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THE SOME TWO SOURCES OF LITERATURE AND ITS “HISTORY” IN ARISTOTLE, *POETICS* 4

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The fourth chapter of Aristotle’s *Poetics* contains discussions of two topics—the sources or causes (*aitiai*) that generate literature and the historical development of the system of genres. The latter is the location of some of the most famous and controversial assertions in the *Poetics*, such as those concerning tragedy’s improvisatory origin in those leading a dithyrambic performance and tragedy’s development from a humbler satyric performance. The first section of Chapter 4 has also been a battlefield, since commentators have identified what Aristotle rather oddly calls “the some two sources” of literature (*aitiai duo tines*) in two completely different ways. What I propose to show in this paper is that the two sections of the chapter, which translators and commentators have regularly segregated as unrelated to each other, are actually parts of the same argument.

What has been perceived as Aristotle’s literary “history” is not intended as a historical survey for its own sake, though it will of course be consistent with whatever facts Aristotle happened to know or believe. (Such an evaluation of the “history” has been held by many,¹ and seems now to be the dominant opinion, though the argument and context have not been analyzed in the way that I offer.) The text of Aristotle’s tragic “history” comes into being as part of an argument in philosophical aesthetics about the “sources” of artistry in words and music. It contains a mixture of facts and speculations shaped by an identifiable thesis concerning the naturalness of literary creation. By delineating the exact force and needs of that thesis we will be better able to assess Aristotle’s appeal to certain “facts” about the early days of tragedy.²

* * * * *

It seems that some two sources generate literature (*tên poiêtikên*) as a whole and both of them are natural (*phusikai*). For imitativeness is native (*sumphuton*) to human beings from childhood—they differ from other animals in being highly imitative and in learning their first lessons through imitation—and the fact that all delight in imitations (is also natural). (48b4-9)

The first of the two interpretations of this passage identifies the two sources of poetry as the natural human instinct for imitation and the natural

human delight in imitations. The Greek can easily be read this way since there is a coordination of *te ... kai* joining two articular infinitives: *to te gar* [308] *mimeisthai* and *kai to chairein mimêmasi*. Indeed, if one looks only at this sentence and not at the rest of the chapter, such an interpretation is inevitable.

It has been objected that these are not two distinct sources but two aspects of the same instinct.³ This is not necessarily a strong objection since Aristotle qualifies *duo* with *tines*: apparently he feels that the natural source of literature is in one sense twofold and in another sense single. But it is quite possible, as a distinguished list of objectors has maintained (Vahlen, Gudeman, Else, Lucas), to read this sentence as describing a single natural source of musical-literary creativity. The problem for them, then, is to find the second *aitia* in Aristotle's text.

After the sentence quoted above Aristotle discusses for a while the fact that we learn—and enjoy learning—through imitations.⁴ Then comes a sentence which resumes the argument and seems to make a transition to the second part of the chapter, the “history”: “Imitation being natural (*kata phusin*) to us—and harmony and rhythm too (for it is obvious that meters are parts of rhythm)—from the beginning those who had a particular natural gift for these things (*hoi pephukotes pros auta malista*) gradually moved poetry forward and generated (*egennêsan*) it from improvisations” (48b20-24).

Searchers for a second *aitia* have located it in the parenthetical remark about harmony and rhythm, maintaining that the instinct for imitating and enjoying imitations is not sufficient to explain the production of music and poetry, that what is needed is some specific reference to the human instinct for melody and verse. In his discussion of how we enjoy learning through imitations, Aristotle had referred not to drama or epic but to pictures, showing (so the argument goes) that what he has in mind there is deliberately more general than literary-musical compositions.⁵ The two sources of poetry, in this view, are the general instinct for all imitating and the specific instinct for rhythm and song, which Aristotle here asserts to be natural to our species, just like imitation (*kata phusin de ontos hêmin tou mimeisthai kai tês harmonias kai tou rhuthmou*, 48b20-21).

This too is a defensible, if awkward, reading. Everyone seems to admit the ungainliness of tucking the second announced *aitia* inside a parenthesis to the opening clause of a sentence introducing what, on traditional readings, is quite a different topic. What I propose to show is not that either of these readings is impossible—both have merit as construals of a typically elliptical Aristotelian text—but that a simpler and more interesting candidate for second *aitia* has been overlooked. The reading I offer is both more natural to the Greek and has important ramifications concerning Aristotle's versions of the origins of tragedy and comedy.

The some two sources of poetry, I suggest, are (1) the general human instinct for (and delight in) imitations and (2) the specific giftedness of certain individuals who are naturally talented in singing, dancing, and verbal performance. In a sense these are two *aitiai*, insofar as creative musical people

are different from the rest of us, and in a sense they are the same thing—a species trait that is more highly present in some individuals than in others. (The ambiguity over whether they are distinct entities or just two aspects of the same thing explains the odd “some two” phrase.) The name for the second [309]source is *hoi pephukotes pros auta malista*, “naturally gifted artists” (48b22).⁶ Like the general instinct for imitating, this *aitia* is emphatically natural, part of our and great artists’ human *phusis* rather than coming from divine madness or the Muses’ inspiration (that is the overall thrust of Aristotle’s argument),⁷ and it is also responsible for the generation of poetry, both individual poems and the system of genres.

The chief thing to notice is the use of *gennêsai* (48b4) and *egennêsan* (48b23): (1) the two sources are initially said to “generate poetry”;⁸ (2) gifted individuals “generate poetry.” So put, the second *aitia* seems all too obvious, I could almost say indisputable; but there are good reasons why the identification has never been made (though Gudeman comes very close to articulating the point of the discussion).⁹ Two threads of argument are interwoven in this chapter: one that the source or sources of artistic creation are entirely natural ones, a second that a naturalistic explanation can be offered for the system of genres that has actually developed over time.

The point of the latter argument is in effect to say that since the system of genres—epic, invective, tragedy, comedy, dithyramb and phallic songs—is structured by principles that are wholly human and natural no appeal to non-human or non-natural causes is necessary. Since this part of the argument appeals to the past and looks quite like one of our favorite projects, literary history, it has been perceived as Aristotle’s attempt to do what we would like to do for Greek tragedy—trace its actual historical development.¹⁰ But what has been called Aristotle’s “literary history” is actually a complex argument about the possibility of giving a wholly naturalistic account of the generation of the genres of poetry.¹¹

The first step in this argument is to introduce two more principles—improvisation and character. Both are necessary for the success of Aristotle’s thesis, but the resulting text has a complexity that somewhat hides the basic thesis. I will deal first with improvisation (which is mentioned earlier, though developed later), then with character.

In the largely traditional and inherited scheme of musical performances nothing would have changed from ruder pre-Homeric times, Aristotle argues,¹² unless there had been two factors: (1) particularly gifted individuals, whose instinct for the possibilities of representation looked ahead to nature’s design¹³ and gradually brought tragedy, the prime case in all this discussion, to the realization of its complete nature (*phusis*, 49a15); and (2) occasions on which those great artists could exercise their ability and make innovative changes in the inherited conceptions.¹⁴ Those occasions and activities are called improvisations (*autoschediasmata*). “Improvisation” is not a plain or documentary fact known to Aristotle about the historical development of tragedy;¹⁵ it is a principle of explanation required by the argument that strictly

natural conditions suffice to account for the articulate system of genres. If the naturally talented artists (*hoi pephukotes pros auta malista*) had no opportunity to do something different from what had been done before them, no progress would have been made toward the fuller realization of Nature's intentions for the best and highest form of literature, namely, tragedy.¹⁶

[310]Note that the word "improvisation" occurs only in connection with the notion of progress and growth in the genres: *kata mikron proagontes ... ek tôn autoschediasmatôn* (48b23), *ap' archês autoschediastikês ... kata mikron êuxêthê proagontôn* (49a9-13). Improvisations are inherently tied, in Aristotle's argument, to the notion of development in the formation of the articulate system of genres as he knew it. Improvisation is twice mentioned, not (I maintain) as a brute fact and for the sake of historical information, but because it is a necessary condition for the truth of Aristotle's thesis about the human and natural causes of poetry. I will return to these notionally necessary improvisations below.

The second special feature introduced to make the argument work is the division of human character into the dignified and the vulgar or the responsible and the shiftless. The contrast can be articulated in various ways, emphasizing moral character or personal style or social class—an axis along which Aristotle is happy to glide since he tends to identify character and class as natural correlatives of each other.¹⁷ The principle is introduced immediately after the announcement of the second source of poetry:

Imitation being natural to us—and harmony and rhythm (for it is obvious that meters are parts of rhythm)—from the beginning those who had a particular natural gift for these things gradually moved poetry forward and generated it from improvisations. And poetry was divided according to (its/their) appropriate characters (*êthê*); for the more exalted (*hoi semnoteroi*) imitated the fine behavior of fine people, while the baser sort (*hoi eutelesteroi*) imitated the behavior of contemptible people; at first these poets composed invectives, just as the others composed hymns and encomia.
(48b20-27)

The division of human character and behavior into two broad classes has already been alluded to earlier in the *Poetics*:

Since imitators imitate people behaving, these must be either serious or contemptible (*spoudaious ê phaulous*), for characters (*êthê*) are almost always organized by these two basic principles alone, since all people's differences in character are measured in terms of badness or excellence.
(48a1-4)

The ethical-social components of represented individuals are fundamental to Aristotle's view of the genres and their appropriate distance from each other.¹⁸ The argument in the vicinity of the sentence just quoted concerns the oil and water separation of tragedy from comedy ("In exactly this difference

lies the distinction of tragedy from comedy, for the latter aims to imitate people worse than they now are while the former aims to imitate people better than they now are," 48a16-18). So strong is Aristotle's sense of apartheid between the high and low genres and his horror of their mixing that he seriously wonders whether a theory of *drama as such* is tenable. A theory (he says) which emphasized the distinction between drama and narrative would deal with Sophocles and Aristophanes together over against Homer, whereas a theory which emphasized [311]the ethical-social class of characters would group Sophocles and Homer together over against Aristophanes: "Following the one division, Sophocles would be an imitator like Homer, since both imitate serious persons; by the other division, he would be like Aristophanes, since both imitate people behaving and acting" (that is, they are dramatists, 48a25-28). Aristotle's overriding sense of social-ethical decorum, or rather the need to reflect adequately in his theory the fundamental, perceived differences of decorum (particularly those between tragedy and comedy), leads him to cite Homer alongside Euripides and Sophocles for examples of the best tragic practice. Between the two competing basic principles of generic organization—dramatic vs. narrative or dignified vs. undignified—the latter in practice predominates.

This is also the explanation for why Aristotle gives such short shrift to *opsis* and in general to the specifically theatrical elements of tragedy, even going so far as to maintain that the essential effect of a tragedy should be wrought *aneu tou horân*, without even seeing the actors perform and only hearing the plot and events (53b4). This amounts to cancelling the importance of the contrast between drama and narrative (that is, between Homer and Sophocles) in order to keep serious narrative and serious drama together. *Opsis*, in effect, includes all that enters into the enactment of a story by a troupe of actors as opposed to its presentation by a single narrator.¹⁹ This theoretical move is motivated by Aristotle's sense that differences of ethical-social class in represented behavior should receive prior and overriding consideration rather than the merely formal distinction between manner of presentation (drama vs. narrative).

To return now to Chapter 4: given the systematic concern with decorum and character, it is easy to see that the text at 48b20ff. is not a marshalling of historical facts but an attempt to analyze the fundamental lines of contrast among the genres. Further, the specific reason that ethico-social character is emphasized here is that Aristotle is mounting a pro-naturalist argument about the sources of poetry, namely, that the genres are articulated by strictly human characteristics, mirroring their makers—which presumably they would not do if there were (also) some non-human, non-natural source for poetry. Because there is a homology between the field of human character/behavior and the field of poetic composition (or so Aristotle asserts), there is no need to appeal to any such entity as a Muse or any such state as divine inspiration in a responsible account of the *aitiai* of literature. As he said at the head of the chapter, "Some

two causes seem to generate (have generated) poetry as a whole—*and both of these are natural.*”²⁰

Later in the account of the natural process of poetry’s generic differentiation, Aristotle does introduce some facts (or what he takes to be facts) about the historical changes introduced by gifted individuals, but at the outset the analysis is completely determined by the requirements of a thesis in philosophical aesthetics and does not even pretend to appeal to any historical facts (beyond the existence in earliest times of both dignified and ridiculous poetry, and even this is asserted only conjecturally: “We cannot name any such [high or low] poem by any person before Homer, but it is likely that there were many,” 48b28-29). Since the argument concerns the naturalism of a process of [312]historical development, there will obviously be references to some putative historical realities, and these could turn out to be valuable to those of us moderns whose interest is in knowing the actual history of tragedy, rather than in supporting the thesis that that history was not supernaturally determined—an argument that for us has long been settled. But we must watch the argument very carefully to detect where Aristotle actually refers to (what he takes to be) facts and where he rather reconstructs a plausible scenario whose events and actors are simply postulates demanded by his own view of things.

The two new principles introduced to yield a successfully naturalistic account of the generation of the system of genres function in different ways. “Character” articulates the homology between poems as strictly human artifacts with their (merely) human creators; “improvisation” serves the more mechanical purpose of providing a (theoretically necessary) opportunity for poetry’s progress over time. That progress follows both a high road, where creative *spoudaioi* move with measured tread, and a low road, along which creative *phauloi* pratfall and tumble. In Aristotle’s picture of historical development, which is extremely vague by historical standards but crisp and clear for the needs of philosophical argument, the earliest recoverable state of affairs after the conjectured archaic hymns and invectives is the division of poetry (and poets) into the heroic and the iambic (48b33-34).²¹ The succeeding stage, still within the limits of the argument about character, is the appearance of tragedy and comedy: “when tragedy and comedy had appeared, those who had an impulse (*hormôntes*) towards either kind of poetry according to their own proper nature (*kata tēn oikeian phusin*)—some became makers of comedies instead of invectives, others became producers of tragedies instead of epics” (49a2-5).²²

To this point, improvisation has not actually entered the argument, though it had been mentioned at the beginning and has been waiting in the wings while the role of generic class and decorum was developed. At 49a7-9 Aristotle ties off the argument about successive stages of ethical differentiation in history with a vague allusion to the issue of whether tragedy has reached its fullest development. Then he returns to his topic sentence, which was “from the beginning those who had a special talent for these things gradually led poetry forward and generated (its genres) from improvisations,” here repeating its

main components: “Once tragedy had come to be from an improvisatory beginning, ... it was gradually augmented by those who led it forward as more of it became clear, and after undergoing many changes it stopped when it had reached its own nature” (49a9-15). This is another side of the naturalistic argument. Aristotle must introduce occasions for improvisation in order for his account of generic development to be a plausible one. His idea of a plausible naturalist development is that it is a story of gradual improvements, made by many gifted individuals, all of whom had some glimmering of Nature’s highest possibility for serious imitative excellence.

Much attention has been focused on the word “improvisation” in this argument since Aristotle glosses it with the clause “tragedy [came to be] from those leading the dithyramb, comedy from those leading the phallic songs which to this day remain customary in many cities” (49a10-13). That phrase, cut from its context, looks very like an assertion of a fact (whether known or merely [313]conjectured), and it has produced endless problems for literary historians. The primary problem is not its inconsistency with facts known independently of Aristotle but its inconsistency with the two other filiations of tragedy given in this same chapter—that it developed from the composers of epic and that it developed from a humbler satyric format (49a19-21). Three derivations of tragedy in one short stretch of text seems two too many. We have already seen that the first “derivation”—from those who would have been composers of heroic epic—is part of an argument rather than a simple historical assertion. Does Aristotle intend both of the other two to be taken as historical facts, or only one of them, or neither?

The most sensible way to decide such an issue is surely to consider how far and in what way his assertions are required by the needs of his argument. Insofar as his statements can be generated from the requirements of his theoretical argument about natural development, their historical validity, while not impossible, becomes suspect, for then he is at least selecting facts to serve the needs of his thesis or at worst conjecturing about the sort of thing that could have or must have taken place in order for his theory to be correct. When we look at the argument that structures his “history,” improvisation seems to be introduced for reasons other than historical. There is no reference to names or dates, only to the general activities of leaders of dithyrambs and phallic songs. The sort of thing such people do is the “improvisatory origin” (*archê autoschediastikê*) of tragedy and comedy respectively. It appears that Aristotle, required by his naturalistic argument, has cast his mind over the field of improvisatory occasions known to him in order to give plausibility to his thesis that talented singers and dancers are the only explanatory factor necessary to account for the development of drama to its present high state.

The subordinate clause about dithyrambic and phallic leaders becomes even less historical when we note that dithyrambic performances in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries were not improvisatory but were carefully and entirely scripted. Hence Aristotle notes that the leaders of phallic songs still to this day (*eti kai nun*) improvise, where dithyrambic leaders evidently had

ceased doing so. The activities of dithyrambic leaders thus become, in Aristotle's argument, not so much a fact as the sort of thing that in earliest days must have been necessary for the gradual evolution of serious drama.

The subsequent account of the many changes undergone by tragedy as it grew under the guidance of creative and musically talented individuals is very sketchy—increased importance of actors over chorus and of speech over lyric, number of actors and scene-painting, “and its greatness” (*kai to megethos*, 49a19). It seems that at this point Aristotle has shifted the focus of his argument again. First he gave prominence to the inevitable division in human decorum, then to the structural possibility of innovation on festival occasions (improvisation), now he is thinking of the *gradualism* of a natural development—the fact that it is a long, slow process involving the individual acts of many talented performers. Alongside the gradual shift from the priority of song to a priority of speech (which is a movement from the confusion of crowds to the responsibility of individual characters and from the vagueness of lyrics to the precision of narrative and dialogue), he sees a similarly gradual [314]development of dignity and grandeur and sheer size. The performances he has in view are not single plays but groups of four, each taking the bulk of a festival day to enact. If gradualism is the guiding principle for this phase of the text, then what Aristotle wants to do is to indicate scalar changes along a relatively even line, diminutions from tragedy's present monumental form back to its smallest and least impressive analogue in early days.²³ Though the development is traced forward, the argument has been constructed backward by taking the current size and dignity of tragedy and reducing it. So the earliest projected drama in this scheme must have been something small in its actual content (*ek mikrôn muthôn*, 49a19), small in its development (*epeisodiôn plêthê*, 49a28), and comparatively undignified (*lexeôs geloias ... opse apesemnunthê*, 49a20-21), more danced than spoken (hence the tetrameter, 49a21-28).

It is easy to see how Aristotle's procedure in arguing for gradualism led him to mention a satyric performance as the earliest imaginable form of drama from which tragedy developed. Looking at the day-long and exceedingly serious tragedies of his own time, or indeed of the fifth century, and diminishing their bulk and dignity notch by notch, he would come to a short, undignified, relatively innocuous performance such as Euripides' *Cyclops*. The material is not comic, according to Aristotle's categories: the subject is heroic (though minimally), drawn from proto-tragic literature (the *Odyssey* is a predecessor in the line of tragedy, not comedy, 49a1), and the characters are dressed and masked in the reasonably dignified style of tragedy, not in the grotesque faces and phalluses of comedy.²⁴ Those obvious facts plus the presence of a satyr-play with each group of tragedies seem more than sufficient to generate Aristotle's notion of a hypothetical early form of tragedy which was “satyric.”

Each stage of the argument about naturally gifted individuals as poetry's second natural *aitia* has seemed to throw up an ancestor for tragedy—epic

(49a1-5), dithyrambic leaders (49a11), a satyric performance (49a20). In the first case it is relatively easy to see the argument that frames its introduction: indeed it does not literally appear to be a statement about the origin of tragedy, only an assertion that when tragedy appeared those who would have been instinctively drawn to epic turned to the new format of serious drama. But I want to emphasize that just as epic's claims to be the forerunner of tragedy can be resolved into a different argument, so the subsequent self-contradictory statements about the early form of tragedy can also be resolved into a coherent and continuous argument about the naturalism (and hence gradualism) of tragedy's evolution.

Some of the items cited in the final portion of the argument were undoubtedly understood by Aristotle to be simple facts, such as Sophocles' introduction of a third actor,²⁵ though it is of course a different and much more difficult issue to know when he was correct in his beliefs. But what must above all be emphasized is that these facts (and there are not many of them) are all marshalled in service of an overriding argument, one whose lineaments can now be seen.²⁶ Where Aristotle's text alludes to items such as the improvisations of dithyrambic leaders or the small, satyric character of early tragedy, items whose existence is required by the needs of the argument, then the most plausible and economical reading of the text is that it is most unlikely [315]to have any factual value at all. Certainly the burden of proof lies with those who like to assert strongly that Aristotle must have known more than we do—which is undoubtedly true but not relevant to the issue of what it is that guides his train of thought in Chapter 4. Ockham's Razor requires that if Aristotle's appeals to dithyrambic leaders and to satyr-plays (themselves confusing and inconsistent as a stemma for tragedy) are adequately explained by the demands of Chapter 4's aesthetic theory, we have no grounds for asserting that Aristotle also knew them to be documentary facts (whatever that would mean). Dithyramps and satyric performances should therefore, in my view, be expelled from modern accounts of the early history of tragedy unless we discover independent grounds, different from Aristotle's naturalistic arguments, for re-introducing them.



NOTES

1. "Aristotle's statements on the development of tragedy are in large part a rationalistic construction. We have not the slightest ground for assuming that Aristotle had any sixth-century dramas or any documentary material on the pre-literary beginnings of tragedy": W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* 1.2 (Munich 1934) 38 n. 4.

2. A thorough review of the literature on these problems can be found in the commentaries of Vahlen, Bywater, Gudeman, Rostagni, Else, Lucas, Dupont-Roc and

Lallot, and Hardison: J. Vahlen, *Aristoteles de Arte Poetica Liber* (3rd ed., Leipzig 1885; repr. Hildesheim 1964), and *Beiträge zu Aristoteles' Poetik*, ed. H. Schöne (Leipzig 1914); I. Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (Oxford 1909); A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles Peri Poiêtikês* (Berlin 1934); A. Rostagni, *Aristoteles. Poetica* (2nd ed., Turin 1945); G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument* (Cambridge, Mass. 1957); D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle. Poetics* (Oxford 1968); R. Dupont-Roc and J. Lallot, *Aristote. La Poétique* (Paris 1980); L. Golden and O. B. Hardison, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Tallahassee 1981); see too Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London 1986). The text is cited from Lucas (a reprint of R. Kassel's edition [Oxford 1965]) with only the last two digits of the Bekker pages (thus 49a3 = 1449a3). I have had helpful comments from Marsh McCall, Richard Seaford, Geoffrey Lloyd, Lesley Jones, Elizabeth Belfiore, and the editors, all of whom I thank for their help and resistance.

3. Halliwell (supra n. 2) 71, who accepts that delight in imitation is the second *aitia*, brings out an aspect of the contrast that may underlie other readers' acceptance of it. He takes *mimēisthai* to be the composer-performer's activity, *chairein mimēmasi* the audience's passive enjoyment. (So understood, the pair of terms would come very close to capturing the double causality for which I later argue.) But comparison with *Metaphysics* A.1 (an argument very similar in content to *Poetics* 4) suggests that delight in x should be understood as a confirmation of the naturalness of x: "All people desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses." If *mimēisthai* in *Poetics* 4 is analogous to *eidenai* in *Met.* 1.1, then it is a general trait of the species, not the special province of those who most actively exercise it. The phrase *sumphuton tois anthrōpois ek paidōn* (48b5-6) surely refers to a quality found in all people, not just in performers. Note too that in the immediate discussion Aristotle rejects a contrast [316] between specialists and ordinary folk when he asserts that "learning is pleasant not only for philosophers but also equally for the rest" (48b13-14).

4. On Aristotle's cognitive theory of aesthetic pleasure see S. Halliwell, "Plato and Aristotle on the Denial of Tragedy," *PCPS* 30 (1984) 49-71 and Halliwell (supra n. 2). The connection between pleasure and nature is stated at *Rhet.* 1.11 *ad init.*: feeling pleasure in x is a kind of proof that x is natural for us.

5. In fact visual imitations' *ethical-social significance*, which is ultimately the crucial factor, is very slight, according to Aristotle. "The objects of no other sense [than hearing], such as taste or touch, have any resemblance to moral qualities; in visible objects there is only a little, for there are figures which are of a moral character, but only to a slight extent, and all do not participate in the feeling about them. Again, figures and colors are not imitations, but signs, of character, indications which the body gives of states of feeling. The connection of them with morals is slight, but in so far as there is any, young men should be taught to look, not at the works of Pauson, but at those of Polygnotus, or any other painter or sculptor who expresses character. On the other hand, even in mere melodies there is an imitation of character" (*Pol.* 8.5.1340a29-40; trans. B. Jowett in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle* [Princeton 1984]).

6. Talented or creative individuals also figure in *Met.* 1.1.981b13-20. For a reconstruction of Aristotle's material psychology of genius, see J. Pigeaud, "Une physiologie de l'inspiration poétique: de l'Humeur au Trope," *Les Études Classiques* 46 (1978) 23-31. The types of explanation given in Greek philosophy for human progress are surveyed in A. T. Cole, *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology* (*APA Monographs* 25, Cleveland 1967). An example for literature is provided by Philomnestos (FGrHist 527 F 2), a scholar of uncertain date, who describes one Anthias of Lindos as "naturally talented in poetry" (*euphuês te peri poiêsîn ôn*).

7. This is confirmed by his naturalistic reference at 55a32-34 to poets as “talented or manic,” where “manic” does not have the divine force assigned to it by Plato but is simply the next higher degree of “talent,” caused by black bile: see Lucas *ad loc.*

8. Or, “to have generated poetry,” in which case Aristotle already has in view the “historical” material which will form part of his argument.

9. Gudeman (supra n. 2) 120: “Obwohl alle Menschen von Natur aus jene Anlagen potentiell besitzen, muss, um gerade eine dichterische Betätigung hervorzurufen, noch eine individuelle Begabung hinzutreten, und zwar entwickeln sich die betreffenden Leistungen allmählich aus noch unvollkommenen Stegreifversuchen zu einem Kunstwerk.”

10. Studies of the origin of Attic tragedy, which inevitably take up the question of what to do with Aristotle, include A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford 1927, preferable to the second edition revised by T. B. L. Webster, Oxford 1962), M. Untersteiner, *Le origini della tragedia e del tragico* (Turin 1955), H. Patzer, *Die Anfänge der griechischen Tragödie* (Wiesbaden 1962), G. F. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Mass. 1966); C. J. Herington, *Poetry into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley 1985); John J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song: *Tragôidia* and *Polis*,” *Representations* 11 (1985) 26-62; a good survey of the problems in A. Lesky, *Greek Tragic Poetry* (transl. Matthew Dillon, New Haven 1983).

11. Similarly, the account of earlier philosophy in *Met. A.1* has long been perceived to be not an objective, much less complete, history but an argument that incorporates selective aspects of earlier philosophy.

12. The argument is paralleled at *Pol. 2.8* (1268b22-69a28): innovations have taken place in medicine, gymnastics, and all the arts and sciences; these changes have brought us from a simple and barbarous state to our present excellence.

[317]13. On the close correlation posited between *technê/poiêsis* and *phusis*, see *Phys.* 199a8-19: if a house were a natural object it would grow in exactly the way that it is built by *technê*. Cf. *Met. Z.9* (1034a34-b8). The agent of the production (*poiêsis*) of health is not the physician but nature itself, specifically the *eidos* of health in the physician’s soul—*Met. Z.7* (1032a26-b23). On the difference between Aristotle’s notion of artistically gifted individuals and the romantic idea of the creative artist, see Halliwell (supra n. 2) 60-61.

14. In the growth of philosophy (which, like poetry, is not a *necessary* activity), leisure played a similar role as the objective circumstance allowing the realization of humanity’s speculative capabilities: *Met. A.1* (981b22-24).

15. Likewise, it is not a documentary fact to Maximus of Tyre (37.4): “Early Athenian culture consisted of boys’ and men’s choruses, performed by farmers in the demes, still dusty from reaping and plowing, singing improvised (*autoschedia*) songs; this gradually changed to an art of infinite charm on the stage and theater.” The idealization and historical unreality of this picture are obvious; presumably the notion of improvisations in this account stems at least indirectly from Aristotle, *Poetics* Chapter 4.

16. Similarly, in the development of all *technai*, it was individuals who made the leap from mere experience, and they did so when they had the occasion for discovery, such as the leisure allowed to Egyptian priests (*Met. A.1*.981b13-25).

17. Thus at *Pol. 8.7* (1342a18-28) the audience is broadly divided into two types of person—those who are free and educated, and those who are vulgar (*phortikos*), a class consisting of manual laborers and *thêtes* and the like. Property obviously has something to do with the distinction, since *thêtes* are the lowest property-class of citizens, but Aristotle reads the contrast in terms of the mental effects of social conditioning: “their

souls have been perverted from their natural state” (22-23). The free/vulgar contrast is also used to differentiate types of rhythm and movement (*Pol.* 8.5.1340b9-10) and the practice of playing for the pleasure of others (*Pol.* 8.6.1341b10-17). The distinction is even flexible enough to apply to good and bad specimens within the field of tragedy, a genre which should be entirely serious (49b17-18).

18. Isocrates similarly objects to the use of “talented” (*euphuesis*) to describe comic actors: “Some people do not use words naturally and correctly but transfer them from admirable states to the basest practices. They call jokers and sassy imitators ‘talented,’ when this designation should be reserved for those who have natures aimed at excellence” (*Antid.* 283-84).

19. This point is further argued in my *The Ephebes’ Song: Athenian Drama and the Poetics of Manhood* (forthcoming, Princeton).

20. The argument is paralleled, as G. E. R. Lloyd points out to me, by Aristotle’s account of the development of the *polis* in *Politics* 1, which is essentially analytic, looks quasi-historical, and reflects his expectation that the *genesis* of a thing will correspond to its *phusis*. Aristotle explicitly says both that humans are naturally political and that the first founder of the state was responsible for the greatest goods (1253a30-31), combining a *phusis*-oriented account with the recognition of the part played by exceptional individuals.

21. Homer at this point seems to be the unique and towering exception to Aristotle’s rule that individuals are either noble or base and that their poetry follows their character. Homer was himself *spoudaios* but was also able to compose the proto-comic *Margites* (48b34-49a1). The anomaly of Homer is also alluded to in Chapter 8, where he is the epic poet who composed a uniquely unified plot—“either through his skill or through his nature,” *êtoi dia technên ê dia phusin* (51a24).

22. The succeeding explanatory phrase *dia to meizô kai entimotera ta schêmata einai tauta ekeinôn* is usually taken to mean “because these genres [comedy and tragedy] were [318]greater and more worthy of esteem than the earlier ones [abusive poetry and epic].” But I am suspicious of the claim that tragedy is greater than epic. I think that the run of argument makes it possible that *tauta* refers to epic and tragedy (the greater and nobler genres) not to comedy and tragedy (the later genres); *ekainôn*, then, refers to abusive poetry and comedy (the lesser and ignobler genres), not to abusive poetry and epic (the earlier genres). The comment amounts to saying, “This parallel transfer of talent was conditioned by the fundamental fact that in each case [invective versus epic, comedy versus tragedy] the formats of the latter are grander and more respectable than those of the former—so, naturally, dignified persons continued to be drawn to the dignified genre and common persons to the low-class genre.”

23. The apparent insignificance of the earliest hypothetical form of tragedy accords with Aristotle’s principle (*de Caelo* 1.5.271b5-13) that minute deviations in the early stages of a process have enormous consequences over time.

24. Compare the masks and costumes for comedy and satyr play in A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London 1971). Satyr costumes have little penises attached, to be sure, but it is the size and exaggeration of comic phalluses that makes them *phaula*, not just the fact that genitals are there.

25. Since all three tragedians evidently competed at the City Dionysia with the same number of choristers and actors, the most one can attribute to the initiative of Sophocles would be a proposal that in the following year’s contest all three poets would be allowed to use a third actor. A similar point about Sophocles’ supposed invention of *skênographia* (*Ar. Poet.* 4.49a18) is made by A. L. Fitton-Brown, “Three and Scene-Painting Sophocles,” *PCPS* 30 (1984) 1-17 (ref. n. 24).

26. The argument continues into Chapter 5, up to 49b9, where Aristotle's attempt to specify the creative individuals who gradually gave form to comedy is much less detailed, since comedy had all along been given less honor and attention than tragedy (a neglect which Aristotle must basically approve). If there had been a clear concluding and transitional sentence at that point, saying "so much for the naturalness of the sources of poetry," the structure and argument of the preceding text would have become clear sooner.