then *sophia*, being based on a sort of direct intuitive recognition of the eternal first principles, leaves little room for self-reflection, even when it makes the one possessing it more able to teach the causes. At most, the teacher of *sophia* reflects on precisely how best to make the students see the eternal truth too.
8. For two very different discussions of the various senses of the universal in Aristotle, see Michael J. Loux, *Primary Ousia: An Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics Z and H* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 205ff. and Ute Guzzoni, *Grund und Allgemeinheit: Untersuchung zum aristotelischen Verständnis der ontologischen Gründe* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1975), pp. 71–125. Joseph Owens has emphasized the fact that the universality Aristotle develops in reference to *sophia* here is that which is associated with the knowledge of causes, but that this does not necessarily imply a simple equation between the universal, cause and form. See Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*. 3rd edn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), pp. 161–168.

9. Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, pp. 168.
10. Cf. Aristotle's discussion of *epistēmē* and specifically the claim that it concerns things that cannot be other than they are at *NE* VI.3, 1139b19–37.
11. I translate this last rather odd phrase, “*ōsper kephalēn echousa epistēmē tōn timiōtatōn*,” – quite literally. The term ‘*kephalēn*’ may be taken to refer to ‘*nous*’ in the preceding clause so that the sense of the phrase seems to be that wisdom is scientific knowledge with intellectual intuition; that is, it is not only proper knowledge of what follows from principles, but true knowledge of the principles themselves directly by means of *nous*.
12. Thus, after recognizing that his strong endorsement of the importance of *phronēsis* at the end of book VI might lead one to think that it was more authoritative than *sophia*, Aristotle writes: “Thus *phronēsis* gives orders for the sake of *sophia*, but does not give orders to *sophia*. Further, [to say that *phronēsis* orders *sophia*] would be as if someone were to say that politics rules the gods because it gives orders concerning all the things in the city” (1145a9–12).
13. George Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edn (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 1714.
14. Hermann Diels, trans., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Walther Kranz, 6th edn, Vol. I (Zürich: Weidmann, 1996), p. 233. For Parmenides, *suneches* is not a determination of time, for being is, strictly speaking, outside of time. However, in 8.5, the temporality of that which is seems to be specifically at issue and the goddess is intent on showing that being is eternally present. However, variations of the term also appear in lines 23 and 25, where it seems to take on a spatial determination. I tend to agree with Kirk and Raven who surmise that Parmenides holds being as continuous in the widest sense possible. See G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2nd edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 251.
15. In *Metaphysics* Z.3 one of the two criteria for something's being called a substance is that it be “*to chōriston*” (that which is separable); in *Metaphysics* Λ.7, 1073a3–5, Aristotle refers to primary substance, God, as “*kechōrismenē tōn aisthētōn*” (that which has been separated from sensible things)
16. Aristotle indicates the ontological independence of primary substances by saying that they are “neither said of some underlying subject nor are they present in some underlying subject.”
17. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990), pp. 317–329. For the English translation, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 312–324. Future references will be to the German text, followed by page reference to the English translation.
18. Richard Bernstein has named this sort of discomfort “Cartesian Anxiety,” suggesting by this that Descartes's search for foundations is not merely an epistemological exercise, but also “the quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us.” See Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 18.
19. Jacques Taminiaux calls this the “self-referential” aspect of *phronēsis*. He suggests that this dimension of *phronēsis* arises out of the difference between *praxis* and *poiesis* according to which *praxis* has its end in itself, whereas *poiesis*, like *technē*, is always done for the sake of something or somebody else. See Jacques Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the*

- Project of Fundamental Ontology*, trans. and ed. Michael Gendre (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1991), p. 124.
20. Bernstein distinguishes between “blind” and “enabling” prejudices in order to elucidate what Gadamer develops as the positive concept of prejudice – namely, the notion that prejudices are conditions of understanding. The distinction between “blind” (unjustifiable) and “enabling” (justified) prejudice does not mean that blind prejudice is not also operational in each act of judgment. To the contrary, this sort of prejudice too must be recognized if we are to take seriously the fact that it is always a *finite* human being who understands and judges. Richard Bernstein, ‘From Hermeneutics to Praxis’, *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (1982): 823–845. For Gadamer’s discussion of the positive concept of prejudice, see Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 274–312/270–307.
 21. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 328/322.
 22. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1712. *Synesis* is derived from the verb *synienai*, which means “to send, bring or set together,” “to perceive or hear,” and even in the middle voice, “to come to an understanding about something.” Thus, it already has a communal or dialogical dimension built into it. However, Liddell and Scott also explicitly establish “conscience” as one of the meanings of *synesis*, linking it with *syneidēsis*. *Syneidēsis*, which means, “a joint knowledge or consciousness,” or “conscience,” however, is derived from a different root, namely, **synidein* (ibid., *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1704). This verb is linked to verbs of knowledge related to the sense of sight: *synoran*, “to see together,” and *syneidenai*, “to share in the knowledge” of a thing, or “to be conscious” to oneself, (when used with the dative). Taken together, the cluster of words in which *synesis* is embedded clearly suggests that it connotes a sort of intelligence directed towards and intimately related to others. Thus, the translation offered here is designed to bring out this dimension of the term that is otherwise eclipsed when merely translated into English as “intelligence” or “understanding.”
 23. Heidegger’s own insistence on “*Gewissen*” as a translation of *phronēsis* must not be permitted to obfuscate my translation of *synesis* as “conscientious apprehension” which remains un-Heideggerian and to some extent, pre-Christian, insofar as it is designed to capture one aspect of the *dialogical* dimension of *phronēsis* in Aristotle. For a discussion of the limitations of Heidegger’s view, see P. Christopher Smith, “The I-Thou Encounter (Begegnung) in Gadamer’s reception of Heidegger,” in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 521.
 24. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 237.
 25. Adina Schwartz has argued along these lines, see Adina Schwartz, ‘Aristotle on Education and Choice’, *Educational Theory* 29 (1979): 97–107.
 26. In his exuberance for the concept of *phronēsis* in Aristotle, Jacques Taminiaux misspeaks when he writes: “Since *phronēsis* concerns neither products (as *technē* does) nor imperishable things (as *epistēmē* does), it is not concerned with anything universal, but with what pertains to the individual, *ta ekasta* (sic.), and the proper time, *to kairos*” (Taminiaux, op. cit., pp. 123–124). To the contrary, *phronēsis* is concerned with the universal; however, this is neither the hegemonic universal of *epistēmē*, nor the pre-established *eidos* of *technē*. Whereas *epistēmē* subsumes particulars under universals according to the necessary rule of the universal and *technē* manipulates particulars so as to fit it into the pre-conceived *eidos* of the producer, *phronēsis* approaches each new situation with certain universal assumptions *which it must constantly be prepared to revise according to its*

encounter with the concrete individual. The universal and the individual are co-determined in this encounter.

27. Gadamer has, of course, emphasized that understanding, interpretation and application must always be understood as a unified process. Thus, application is itself at once understanding and interpretation (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 308/313).
28. David Wiggins, following John Cooper, has suggested that there are two possible readings of the “*pros*” here: the first takes it in terms of the means-ends logic, the second recognizes that the very existence of the thing “counts in itself as a partial or total realization of the end.” David Wiggins, ‘Deliberation and practical reason’, in Amélie Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 224. Cf. John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 19–23.
29. Richard Sorabji, ‘Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue’, in Amélie Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, p. 218.
30. Although Natali argues that it is most reasonable to take Aristotle’s insistence that *phronēsis* concerns what leads towards the ends and not the ends themselves at face value, he too recognizes that when *phronēsis* is linked to *aretē*, there seems to be room for the claim that *phronēsis* is involved in determining ends: “Aristotle’s theory aims to rule out the possibility of deliberating passionlessly about the end to be pursued, in the way a mathematician analyzes a problem. The orientation to good action depends on *phronēsis*, which takes its end from virtue, which is determined by a *logos* which is, in its turn, *phronēsis*.” See Carlo Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, trans. Gerald Parks (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2001), p. 58.
31. The manner in which these universals becomes fixed via induction links *epistēmē* more closely with *phronēsis* than one might think. However, *epistēmē*, unlike *phronēsis*, remains guided by an ideal of absolute certainty that *phronēsis* is not.
32. Heidegger has recognized the structural affinity between *sophia* and *phronēsis* calling the conception of sensation Aristotle develops here practical *nous* (Heidegger, *Sophist*, pp. 159ff/110ff.).
33. This explains why Aristotle calls it sensation of “another kind,” for sensation proper is “common to all humans” (982a11–12) and not only to the virtuous.
34. Sorabji, ‘Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue’, p. 216.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 204–205.
36. The distinction Aristotle establishes in a rather convoluted manner between the continuous, *syneches*, and the successive, *hexēs*, in *Meta.* 1068b26–1069a18 is perhaps interesting in this context; for Aristotle suggests that it is contact that turns succession, *hexēs*, into contiguity, *echomenon*, of which continuity, *syneches*, is a species. There Aristotle calls something “*syneches*” “whenever the limit of two things that are touching and held together become one and the same.” Thus, what differentiates the successive from the continuous is precisely the touching that reduces difference to the same. Succession, on the other hand, respects this difference, but recognizes that that which is successive is determined both by what came before and what will come after.
37. Cf. *Physics* IV.11.219b1–2, where Aristotle defines time in terms of motion as “the number of motion with respect to a before and after.” Taminiaux has recognized that Aristotle hints at, but never explicitly develops, another conception of temporality when he establishes the difference between *kinēsis* and *praxis* in *Metaphysics* IX.6 and further in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5, when he establishes the difference between *poiēsis*

and *praxis*. The analysis of the temporality of *phronēsis* found here owes much to Taminioux's basic contention that ". . . *praxis* includes its own goal, and, as such, is *teleia*, or complete. It means that at each moment, *praxis* unifies what it previously was and what it will be, its past and its future, whereas the *kinesis* of which *poiesis* is a species, leaves its past and future unrelated to one another" (Taminioux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, p. 125).

38. Aristotle uses this sort of phrase to refer to *prohairesis* at *NE* III.4.1111b27, to *bouleusthai* at *NE* III.5.1112b11–12 and *phronēsis* *NE* VI.13.1144a7–8. Here the "*pros*" may be taken to suggest the futural dimension of *phronēsis*.
39. Such a position seems to be championed by Schwartz, who argues that Aristotle must place strict limits on the creativity of the *phronimos* precisely because he had an "unquestioning commitment to one highly specific and inclusive set of goals" that determined his conception of the good life (Schwartz, 'Aristotle on Education and Choice', p. 106).
40. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 212. Ross also points out that Aristotle seems to have embraced an objective contingency in the *Ethics* that he took so seriously as to refuse to develop a clear conception of a universal law of causation (*ibid.*, pp. 208–209).
41. Natali suggests that "Aristotle is rather tolerant, and regards as acceptable many behaviors that do not stray too far from the mean" (Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, p. 98). He seems to concur with Ross's assessment outlined above when he argues that Aristotle does not introduce a dogmatic conception of an ultimate end into his discussion of *phronēsis* (*ibid.*, p. 45).
42. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 326/321. Natali emphasizes that "Aristotle connects the virtues and actions much more closely than the Academics did" in his excellent discussion of the manner in which Aristotle differs from his contemporaries (Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, pp. 119ff.). Aristotle himself affirms this at *NE* I.9 1098b30–1099a7.