

Bodies of Speech

Bodies of Speech:
Text and Textuality in Aristotle

By

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Bodies of Speech: Text and Textuality in Aristotle,
by Gabriel Zoran

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In memory of my parents
Rudolf Zorn (1913-1999)
and Selma Zorn nee Redlich (1917-1973).

When the word will become a body
And the body will open its mouth
And utter the word from which it has been
Created -
Hezi Leskly, **Hebrew Lesson V**

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PREFACE

The long tradition of *Poetics* scholarship has created an almost automatic linkage between the Aristotelian theory of poetry and a series of subjects—in the first place tragedy and the tragic. It cannot be denied, of course, that most of the *Poetics*, as transmitted to us, is dedicated to tragedy, and moreover that the *Poetics* regards tragedy as the most superior genre. Still, this does not necessarily imply that the *Poetics* as such is a "theory of tragedy", or that it is exhausted by such a title.

The prestige ascribed to tragedy in the *Poetics* itself, side by side with the prestige of the tragic genre from Renaissance literature till Romanticism, gave rise to an evident "tragocentric" reading of the *Poetics*, which predetermined all that was to be important for successive generations' theory of tragedy, and displaced, or entirely abandoned, all that seemed not immediately relevant to the tragic effect. Naturally, such a reading centers on the concept of "catharsis", whose status is far grander in the post-Aristotelian tradition than in its real place in the *Poetics*.

Also, less "tragocentric" readings have still been applied to some distinctly Aristotelian subjects, for instance, the poetic genres. The classicist tradition situated the genres (tragic, comic, epic) at the center of the map of interest, and this position reflects back on the understanding of the *Poetics*. Here too, the concept is undeniably central in the *Poetics* and in Aristotelian thought in general; nevertheless, the question is if this is sufficient for an exclusive identification of the *Poetics* with the theory of genres.

Finally, the concept of "mimesis", imitation, has certainly become a starting point for understanding the *Poetics*, against which one can argue even less than against the preceding ones. Yet even here, being content with "mimesis" as an exclusive starting point can lead to discarding a rich complex of assumptions existing in the *Poetics*, which are not necessarily mimetic. Moreover, this discarding may apparently impoverish even the very concept of "mimesis".

Although the *Poetics* is decidedly a key book in the theory of literature, the neo-classical aura unwillingly irradiating from it somehow frustrates the possibility of a dialogue between it and any theoretical thinking relevant to the present. And apart from the school of "neo-Aristotelian criticism" only few theoretical schools acknowledge their debt to Aristotle.

The present study aims to contribute to a reading of the *Poetics* more relevant to modern theory—but obviously not at any cost. The *Poetics* is a product of its own time and environment, and if it is significant for our time, this is only through its own time and place.

In the space of modern literary and linguistic thinking, many theories have close affinity to Aristotle, but sometimes with very little awareness. A quite curious *bon ton* is to recognize again and again our debt to Plato, whether in agreement or disagreement. Aristotle, on the other hand, continues to rest under the neo-classical aura, and beyond that remains a matter mainly for philologists.

The present study sets out to read the *Poetics* in a way bypassing the complex of neoclassical questions and their aftermath, and examine it as the first systematic treatise on the literary text as such. This starting point leads immediately to a widening of the scope, and to a joint examination of the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. Rhetoric, being a theory of verbal persuasion, deals with communicational procedures and with the relationship between speaker and audience. These subjects are barely treated in the *Poetics*. The *Rhetoric* also contains a much broader reference to language and style. So including the *Rhetoric* in our study offers the completion of many important details which are lacking in the *Poetics*. But beyond this contribution, the combination of the two treatises makes possible an absolute change in perspective and inner proportions.

Combining the two books shows that they are two parts of a comprehensive theory of communication, which is all about the concepts of **text** and **textuality**. True, this "text" can be a poetical one too, but textuality is a much broader phenomenon than the aesthetic literary aspect. There are rhetoric texts, legal, political or historical ones, which despite their difference from poetry are closely connected to it, being verbal texts.

And again, one can also discuss "mimesis", imitation. But this important concept too acquires a different meaning and a different status within the broader scope. Mimetic representation is one possible end of a text, but besides this there are ends like arousing belief, arousing emotions, etc. There are representational elements in rhetoric, just as there are rhetorical elements in poetry. To present a full picture of this complex, the field of vision must be broadened so as to capture the concept of **verbal text**; only in this spirit may the concept of poetical text be understood.

This viewpoint, as we shall see, reveals a surprising (or perhaps not so surprising) affinity between Aristotle and several trends in the theory of literature of the last century. It creates a dialogue between him and structuralist, communicational and phenomenological conceptions, and between theories dealing with the reader's response and with the semantic

structures of the text. Aristotle is found capable of saying something on the subjects of these theories as well, once he is asked the right questions. I don't mean to say that his answers will always hit on modern wishes, or offer the most innovative solutions. Sometimes he may be strikingly innovative and modern, and sometimes conservative and bound to his time and space.

The text theory which underlies Aristotle's thought is structuralist in character, albeit in a rather hierarchic version; post-structuralism and deconstruction are of course alien to him. Nevertheless, the questions raised by all these theories and the intellectual milieu out of which they grew are by no means alien to him. In that respect he is no less relevant for his *avant-garde* than for his conservative aspects.

Explication of these aspects in Aristotle makes it possible to detect hidden dialogical channels between modern theory and his thought, which are not always conscious. But first and foremost, this explication may at several points clarify Aristotelian theory itself by setting it in a new context.

The study is divided into seven chapters. The first two deal with the basic assumptions. I try to clarify the concepts of **text** and **language** in Aristotle, and do so through an examination of his attitude to writing and the written text, and pointing out the difference between him and Plato in that respect. The centrality of the text concept in Aristotle is due to his being the first philosopher to deeply internalize the thinking pattern of a literate culture—unlike Plato, who in various respects still thinks in terms of oral culture.

Following the introduction of the concept of text, the next chapters present a systematic description of an Aristotelian text theory, derived mainly from the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. This theory concerns a semantic and a communicative structure, as is explained in the interim discussion after chapter 2.

The semantic structure, discussed in chapter 3, is constructed as a series of semantic layers ordered on the axis through a surface level and a deep structure. The communicational structure concerns the communicative act between speaker and recipient. This process takes place on one single level, so it is "horizontally" structured. Chapter 4 deals with the overall communicational scheme, chapter 5 with the addressor (artist, poet, orator), and chapter 6 with the addressee (audience, listener, reader).

This entire complex, which outlines the dimensions of the text, is embedded in a broader system, that of **context**. The context is generic in nature: each text is understood as a manifestation of a poetic genre. However, there is also a genetic and historical context. The genre itself undergoes a process of coming into being, development and growth. The complex of these issues is discussed in chapter 7.

On the basis of the assumptions herewith presented, the epilogue suggests a new understanding of the concept of "*mimêsis*" which will hopefully be further developed in a following study.

As is clearly understood from this short outline, this study does not follow the Aristotelian argument linearly, as it is originally presented in the *Poetics* or in the *Rhetoric*, and is by no means a companion or any kind of commentary to either of these books. It takes a track of its own, based on Aristotelian thinking and trying to elucidate it, but is not committed to any order or formal division of the Aristotelian writings. Furthermore, it deals with several subjects implied in Aristotle's discussion, but not always explicitly discussed. As a result, some of the Aristotelian passages and discussions are analyzed several times, each time from the aspect relevant to the subject under discussion. This may create an impression of repetitiveness, but I preferred, when necessary, to quote the same passage again, and at times even to repeat a short explanation, so that the relevant passages may be accessible and present in every course of reading; the reader need not go back and leaf through the pages to understand a given discussion.

The quotations too are not from the original: they are all from accessible translations, notified in the list of references; where necessary, for certain sections I have added the original, a translation of my own, or both. Quotations from Aristotle are all from the *Complete Works of Aristotle*, Barnes 1984. Quotations from Plato are from the *Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, Hamilton & Cairns 1973. Greek words are transliterated into Latin according to the common rules, and set in italics.

The book is based on years of teaching and research. My thoughts about Aristotle have been discussed in seminars I held in the department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa. Some of them have been presented at conferences and in symposia held in Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Groningen, Chicago and Helsinki.

The present book is a revised, rethought and rewritten version of seven chapters from my previous Hebrew book, *Beyond Mimesis: Text and Textual Arts in Aristotelian Thought (Me'ever LaKhikui: Text VeUmnuiot Lashon BaMakshavah Ha Aristotelit)*, published by Tel Aviv University Press, 2009. A first version of chapter 2 was published ten years earlier, in *An Overcoat for Benjamin: Papers on Literature for Benjamin Harshav, on his Seventieth Birthday (Aderet LeBiniamin), Vol. I*, Tel Aviv University, 1999.

During the work on this study I shared my thoughts with several friends, students and colleagues, and their valuable contributions penetrated the written version in ways which today are not always clearly recognizable, but which I can always appreciate. I should mention the long and continuous support and friendship of Dr. Vered Lev Kenaan, the important comments of Prof. Margalit Finkelberg, Prof. Menachem Brinker, Prof. Stephen Halliwell, Prof. Aviad Kleinberg, Prof. Nurit Yaari, Prof. Ariel Meirav, Prof. David Fishelov, and last but not least, the numerous conversation I had, at the primary stages of the study, with my friend, Prof. Rina Drory, who sadly passed away before the work was finally shaped.

I wish to express my gratitude also to those who aided me in various stages of producing this book. Murray Rosovsky was a careful and uncompromising style editor; Nadav Greenberg prepared the graphic layout and solved complex computerizing problems; Ron Lasri professionally prepared the Index; Stephanie Cavanagh, Carol Koulikourdi, Amanda Millar, the series editors and the staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing performed the process of production most kindly and efficiently.

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CHAPTER ONE

ART, LANGUAGE, TEXT

1. Aristotelian theory and Aristotelian agenda

The title of this discussion, "Art, Language, Text", comprises three concepts which will be discussed in the following study from various aspects. They are well known also from modern contexts which have nothing to do with Aristotle. But to use them as explicatory concepts for Aristotle's theory, and certainly to regard them as parts of the body of Aristotelian thought, one has to define them and their contexts accurately. Each of these concepts makes its own way into Aristotelian thought.

The way of the concept "art" seems the shortest. This is a clear and definite concept in the Aristotelian system. Indeed, its meaning in this context is quite different from the modern one, but the shift it has to undergo from its modern uses to the Aristotelian meaning is mainly technical. Once we accept the rules of Aristotelian thought and understand the concept the way Aristotle does (that is, through the term *tekhnē*), there is no problem using it consistently without contradicting Aristotle's meanings or getting into misunderstandings.

The other concepts, those of language and text, are more difficult, since they have no exact parallel in Aristotle. Also, their very relevance as concepts in Aristotelian philosophy therefore requires proof and an explanation. Aristotle speaks about language at many points in his writings—in the *Rhetoric*, in the *Poetics* and in his books on logic. From the quantitative viewpoint these discussions may be even broader than those about "art". Still, one cannot say with certainty that they refer to a single and unified concept of language. The words referring to language in Greek, and especially in Aristotle's thought, are *logos* and *lexis*. The meaning of the former is too broad for our purposes; the meaning of the latter is too narrow. *Logos* means speech, thing, discourse, expression, sentence, utterance, thought, logic, argument, system, story, plot-structure, oration: a far broader range than the meaning of "language". *Lexis* refers to style, discourse, form of expression, concrete speaking, so its meaning is too narrow.

Despite their affinity the two concepts differ in principle: the concept of *logos* is closely linked to the domain of form (*eidos*) and of Aristotelian logic in general. *Lexis* is understood more in relation to medium, so it is linked to the domain of matter (*hulê*). These concepts are thus located at two distinct poles of the Aristotelian system: that of form and that of matter, and each belongs to a context of its own. This creates difficulty in understanding the Aristotelian concept of language in modern terms, that is, to find an Aristotelian concept parallel in scope and content to our concept of language: a single system that includes phonetic, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic elements. To reconstruct an Aristotelian concept of language various fields and discussions which Aristotle not always regarded as connected have to be combined, and which Aristotle himself deemed marginal must be placed at the center.

The third concept, that of "text", does not actually exist in Aristotle. In fact, the use of the term "text" as a theoretical concept is relatively new, and is typical mainly for structuralist and post-structuralist thought. A **text** is a definite utterance within language, whether a natural language or any other sign system, such as painting, cinema or theater. The concept of text suggests an overall definition of something defined in Aristotelian theory (and in traditional theories in general) by a series of more specific terms, which are usually generic: tragedy, novel, sonnet or movie. The concept of text abstracts from all these genres general qualities of linguistic or semiotic structure in its broadest sense. In that respect it differs from the general concept of "work of art", since the peculiarity of a text as such has nothing to do with artistic creativity or with aesthetics, but only with semiotic qualities, that is, with "textuality".

The aim of this study is to use the concept of text as a clue to understanding Aristotelian theory, that is, to examine Aristotle through a new concept which on the face of it he himself does not know. Although it may sound absurd, this course of argumentation is entirely possible; except it must be pursued cautiously, and by no means through invasive application of ideas alien to Aristotle.

The first question one should ask for that purpose is why in fact there is no explicit concept of text in Aristotle. This question must be dealt with in a two ways: one leads to the history of language and culture in general, the other to Aristotelian philosophy in particular.

From the linguistic and cultural viewpoint one can refer here to Scheid and Swenbro's brilliant discussion (1996) on the history of the metaphor of weaving in antiquity. The concept of text, especially in antiquity, should not be accepted as simple and homogeneous, and its metaphorical roots must be examined. The source of the term is the Latin verb *texere*, which

means to weave. So the noun's primal meaning is that of cloth, textile. The roots of the metaphorical transformation from verbal utterances to textile are Greek, but until the first century a.C. they were not manifested as a noun, but only as metaphorical uses of the verb. The first use of the Latin noun *textus* is documented in Quintilian's writings.¹

Longinus in *On the Sublime* (1.4.) is one of the first to use the Greek parallel to "textus"—*huphos*, probably as a loan translation of the Latin term, and this is the earliest documentation of that Greek root as a noun.² The original meaning of these terms ascribes the image of textile to the lexical and stylistic structure of the work, unlike the modern use shown above, where "text" means the complete utterance with all its components.

The first part of the question "why not in Aristotle?" can thus be answered simply: because in the language of his times no parallel term existed as yet. But this answer is insufficient, because even if the term had no exact parallel, it might have had certain substitutes, albeit partial ones. Aristotle himself uses terms like *epopoia* or *rhapsodia* in a way which is not clearly generic, but seems rather to mean a "work of language". This phrase is also the literal translation of *epopoia* (if the component of *epos* is read in its original sense as "word" or "saying"), which makes it the closest Aristotelian parallel to "text" in its modern sense. Aristotle mentions it in the first chapter of the *Poetics*: "There is further an art which imitates by language alone" (*hê de [epopoia] monon tois logois*, *ibid.* 1447a28), but this is merely an episodic use; it is textually uncertain and is not further developed.³

Precisely this lack of development raises the second aspect of the question: what is there in Aristotle's philosophy that stops him from consistently and definitively using this concept or any of its substitutes? Is it a linguistic lack, or a deeper, conceptual want?

On the face of it the term "text" signifies a general kind, perhaps a "super-genre", which can be split into various genres, and in that respect such a concept could have found its place in Aristotle. But actually Aristotle does not go that way: he speaks about tragedy or comedy, or about political and epideictic speech; he also points out several qualities common to all of them, but still, he does not regard them as existing under the same roof. Nor is a general use of terms like *rhapsodia* or *epopoia* repeated after the first chapter of the *Poetics*, and even in that chapter the general definition seems possible only because at that stage of the discussion there are still no definitions of particular genres. But once the genres have been defined, Aristotle makes no further use of these indeterminate terms.

A super-concept does exist, to which all the generic definitions are subject, but that concept does not resemble that of "text" or its possible substitutes. Comedy, tragedy and epic are all **imitations**, various kinds of *mimêsis*, therefore they are *mimêmata*.⁴ But the Aristotelian concept of *mimêsis* also refers to non-verbal utterances, such as painting or sculpture; on the other hand it does not refer to clearly verbal utterances, such as speeches, lyrical poems and historical compositions.

The Aristotelian concept of imitation deserves a special study, but even at this stage this concept clearly does not offer a satisfactory answer to the questions posed at the beginning of our discussion. True, the concepts discussed in the *Poetics*—epic, tragedy, etc.—are all kinds of imitation, and so are painting and sculpture, which are not broadly discussed in the *Poetics*. But if we examine the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* together it becomes clear at once, even without careful comparison, that in both works Aristotle discusses verbal products. The works are thus quite similar as to their objects. Aristotle is fully aware of this, since when discussing style in the *Rhetoric* he refers to the *Poetics*, and when discussing "thought" (*dianoia*) in the *Poetics* he refers to the *Rhetoric*.⁵ But despite this affinity, one cannot use the Aristotelian concept of *mimêsis* as a *genus proximum* for the verbal products discussed in the two books.

What then is the common denominator of the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*? What is the common genus to which the objects of both disciplines belong? Both works deal with language or with objects that can be made of language. No matter if one speaks of an act of imitation or an act of convincing, tragedy and epic, like political and judicial oration, are always **texts** in language.

As stated above, Aristotle does not use the term "text" or any of its possible parallels, and in general he is not concerned with the question of the common object of the two works. But to understand the relation between them, and even specific phenomena in each, we are sometimes forced to substitute concepts like tragedy, comedy or oration by the general concept of **text** or **verbal text**. From the modern scholar's viewpoint this is an inevitable step: we enter Aristotle's work equipped with concepts of our own, and address him questions from our own world. Thus Aristotelian thought is reorganized according to questions not necessarily raised by it.

This experiment is not the outcome of the rhetorical temptation to read our own beliefs into Aristotle, nor is it led by the exegetic wish to prove that Aristotle can provide answers to every question. I believe that although Aristotle has not formulated a complete and coherent linguistic theory, one can use concepts from such a theory for a better understanding

of arguments he has presented in several contexts, but seems not to have fully structured and formalized. This way one can detect in Aristotle directions of thought previously concealed.

If this approach is a change, it is not a change of conception but of agenda. The Aristotelian agenda was dictated by the needs and assumptions underlying Aristotle's own theory. Sometimes scholarship and exegesis adopted what seemed to them the genuine Aristotelian agenda; but sometimes they ascribed to him an agenda according to their own needs. Sometimes his discussion was understood as a normative treatise, sometimes as a descriptive one. Sometimes tragedy was positioned as the center of interest, sometimes not. Sometimes the scholarly tradition determined an agenda significantly different from the original. For example, the various attempts to explicate the concept of *katharsis*, and the exegetic and cultural effort invested in it, determined an agenda which occasionally deviated from the Aristotelian, so perhaps also the attempts to compose an Aristotelian theory of comedy. Can the promises Aristotle scatters at various points in his writings that he is about to present somewhere a theoretical discussion of *katharsis* and of comedy serve as real testimony about his agenda?

To read the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* in light of an agenda which ascribes weight to questions of language and communication is possible, like any other reading of Aristotle. The emphasis on **text** and **textuality** may perhaps fertilize and promote understanding of his thought and point to significant links between the two works. But to outline the assumptions for such a discussion, it would be best to begin with the concept in which the original Aristotelian agenda can be most easily detected. This is the concept of "art", *tekhnê*, which is well rooted in Aristotle's epistemology.

2. The Concept of "Art"

The Greek term for "art" (*tekhnê*) is actually included in the titles of both Aristotle's books considered here. The *Rhetoric* is called in Greek *Tekhnê Rhêtôrikê* (Rhetorical Art). True, in the title of the *Poetics* the term is not explicitly mentioned, and the work is called *Peri Poiêtikês*, but the term *Poiêtikês* is actually an adjective that became a noun: the title is an abbreviation of *Peri Poiêtikês [Tekhnês]* (On Poetic [Art]).⁶

The Greek term *tekhnê* refers to both the art itself and the work containing the collected rules of that art, the "manual". This use is not special to Aristotle. The works by forerunners on rhetoric are all defined as *tekhnai* (manuals). Plato, as we shall see immediately, does not believe that rhetoric is an art. Of course, a statement of this kind also requires an

assumption about the meaning of the term, and raises certain questions as to that meaning. The questions raised by Plato, together with the "regular" use of the term, are the basis of the special Aristotelian understanding of that concept.

For Aristotle *tekhnê* is the fourth of five grades of cognition, which from simple to complex are (a) *aisthêsis*—sensation; (b) *mnêmê*—memory; (c) *empeiria*—experience; (d) *tekhnê*—art; (e) *epistêmê*—science.

Sensation, Aristotle claims, is the primal and most natural epistemological datum: "By nature animals are born with the faculty of sensation" (*Metaphysics* A, 1, 980a25). Nevertheless, there are also more developed animals:

And from sensation memory is produced in some of them, though not in others. And therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember. (Ibid.)

These two grades, sensation and memory, are common to human beings and other animals; the other three are particularly human:

And from memory experience is produced in men; for many memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. (Ibid. 980b13-981a1)

Experience is the natural basis for the grades of art and science, as Aristotle states at another point:

So from perception there comes memory, as we call it, and from memory (when it occurs often in connection with the same thing), experience; for memories that are many in number from a single experience. (*Posterior Analytics* II, 19, 100a5-10)

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle explains how art grows out of experience:

And art arises, when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgement about similar objects is produced. For to have a judgement that when Callias was ill of this disease this did him good, and similarly in the case of Socrates and in many individual cases, is a matter of experience; but to judge that it had done good to all persons of a certain constitution, marked off in one class, when they were ill of this disease, e.g. phlegmatic or bilious people when burning with fever—this is a matter of art. (Ibid. A, 1, 981a5-12)

Experience thus is a repeated event, and in that respect it is knowledge of one thing about many objects. But things learned from experience,

whether concerning a single object or many, are always particular in nature. Experience always exists on the level of details. In art, however, the details are substituted by a general concept; medicine, for instance, concerns not Callias or Socrates but a general concept of people suffering from a certain disease. The generic definition refers to all people, but it specifies from them not particular ones, but a sub-genre of people who are in a certain state. Once the knowledge drawn from experience is about an object of this kind, it can be duplicated, applied and broadened; that is, it can be taught.

Nevertheless Aristotle admits that this general knowledge is not always what promises the immediate results.

With a view to action experience seems in no respect inferior to art, and we even see men of experience succeeding more than those who have theory without experience. The reason is that experience is knowledge of individuals, art of universals, and actions and productions are all concerned with the individual: for the physics does not cure a man, except in an incidental way, but Callias or Socrates or some other called by some such individual name, who happen to be a man. If, then, a man has theory without experience, and knows the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure; for it is the individual that is to be cured. (*Metaphysics* A, 1, 981a13-23)

The practical world, whether of actions done or works created, always consists of particulars. Therefore the general nature of art will often be fruitless if not accompanied by a certain sensitivity to particulars, namely experience. However, the epistemological value of an action concerns not its effectiveness in attaining immediate results, but its doer's general knowledge.

But yet we think that knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than to experience, and we suppose artists to be wiser than men of experience [---] and this because the former know the cause, but the latter do not. For men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while the others know the 'why' and the cause. (Ibid. 981a23-30)

For that reason, those who master an art are suitable for functions of work managers, architects or engineers; those with experience are fit for mechanical work -

[B]ecause they know the causes of the things that are done. (We think the manual workers are like certain lifeless things which act indeed, but without knowing what they do [---]). (Ibid. 981b1-2)

Those who act out of experience are likened to machines or robots: those who act out of art are those who activate these machines.

Another difference between people with experience and with art is their ability to teach. Unlike those with experience, those with art are able to teach. Experience is a skill that cannot be transmitted. The worker cannot transmit his skills to somebody else. But knowledge, being formalized, is transmittable, therefore can be taught. Science, in Aristotle, is knowledge located one grade higher than art, since it concerns being, not coming into being. As he puts it:

There comes a principle of skill and of understanding: of skill if it deals with how things come about, of understanding if it deals with what is the case. (*Posterior Analytics* II, 19, 100a8-10)

As we saw above, art as discipline is indeed based on general rules, but the objects it deals with are necessarily particulars, creatures coming into being: "the physician does not cure a man [---] but Callias or Socrates". Science, on the other hand, does not deal with particulars in any respect, but only with universals, therefore with constant essences. Moreover, the fact that the real objects of science are concepts like "human being" or "animal" is partly because science, in Aristotle, does not strive to attain a specific result in the real world, such as to cure, to convince, to design furniture or compose a tragedy, since every practical end will make the scientist deal with concrete details. Science is an end in itself, not a means to anything else.

Science and art are two epistemological levels, based, each in its own way, on general concepts. So one can say that Aristotle's writings are all ordered according to these two domains: some belong to the level of *epistémê* (*Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *On the Soul* and more), others to the level of *tekhnê*; and here we return to the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*.

The definition of *poetics* and rhetoric as arts, that is, their grading at given points on the Aristotelian epistemological ladder, is a polemical statement, for two reasons. One is the disagreement with Plato, who refused to recognize *poetics* and rhetoric as arts. The other is an argument (albeit intimated and implied) between Aristotle and the early rhetoricians as well as the conventional beliefs about poetry. True, the early writers use the term *tekhnê* for rhetoric as well as for poetry, but the meaning they actually ascribe to that term is more fitting, in Aristotelian terms, for the level of experience.

Aristotle's argument with Plato concerns the latter's attacks on rhetoric in *Gorgias*, and on poetry in *Ion* and the *Republic*. The attacks on these disciplines target various issues, some ethical and some ontological. The

determination of the epistemological level of the discipline (that is, its grading as art or not) is only one of them. We shall refer here to the epistemological component only.

In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates attacks rhetoric and claims among other things that it is not art:

And I insist that it is not an art [*tekhnê*] but a routine [*sunêtheia*], because it can produce no principle in virtue of which it offers what it does, nor explain the nature thereof, and consequently is unable to point to the cause of each thing it offers. (Ibid. 465a)

Plato conceives of rhetoric as something basically unscientific and non-artistic, since it deals with the irrational aspects of existence: passions, emotions and all that is uncontrolled by the idea. For him the right treatment of the soul is through the disciplines of legislation and justice, while rhetoric, with its charms, is like "flattering" (*kolakeia*); it addresses the soul not through its real needs, that is, through the idea, but through its weaknesses, that is, through semblance: exactly as cosmetics and pastry cooking flatter the body through its own weaknesses, while medicine and gymnastics really treat it. This also implies that rhetoric causes real damage, and this after all is Plato's central claim against it.

The important point for our purpose is that rhetoric is connected in essence to things exterior to the idea, hence it is irrational. Therefore if rhetoric works in a consistent way it can be only a matter of habit and dexterity. There is no idea behind this occupation, just as there can be no idea of absence, baseness, spoiling or weakness. Things of that kind are defined mainly by their remoteness and disconnection from the ideas, not by an idea of negativity. In principle a science of bad things is impossible according to Plato, just as one cannot know good without doing it. The link between knowledge and action, which is so typical for Plato, makes it impossible to connect a rational system with something conceived as bad or harmful. In that context habit and experience are not conceived as grades in the development of knowledge, but as variations of non-truth, and their relationship with knowledge is conceived more as that between truth and lie, being and un-being.

Aristotle's position, as noted before, is different: first, the assumption that rhetoric is an art is the basic justification for all his activity in the field, or at least, this is the title of his work. But the fact that rhetoric is an art is independent of any of its essential qualities: it is an art just like every kind of knowledge which has been sufficiently accumulated and organized by experience. Art is the direct continuation of habit and experience; it is

based on its former states of cognition and is not a separate option posed against them:

All men attempt to discuss statements and maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either by random [*eikê*] or through practice and from acquired habit [*sunêtheia*]. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and everyone will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art. (*Rhetoric* I, 1, 1354a5-11)

Aristotle thus claims that it is possible to develop a professional field subject to the general conditions of the growth of knowledge. What has been a habit can be developed into a system, since one can examine the answers to the question why in certain cases this habit proved itself. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle refers to it in a more laconic way, but he adds an interesting reference:

[B]ut really science and art come to men through experience; for 'experience made art', as Polus says, 'but inexperience luck'. (Ibid. A,1, 981a7)

Polus' words, to which Aristotle refers, are quoted from nowhere else than Plato's *Gorgias*, the dialogue which attacks rhetoric so harshly. Polus says:

There are many arts, Chaerephon, among mankind experimentally devised by experience, for experience guides our life along the path of art, inexperience along the path of chance. And in each of these different arts different men partake in different ways, the best men following the best arts. (Ibid. 448c)

This idea about the beginning of arts is a common belief, repeated by several sophists and their disciples. Similar sayings are ascribed also to Agathon, Moschion and others.⁷ Polus' formulation is no deeper than theirs and is certainly not a part of a coherent system. But it is worth noting that Aristotle refers precisely to him, since that way he takes a direct part in the controversy expressed in the *Gorgias*, by supporting the non-Socratic position.

The disagreement about poetry is even sharper. Indeed, unlike the case of rhetoric, the question whether *poetics* is an art or not is not explicitly raised here, and the term "art" has no role in that disagreement. However, the Platonic arguments against poetry are basically quite similar to those against rhetoric, and so are Aristotle's answers.

According to Plato, poetry, like rhetoric, harms the soul and is composed irrationally. In poetry it is more difficult to distinguish ethical from epistemological criticism. But if we focus on the epistemological level, that is, the question whether poetry is an "art" or not, we can find the best answers in the *Apology* and in *Ion*. In the *Apology* Socrates relates that in his searches after wisdom and wise people he addressed the poets, but very soon found out that they were not as wise as one might imagine from their poems:

Well, gentlemen, I hesitate to tell you the truth, but it must be told. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any of the bystanders could have explained those poems better than their actual authors. So I soon made up my mind about the poets too. I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. (Ibid. 22b-c)

The dialogue *Ion* presents a conversation with a poet of that kind and the conclusion is that the poet really does not understand what he is talking about. Indeed, Ion is presented as not very impressive in his personality or in his intelligence, and seems not to pose much of an intellectual challenge for Socrates (especially if compared with Socrates' interlocutors presented in *Gorgias* or in *Protagoras*). But although he is easy prey, Socrates, in a jest untypical for him, does not expose his stupidity, nor does he use the situation to reject poetry entirely, as he did with rhetoric in the *Gorgias*. He finds a kind of mitigating circumstances: poetry is indeed not a "wisdom" (that is, an art), but it is conceived as a certain action done under the influence of divine inspiration, like that of prophets and soothsayers.

This mitigation, by the way, later proves insufficient for Plato, and in the *Republic* his criticism is much more extreme. In that text also the theory of ideas is presented, which makes possible a clearer comparison of poetry with other arts. The true artist should know the idea and shape his product according to it. The imitating artist (whether poet or painter) has no access to the ideas of things but only to their material realization, and he shapes his product according to it. Thus he does not create a new object but a kind of illusion, like a shadow or a reflection. The argument that poetry is not art is based here on the assumption that art concerns viewing the idea, and the poet does not view it, but the material world. This argument is very different from that of the earlier dialogues (*Apology*, *Ion*), and we shall deal with this difference later. But for our purpose note that both arguments alike imply that poetry cannot be deemed art, even though the term "art" is not used explicitly in that discussion.⁸

Aristotle's answer to these arguments is very comprehensive, and unlike the case of the *Rhetoric* it is not limited to one single direct reference. But here too Aristotle's standpoint is first of all a kind of justification for the very existence of the *Poetics*, since the main issue of that book is to regard the composition of poetry as a series of decisions referring a system of rules, drawn from acquaintance with the *eidōs*, the genre.

In addition, certain remarks in the *Poetics* can be understood as referring to several aspects of Plato's sayings. Aristotle states that poetry is "more philosophic than history" (*Poetics* 9, 1451b5), since poetry deals with what is possible (*ta dunata, oia an genoito*) while history deals with what actually happened (*ta genomēna*).⁹ This important statement does not necessarily imply that poetry is an art; however, it is opposed to Plato's irrational conception of poetry, and ascribes to it philosophical knowledge. At another point Aristotle says that poetry is a matter of natural talent (*euphuos*) rather than of madness (*Poetics* 17, 1455b32). This saying too implies many other claims and does not entail a specific statement about art, since "natural talent" is not exactly "art". Here Aristotle seems only to argue against, or to try to modify, Plato's theory about the poetic "*mania*".¹⁰ Ultimately, more than any explicit saying of Aristotle the very task he undertook—to analyze poetry as a system of professional rules—is in itself a refutation of Plato's standpoint.

As mentioned, besides the disagreement with Plato, Aristotle fights on a second front as well: theories of old rhetoricians. The *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* are full of polemic and critical sayings about old theories of rhetoric as well as conventional beliefs about poetry. The common denominator of all these positions is that they are not based on a consistent professional theory of rhetoric or poetry. Whenever orators or poets yield to easy solutions, to shortcuts or to cheap emotional effects, they violate their own professional principles. They do not follow the rules, but act out of their own or the audience's need for immediate gratification.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not identify poetry and rhetoric with that kind of behavior, therefore he does not reject them as disciplines. He knows very well the possibility that poetry or rhetoric may behave as "flattery to the soul", but for him they do not act like this out of their essence, as Plato believes, but on the contrary—whenever they deny their own essence; when they act not according to the rules but to a certain extra-artistic need.

The definition of rhetoric and *poetics* as *tekhnai* is descriptive, but at the same time there is something normative about it. These are arts once they have attained a certain level, but this does not mean that every product of theirs will be regarded as a work of art and that every saying

about them will be regarded as a *tekhnê*. Within the framework of rhetorical and poetic activities in general, many activities are the fruits of skill and habit, or ecstasy and madness. The title *tekhnê* is thus not a mere description; it also entails professional standards: rhetoric and *poetics* are *tekhnai* when they are at their best.

3. The Realms of Human Thinking

Unlike pure science, *tekhnê* is always applied to a certain human activity, so not only must its epistemological level be taken into account but also the kind of human activity it refers to. The various kinds of human activities are expressed in the special way of thinking attached to each.

Aristotle distinguishes three patterns of thinking: theoretical, practical and productive. In Aristotelian terms these are *theôria*, *praxis* and *poiêsis*. These patterns are distinguished according to their objects and aims. The purpose of theoretical thinking is to know, to observe, to recognize. This is an activity whose aim and pattern is to attain knowledge. Practical thinking concerns actions and behaviors in the world. This is every activity which refers to and tries to change a certain state of affairs, or to create a new one. These can be actions like going to war, making friends, marrying, quarreling, reconciling, etc. Productive thinking, *poiêsis*, concerns making: this is an activity which creates new objects in the world: a sculpture, a saddle, a tragedy, a comedy, a chair, a house.

Each of these patterns underlies a certain kind of science, and Aristotle's writings are divided according to these patterns. Theoretical thinking, *theôria*, underlies the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, *On the Soul* and other compositions in the study of nature; practical thought, *praxis*, underlies compositions like the *Politics* and the *Ethics*, the objects of which are human behaviors, their patterns and their aims; productive thinking, *poiêsis*, underlies the *Poetics*.¹¹

Most of Aristotle's writing concerns theoretical thinking; the part concerning practical thinking is notable but not incisive; the part dedicated to creative thinking is the smallest. One can also recognize a very slight sense of grading or preference as to the relative status of the three patterns. Usually Aristotle prefers theoretical thinking, and it is dominant in his writings. This can be seen, for example, in the *Ethics*, where he refers to the values to which each kind of thinking is subject:

Now this kind of intellect and of truth is practical; of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor productive, the good and the bad state are truth and falsity (for this is the function of everything intellectual; while of

the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth in agreement with right desire. (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2, 1139a25-31)

This paragraph is not simple and straightforward, and it does not present a clear-cut distinction; however, it implies that each thought and each action is subject to values of positive vs. negative, true vs. false, good vs. bad. In theoretical thinking the dominant expression of positive and negative concerns truth values; in practical thinking it concerns the distinction of good and bad.

Aristotle does not continue that line of thought in a way which may also include productive thinking, but presumably in that respect it does not differ from practical thinking: this pattern of thinking too is subject to the distinction of good and bad in a certain sense (good and bad regarding the fulfillment of the product's end).¹² So basically Aristotle seems to distinguish theoretical thinking, aimed at knowledge and subject to values of truth, from practical and creative thinking, both aiming at objects and situations in the world and subject to values of good and bad.

Aristotle presents the three thinking patterns also in the *Metaphysics*, with a certain setting aside of theoretical thinking: he speaks mainly of the status of physics, mathematics and theology, and describes them with regard to their quality and objects:

There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, natural science, and theology, [---]. And the highest science must deal with the highest genus, so that the theoretical sciences are superior to the other sciences, and this to the other theoretical sciences. (Ibid. VI, 1, 1026a17-20)

The theoretical disciplines are presented here as more sublime, and the grading refers to the status of the objects of research. Theology deals with the eternal being, which is an end in itself so it is more sublime than the other theoretical disciplines, which deal with qualified being, not with being as such. According to this principle, theoretical disciplines in general are understandably more sublime than other sciences, both practical and creative, since they deal with eternal laws, while the others deal with the manifestations of these laws in particular and concrete phenomena.

The *Poetics* belongs to the realm of *poiêsis*. This linkage is clear from the common root of the two terms, but this very common root can also mislead. The term *poiêsis* derives from the verb *poiein*, to make, which points at a certain production, whether applied, architectural or artistic. As stated already, the common distinctions between artistic creation and