1. Overview

The Project
Thus, we come full circle. In this book, we started out from the question of the “logos of being” of, say, an ox—its “inherent standard” of being (chapters 1 and 2). After exploring how this inherent character shows itself as a kind of “rationing” or “proportioning” in natural and animal motion (chapters 3 and 4) and as “reason” in human action (chapter 5), we have come to see in chapter 6 what kind of being we must be to even ask the question of the “logos of being”: a being that has logos as “speech” in the sense of the specifically human ability to understand and relay even that which is by definition beyond her firsthand experience, in this case, what it is for an ox to be. It is because all along we ourselves, animals having logos, were able to understand and relay that which we never experienced firsthand that we have been able to raise the question of the “logos of being” of an ox in the first place.

It is in this sense that the question of the logos of being presents itself only to a being having logos. Yet, by the same token, we have completed our survey of the four major meanings of logos in Aristotle’s philosophy: standard, ratio, reason, and speech. These four meanings of logos all refer to the fundamental meaning of “gathering,” quite in conformity with the etymology of the word. More specifically, the fundamental meaning of logos falls within the category of “relation” (pros ti) as a relation that holds on to its terms in their difference instead of collapsing one to the other or holding them in indifference. In this basic sense, logos typically names a synthesis of terms otherwise thought as mutually exclusive, without violating the “principle of non-contradiction.” It introduces a third option, a via media, or a middle way that was unnoticed or ruled out, and it does so not at the expense of the “principle of the excluded middle.”

The Argument
So, in chapter 1, we started out by noting that the word logos appears at the very beginning of the Aristotelian corpus in the phrase “logos of being” which distinguishes synonymy from homonymy. We claimed that there “logos of being” must mean the standard of being of a being. This was the first major
meaning of *logos* in Aristotle: standard, form, essence, or “essential formula.” In this meaning, *logos* functioned as answering the question: “What is it for this thing to be?” That a being has such a standard means that it holds on to its aspects as well as to a certain “claim” concerning what it is for itself to be, without letting one yield, or remain indifferent, to the other.

In chapter 2, we asked what warrants for the fact that this standard is not arbitrarily imposed from without, but *inherent* to the being at hand. For a being to have an inherent standard implies that it is neither indifferent nor identical to it, and that its meeting the standard is neither merely necessary nor an eventuality on a par with an infinite number of others. To have a “*logos of being*” for a being, then, means for it to *hold its actual state together and an inherent potentiality together without letting one yield, or remain external, to the other.* Since the actuality of a potential as such is precisely Aristotle’s definition of “motion,” and since nature is an inherent source of motion and the “form according to *logos,*” we concluded that the inherence of the standard of being thus must be illustrated, if anywhere, in natural motion (chapters 3 and 4), and in human action (chapter 5).

Accordingly, chapter 3 dealt with natural motion. We noted how, as simply natural beings, elements are not simply located at certain coordinates in space. Rather, *while being at their actual location, they potentially have their place that they are to rest at, that tend toward and back to.* Further, we saw how living beings instantiate the inherence of their standard of being by reproduction and nutrition. *Living beings not only hold on to their place, as elements do, but also, in nutrition, hold together contrary elements within the “logos of growth” in their own body without letting one take over or lay indifferent to the other; in reproduction they do the same in another body.* Thus, as governed by a *logos* of growth, these motions introduced the second major meaning of *logos*: ratio.

Chapter 4 further explored specifically animal motion: sensation and locomotion. “Sensation is a *logos*” by *holding together the state of the organ and that of the object in their very difference instead of being indifferent to or overtaking one another.* Perception is an affection coming from without that completes the body of the animal from within. As to locomotion, it is analyzed as the result of the “practical” syllogism in which, unlike the case of elemental motion, *universal desire in nature is held together with diverse forms of receptivity to particulars*—thus giving rise to various forms of motions: flight, pursuit, hunting, and migration.

Chapter 5 introduced the third major sense of *logos*: reason. It is in action that humans exhibit the inherence of their “standard of being.” The defining trait of action is choice, and choice is defined by holding one “option” above others, thereby requiring a prior state of the human soul (*hexis*) in which
it holds on to contrary interpretations of the particular sensible. This precisely complicates the immediacy of the “practical” syllogism beyond all forms of natural motion and animal locomotion: the particular premise is no longer provided by immediate sensation, but rather reelaborated by positive states (hexeis). While intellectual virtues such as art, science, and prudence presuppose “potentialities with logos,” that is, two-sided potentialities, virtues of character hold contrary interpretations of particular sensibles in so far as the latter are objects of desire, pleasure, or pain. As Aristotle says, “the desiring part in general somehow partakes [in logos] insofar as it listens to and can obey it in the sense in which we say ‘taking account [ekhein logon] of both one’s father and one’s friends’” (NE I, 13, 1102b31–1103a3). The Politics takes this metaphor of “taking account of father and friends” literally by claiming that logos establishes both the household and the city.

So in chapter 6, we developed an Aristotelian account of “speech”—the fourth major meaning of logos. We argued that speech is the human ability to understand and relay firsthand experience as well as experience which is not and even cannot be made firsthand. Logos as speech dissolves, or at least dilutes, the boundary between what one has experienced and what one has not. Human beings are able to have firsthand experience not at the expense of understanding and relaying those they never had or may never have. In its indicative and optative moods beyond the imperatives and subjunctives of animal motion, this ultimate meaning of logos founds both the household and the city, provides a necessary condition for legislation, historiography, myth, politics, science, sophistry, and philosophy. Hence this capacity is what enables us humans, along with Aristotle, to even inquire into what it is for another being to be, by asking: “What is it for an ox to be?”

The Results
Here are the results of the argumentative survey we have conducted.

First, logos in Aristotle never refers to anything simple, pure, or immediate. It always refers to a relation, a mediation, or a synthesis, in all of its meanings without exception. In this sense, logos must be contrasted with nous as we shall briefly do at the very end of this book. Secondly, in its specifically human sense, logos is strictly and rigorously secular, mundane, full of “wonders,” but never mystical. It is never associated with any other animal nor with anything divine. This may be fruitfully contrasted with the Stoic, Gnostic and Christian uses of the word. Thirdly and finally, it is possibly because it refers to something so humble, prosaic, or at least lacking purity and divinity, that this ambiguous but common word has remained unthematized, riddlesome, hidden in plain sight, both in Aristotle and in his posterity.
Once *logos* is restored and brought into play in its fundamental meaning, one can see compelling reasons for thinking Aristotle as a thinker of inclusion.\(^2\)

As to the implications of our claim that *logos* as speech for Aristotle means the specifically human capacity for understanding and relaying first-hand as well as non-firsthand experiences, there are two things to note in order to grasp its significance. First, once the communicating parties possess this ability, the rate of information relay should increase exponentially. Since there is no relay among bees, the scout bee who has found a resource must inform other bees directly one by one, hence the propagation of information follows a linear growth. Both bees and the imitating bird species are thus sealed off from the wild proliferation of non-firsthand experiences: bees do not relay them, while the birds do not understand their content when they imitate them. Among humans, however, the “middle man” both understands and relays. So, the capacity for understanding and relaying non-firsthand experiences unavoidably boosts the speed with which the information is propagated. Since the receiver can also relay the message without having to undergo the experience firsthand, the propagation of information increases exponentially.

Secondly, once the communicating parties possess this specifically human ability, there is no preestablished control over the truthfulness of the messages. Having this capacity, a human being views her human interlocutors as possibly conveying something they have not experienced either. Hence, as Aristotle quotes from Euripides, “if there are persuasive false designations among mortals, you should also admit the contrary, that disbelieving the true befalls mortals.”\(^3\) I am exercising my ability to understand and relay non-firsthand experiences not only when I say “Socrates was executed in 399,” but also when I say “Socrates was not executed in 399.” Similarly, one is necessarily drawing on one’s capacity to understand and relay non-firsthand experiences when one says that Socrates’s execution was the right thing to do, that it was not the right thing to do, that the world was created in six days, that it will come to an end, that there are igneous rocks on the surface of the moon, or that all lines contain an infinite number of points. In a way, we are all “middle men.”

Thus, this ability is key to understanding the human condition insofar as it is constituted by history, science, education, news media, myth, propaganda, utopian fiction, sophistry, and philosophy. For, if human beings were not receptive to experiences they have not made firsthand, information could not be accumulated, articulated, and propagated in the complex forms of diverse sciences in order then to be repeated and made public. Each scientist would start over all experiences and experiments, and would have
to be the *first* scientist deprived of all traditions and institutions. 4 Further, without such a human capacity, there could also be no limitless propagation, accumulation, and reception of misinformation. There could be no discourse about the creation of the universe, about the origin of species in general, about “our” species, or about any community in its mythical form, since there would be no ethnic or familial genealogy claiming to “purity” or “nobility.” Each human being would have to be the first being on earth, the first human being, the first ancestor of his descendants, the founder of his city, a child of no one. There would indeed be no true fiction, no true experimentation, no true improvisation, no historiography, no prophecy, since by definition all these require access to that which one has not experienced. There would be no awareness of one’s life span as a whole, which is requisite for happiness according to Aristotle, and thereby no sense of one’s own death other than something that did, does, and will happen to others. There would be no propaganda, no rumors, no deliberately impossible and yet deliberate desires, that is, no utopian fiction and no nostalgia, no true remorse or bad consciousness. There would be no debatable principles of living, since all principles would be immediately subjugated to the preservation of the individual and/or of the species. Thus, there would be no genuine compromise, no promises held or betrayed, no true sacrifice because there would be no sense of “good” and “bad” beyond the “painful” and “pleasant.” There would be no possibility for pleasure and pain to assume not an immediate, but an accompanying role. Conversely, there would be no otherworldliness, no eschatology deferring one’s pains and pleasures to an afterlife. There would be no true accountability, and thus no true, unaccountable forgiveness. There would be no way to detach oneself, for better or for worse, from one’s own first-person perspective, no way to be with others beyond the spectrum of allies and enemies, of cooperators and opponents, of masters and servants. In short, there would be no intermediary room for a *xenos* to remain a *xenos*—a welcomed guest or a potential rival. Finally, if humans did not have *logos*, they would not only be less wonderful or terrifying, they would also lack the sense of wonder and terror. They could not love that which they know they cannot have. There would be no philosophy in the Socratic sense. Philosophy is in another’s language. *Philosophia* is, in a sense, *xenophilia*.

Doesn’t it make sense to say that one learns another’s language, reads another’s book, listens to another’s ideas, enters another’s land, and is initiated in another’s way of living precisely because one already has the feeling that it is *there*, in their syntax or their words, in their customs and rituals, that wisdom lies? 5 Don’t the monuments of unknown cities, the sinuosities of their streets, the traces of the sedimentation of their laws and customs, the fleeting
intonations of their sentences, and the divergent categories of their thought appear as promises, rather than as obstacles or indifferent alternatives? Isn’t wonder irreducible to both exoticism and fantasies of assimilation? Would the world then seem like our only and ultimate school? What would the world look like if it were our only and ultimate school? It would look exactly as it is.

2. The Human Condition: The Cycloptic and the Oedipal

For better or for worse, these are the implications of *logos* in the specifically human condition. To give these implications a concrete form, let us see two limiting cases, one of which lacks *logos*, while the other is immersed in it in a specifically human way. “Since those who imitate imitate acting people which are necessarily either serious [*spoudaios*] or lowly [*phaulous*] . . . they imitate them either as better than us or as worse, or as similar to us, just like painters” (*Po. 2*, 1448a1–6). The character that is “worse than us” is the figure of the Cyclops.

The Cycloptic

Although they appear in many important passages of the Aristotelian corpus, the Cyclopes appear in the *Poetics* as figures well-suited to comedy, being “worse [*kheirous*] . . . than the people today” (*Po. 2*, 1448a17). In the debate between conservatism and reform in the *Politics*, they appear as “earth-born” and *not* to be followed since “they were just like ordinary and foolish people” (*Pol. II, 5*, 1269a7–8). The Cyclopes are representatives of ancient customs that should be reformed with caution, even if they are written down. Most importantly, the following discussion concerning the priority of law as *logos* over paternal rule suggests that what is at stake is less a group than a way of life qualified as “cycloptic” (*kyklóptikós*):

Paternal authority does not have the force of necessity, neither does an individual in general, unless he is a king or the like; law however has compulsory power, being a *logos* originating from some prudence and thought. Now among humans, those who oppose people’s impulses are hated, even when they do so rightly, but the law is not hated when it orders what is decent. But in the city of the Lacedemonians alone, or among few others, does the lawgiver seem to have taken care for upbringing and exercises, while in most cities they have been most careless about such things, and each person lives the way he wants, laying down the law “for his
children and wife” in the manner of a Cyclops [kyklöptikós]. (NE X, 9, 1180a19–29)

What makes the Cycloptic way of ruling and living “worse” is then simply that it is at least second best, compared to what is best according to Aristotle: that upbringing be a common concern.7 In the terms of the Nicomachean Ethics, human life is impoverished by no longer “taking account of both one’s father and one’s friends.”8

This ties in well with Aubenque’s emphasis on the role of deliberation and necessarily of compromise as much as consensus in ethical and political affairs according to Aristotle. Aubenque claims that in fact the middle ground in discussion has nothing to do with mediocrity for Aristotle, just like the middle term in logic and the mean in ethics has nothing mediocre about them. The search for including such a middle path is not a way of “playing it safe,” but in fact the search for “excellence between two extremes.” In Aubenque’s words:

In the political order, this excellence is friendship which is the basis of a genuine city in opposition to associations motivated by private interests. The human being accomplishes herself in community, in the coexistence and the conviviality [synousia] whose intellectual condition of possibility is common deliberation. It is in this sense that the “government of the middle,” which we call “constitutional government” [“politie” in the French text] or “democracy,” is the most “excellent” of constitutions.9

Genuine compromise is impossible without logos, without an immersive access into another’s perspective, without at least an opening toward that in which one does not take pleasure, without sacrifice, that is, without a proairesis, a preference, an interpretation as good, of that which one does not and may never benefit from. Genuine compromise is impossible without an eye for the mindset of another. Other than their paternal rule and lack of care for upbringing, what does the Cycloptic life look like?

Law
The Cyclopes lack nothing but lack itself.10 Living on an island of the blessed, similar to the golden race in Hesiod,11 the Cyclopes “lack” concern and work, as is made unmistakable in the Homeric text by the wealth of privative adjectives and the recurrent contrasts with the human condition: they have no plow, no sowing, no hunting, hence no carpenters and no ships . . . (Homer,
Odyssey IX, 125). No wonder that Odysseus, assuming the point of view of an entrepreneur or of a colonizer, fantasizes about the city they would have been able to build if they had had some ships, and about the abundant agriculture they would have had thanks to the fertile soil (Odyssey IX, 126–41). The idyllic environment of the Cyclopes is reflected by their regimen. Coming upon one of them, Odysseus immediately contrasts his diet to human nutrition: “[He was] not like a man that lives by bread [or grain, sitos], but rather like a wooded [hylêenti] peak of high mountains, which stands out to view alone, apart from the rest” (Odyssey IX, 190–92). This inhuman diet and vegetal (“hylic”) or elemental stature seems connected with their sporadic way of life remarked by Aristotle in the Politics.12

Hence, they “lack” the need for deliberation and cooperation. As Aristotle quotes, “each gives law to his children and spouses” in his own cave13 (Odyssey IX, 107–15). Indeed, they are “arrogant and lawless” (Odyssey IX, 106), and yet this is not because they are wicked, but rather because they are blessed in some way. The Cyclopes may remind one of Aristotle’s characterization of the kind of human being that is by nature deprived of the polis. According to another Homeric quotation in Aristotle, this “apolitical” person by nature is “‘clanless, lawless, hearthless,’ and also a lover of war. He resembles an isolated piece at draughts.”14 To vary Aristotle’s striking metaphor, the Cycloptic routine is that of a king on an empty chessboard, checkered in black and white.

The Cyclopes lack neither a common location,15 nor houses, caves, or streets, nor common goals and therefore common strategies.16 Yet a community is not simply made out of allies, and a city is not made out of neighbors.17 What the Cyclopes “lack” is an agora. They do not lack the mental capacity for deliberating, but rather a sense of the human condition and situatedness which make it necessary to deliberate:

For it is impossible to lay down a law about things people deliberate over. Therefore they do not deny at least this: that the human must judge about these, although not one human being, but many. For each ruler judges beautifully when he has been educated by the law, and it would seem out of place if one person saw better when judging with two eyes and two organs of hearing, and acting with two feet and hands, than many people with many, since even today the monarchs make many eyes and ears and hands and feet their own, for they adopt persons that are friendly to their rule and to themselves as their fellow-rulers. (Pol. III, 11, 1287b23–32)18
So if the Cyclopes seem to “lack” one eye by birth, their character is no less formed by their environment. Hence Odysseus never seems to suggest that they have an evil or wicked nature, but rather insists on their self-sufficient environment (Odyssey IX, 190–91). Of course, all this inference is made in contrast to the human condition which has less to do with birth, say the number of eyes one has, than with their interaction with their environment. And human environments are not always as blissful as the island of the Cyclopes. Homeric, Platonic, Euripidic, and Aristotelian texts all depict the Cyclops as having one eye because of a more fundamental political and interpersonal shortcoming, and not the other way around. Hence the number of “eyes” or “hands” always remains often misleadingly metaphorical. To vary examples around this insight as we shall see Aristotle doing, what makes a conversation is not two speakers, what makes a good one is not even more speakers, and a friendly gathering is not enriched simply by more and more food or more and more hosts and guests, but by their variety, that is, their difference. The reason why a crowded jury may be better than a restricted one is not the number of the jury members, but their diversity that does not necessarily follow from such a number:

> It is possible that the many, although not each one is serious [spoudaios], yet when they come together, may be better [beltious] than those who are so, just as public dinners to which many contribute are better than those supplied at one's cost; for where there are many, each one may have some portion of virtue and prudence, and when they have come together, just as the multitude becomes one human being with many feet and hands and senses, so also it becomes one with regard to moral and intellectual faculties. This is why the many judge musical and poetic works, for each can judge a different part and all of them all of the work. (Pol. III, 6, 1281a42–1281b10)

The Cyclopes are not stupid or logically defective. They lack a portion of “virtue and prudence.” Their condition is apaideusia, a lack of education, perhaps the condition that, according to Aristotle, makes one demand a demonstration even for the principle of non-contradiction, or for the very existence of nature. Thus this “shortcoming” is not simply foreign to humans, or at least to their “past.”

Now we are in a position to read Aristotle's famous quotation of the Homeric story of the Cyclops:
Formerly the cities were under kingly rule as some peoples still are, because they came [to form a city] out of kingly rule, for every household is under the kingly rule of its oldest member so that the colonies were so too, given the kinship of their members. And this is what Homer says: “and each gives law to his children and spouses,” for they were scattered, and that is how people used to live. (Pol. I, 1, 1252b19–26)

Not having any notion of law beyond his sporadic life, being the lonesome powerful king on the empty chessboard, no wonder the Cyclops is unfamiliar with any kind of “law of hospitality” (Odyssey IX, 259–71), but instead seems to embody different impoverished forms of the “law of the middle excluded”: I am either this or that, this is either my place or not, this is either mine or not, this is either a friend or a foe. . . . He considers another viewpoint as contrary, contradictory, or confrontational. Being the son of the sea god Poseidon and a sea nymph, Polyphemus the Cyclops in fact has no Cyclops parents, and even no gods properly speaking (Odyssey IX, 275–80), therefore no law reaching out of the cave, no openness, because no need for openness, to a perspective beyond his pleasure and pain.

Of course, Odysseus is depicted as a diametrically opposite character. The Cyclopes were characterized by privative adjectives: “a-phrêtôr” (“clanless”), “a-themistos” (“lawless”), and “a-nestios” (“hearthless”). On the contrary, Odysseus’s famous epithets insist on his openness to a plurality: he is the “poly-tropos” (“much-wandering”), the “poly-mêtis” (“man of many counsels”), the “poly-mêkhanos” (“resourceful”), the “poly-tlêmôn” (“much-enduring”), the man of many twists and turns, of much contriving and endurance. As opposed to the literally autochthonic Cyclopes, Odysseus is the voyager, the perennial xenos, the one displaced and also stretching back to his origin. For instance, when he lands on the island of the Cyclopes, he takes the best wine he has, and once arrived at Polyphemus’s cave, despite his famous cunning, he refuses his fellow men’s proposal to run away with the goods they found in there—not because he believes in the natural goodness of humans and Cyclopes, but rather because he expects generosity in return (Odyssey IX, 228–30). To use the metaphor of chess once again, Odysseus is not a pawn at all, he is comparable to a queen surrounded by bishops, knights, and rooks.

So Cycloptic life “lacks” logos. The Cyclopes are not alogos as such, but alogos precisely in the way a human may be, may have been, or may come to be. The “lack” of the Cyclopes is only seemingly anatomical, and the Cycloptic life is “worse” not because they are literally monocular, but because they
“lack” the need of deliberation, of immersing themselves into the perspective of others. “Lacking” logos, the Cyclopes are blissfully “confined” to their firsthand experience, to their autopsia.

**Language**

This shows in the language of Polyphemus the Cyclops. He does attempt to make Odysseus tell him where his ship was. Indeed, Odysseus immediately deciphers Polyphemus’s malice and tells him that their ship dashed into pieces (Odyssey IX, 279–85). In a dramatic reversal, the very weakness of Polyphemus’s attempt to manipulate inspires Odysseus to manipulate him in turn, and this time successfully. It is at this moment that, calming his immediate anger (Odyssey IX, 299–305) without altogether suppressing it (Odyssey IX, 504), Odysseus pays heed to logos and appeals to his openness to a life altogether foreign to him by taking a look at the world from Polyphemus’s round eye.

Besides his resources of art and indeed the cooperation of his fellow men in the fabrication of the spear (Odyssey IX, 319–35), Odysseus makes and works out his plan by means of language. The night before he blinds him, Odysseus has a little chat with Polyphemus while offering his good wine as if asking for mercy (Odyssey IX, 347–52); and when in drunkenness Polyphemus asks his name (Odyssey IX, 355–59), he springs his trap by famously telling him that his name is “Nobody” (Odyssey IX, 366).

The rest of the story is well known. When Polyphemus tells the other Cyclopes that “Nobody is killing me” (Odyssey IX, 408) in the hope of organizing them, both Polyphemus and the other Cyclopes are responsible for the miscommunication. For Polyphemus takes “Nobody” for a proper name, while the other Cyclopes take it as a pronoun, unable as they are to notice Polyphemus’s shortcoming, and immersed as they are in the literal and correct sense of this word. They fail to become “many eyes and ears and hands,” regardless of how many and how well-armed they may be (Odyssey IX, 410–12). Polyphemus then fails to attune himself not only to Odysseus’s plans, but also to the mindset of the other Cyclopes. Otherwise he would explain to them that the word “Nobody” is homonymous, to use Aristotelian terms, and does not only mean “nobody,” but in this context is the name of the evil Greek guest. But nor do the Cyclopes put themselves in Polyphemus’s shoes and notice that clearly “Nobody is killing me” is an awkward answer to their question in that context. Both sides take the word “Nobody” univocally, but unfortunately in different senses, precisely as Odysseus planned in using this ambiguous name. Cyclopes act as if words simply match beings, as if there is only one word for one being or one kind of being.
This is the story Aristotle has in mind when he calls the life of the Cyclopes as second best, that is, as falling short of the potential of human law and language. We saw at the beginning of this book how Aristotle characterizes this univocal, nonarbitrary, and essential relationship between nouns and beings: the Cyclopes “lack” logos not because they lack language, but because their language is immersed in synonymy. In a word, Cyclopes seem to lack the sense of riddles.

In the Homeric text, the life of Polyphemus seems to have been perfect until the cunning and colonizing Odysseus arrived. The latter laughs at the shortcomings of Polyphemus, and so might the reader think he is expected to do. In fact, it is this passage that Aristotle quotes in the Rhetoric as testimony that the more one is angry at somebody, the more he will want his enemy to know who retaliated.

Love
And yet, there is more to Polyphemus’s story. For there is an unsaid in the Homeric text, a backstory that remained untold until the later tradition. This prequel reveals to us a Polyphemus that is not merely an exemplar of the limited capacities in matter of law and language among Cyclopes, but a particular person with a particular past, and with a personal story about that past—a past which was not as idyllic as a reader of Homer might have thought. This story puts Polyphemus in a new and even more problematically human contrast with Odysseus who was famously awaited at home by Penelope and Telemachus.

Because this story is a love story. It is told in the eleventh idyll, “The Cyclops’ Serenade,” by Theocritus, a Sicilian poet from the third century BC. This text is extremely suggestive as to what it means to lack logos not only in social organization and communication, but also in individual emotional life, a life unable to access resources and assume mindsets beyond its own firsthand experiences. It shows why, however “worse” Cyclopes may be, their situation must at least be plausible in the eyes of the spectators for the play to be a comedy. It shows how the world is not split into mythical grotesque beings lacking logos, and cunning humans possessing it. It blurs such a distinction in line with Aristotle who situates an alogia at the very center of the human soul, that is as characteristically human as logos. It relates a story of Polyphemus that teaches us something about the human condition.

For Polyphemus, it turns out, was a heartbroken lover. Theocritus’s idyll opens thus in Verity’s translation (Theocritus, 2002: 33, ll. 1–18):
“Nicias, there is no remedy for love, no liniment,  
As I believe, nor any balm, except the Muses.  
Their is a gentle, painless drug, and in men’s power  
To use; but it is hard to find. You know this well,  
I think; you are a doctor, and one whom the nine  
Muses love above all. This at any rate was the way  
My countryman the Cyclops eased his pain,  
Polyphemus long ago, when he loved Galatea,  
When the down was fresh about his mouth and temples.  
He loved, not with apples, roses, or curls of hair,  
But in an outright frenzy. For him, nothing else existed.  
Often his flocks would come of their own accord  
Back from green pastures to the fold, while he, alone  
On the weed-strewn shore, would sing of Galatea from  
Break of day, wasting away with love. Deep inside he bore  
A cruel wound, which mighty Cypris’ dart had driven  
Into his heart. But he found out the cure: he would sit  
On some high rock, and gazing out to sea would sing.”

Polyphemus was not only madly in love with the sea nymph Galatea. He  
also wrote poetry—the only remedy for a broken heart, according to the nar-  
rator: sitting on a rock, gazing at the sea, and singing.  
There follows Polyphemus’s love song. Here is the opening (ll. 19–29):

“O my white Galatea, why do you spurn your lover?  
Whiter to look at than cream cheese, softer than a lamb,  
More playful than a calf, sleeker than the unripe grape.  
Why do you only come just as sweet sleep claims me,  
Why do you leave me just as sweet sleep lets me go,  
Flying like a ewe at the sight of a grey wolf?  
I fell in love with you, my sweet, when first you came  
With my mother to gather flowers of hyacinth  
On the mountain, and I was your guide. From the day  
I set eyes on you up to this moment, I’ve loved you  
Without a break; but you care nothing, nothing at all.”

There are two important aspects of this opening. First, by means of this *logos*,  
we get to understand something we have not experienced firsthand: how  
Polyphemus himself saw Galatea. More exactly, we get to understand how
Polyphemus thought he would praise Galatea to herself in such a way that would convince her to join him on his island. The first adjective he uses, “white,” is pretty redundant, since the name Galatea already strongly brings to mind “milk,” gala in Ancient Greek. Similarly, the metaphors he uses to praise her seem to be chosen to reflect his limitation to his own firsthand experience, his inability to go beyond synonymity, literality, or univocality: for Galatea’s whiteness brings to his mind “cream cheese,” her softness a “lamb,” her playfulness a “calf,” her sleekness an “unripe grape,” her fleeting-ness “a ewe.”

The second important related aspect of the opening is Polyphemus’s general tone of complaint and his avowal of not understanding her. But then he tries to understand her by looking at himself from a non-firsthand point of view (ll. 30–33):

“I know, my beautiful girl, why you run from me:
A shaggy brow spreads right across my face
From ear to ear in one unbroken line. Below is a
Single eye, and above my lip is set a broad flat nose.”

All along, we seem to be called by Theocritus to ridicule Polyphemus: his linguistic capacities, his incapacity for assuming somebody else’s point of view, his looks, and so on. This seemingly ridiculing tone continues as Polyphemus tries to convince Galatea. Polyphemus interprets the situation in a clearly self-centered way, foreshadowing his later inability to communicate with the other Cyclopes in the Homeric episode. So he makes propositions, offerings, and promises to Galatea that are very much irrelevant to a sea nymph (ll. 34–49):

“Such may be my looks, but I pasture a thousand beasts,
And I drink the best of the milk I get from them.
Cheese too I have in abundance, in summer and autumn,
And even at winter’s end; my racks are always laden.
And I can pipe better than any Cyclops here,
When I sing, my sweet pippin, deep in the night
Of you and me. For you I’m rearing eleven fawns,
All marked on their necks, and four bear cubs too.
O please, come. You will see that life is just as good
If you leave the grey-green sea behind to crash on the shore,
And at night you will find more joy in this cave with me.
Here there are bays, and here slender cypresses,
Here is sombre ivy, and here the vine’s sweet fruit;
Here there is ice-cold water which dense-wooded Etna
Sends from its white snows—a drink fit for the gods.
Who could prefer waves and the sea to all this?”

There follows an explicit foreshadowing of the *Odyssey* (ll. 50–53):

“But if you think I’m a touch too hairy for you,
I have oak logs here, and under the ash unflagging fire.
Burn away my life with fire—I could bear even that,
And my single eye, my one dearest possession of all.”

Then, instead of a “plan of action,” we read Polyphemus blaming his mother and then nature in general (ll. 54–59):

“I wish my mother had given me gills when I was born,
Then I could have dived down and kissed your hand,
If you denied me your mouth, and brought you white
Snowdrops or delicate poppies with their scarlet petals.
One grows in summer and the other grows in winter,
So you see I could not bring you both at once.”

Can’t he build a ship? Can’t he at least learn to swim? Ironically, indeed, he wishes for “some mariner” to visit him, in another reference to the *Odyssey*. Once again, the blame is on anybody else but him (ll. 60–66):

“It’s not too late, my sweet, for me to learn to swim;
If only some mariner would sail here in his ship,
Then I could fathom why you nymphs love life in the deep.
Come out, Galatea, come out and forget your home,
Just as I sit here and forget to return to mine.
Follow the shepherd’s life with me—milking,
And setting cheese with the rennet’s pungent drops.”

Finally, the blame turns definitely toward the mother. Instead of engaging in action to meet Galatea *on her own terms*, Polyphemus yields to his resentment for his mother and to wishful thinking *in his own terms*. Polyphemus dreams of punishing his mother by exhibiting his own suffering (ll. 67–71):
“It’s my mother who does me wrong; it’s her alone I blame. 
She’s not once spoken a gentle word to you about me, 
Although she sees me wasting away, day by day. 
I’ll see she knows how my head and feet throb with pain, 
So that her torment will be equal to what I suffer.”

Despite his self-centered but passionate desire, Polyphemus’s so-called plan of “action” involves optatives, or contrafactual conditional sentences, or conditions depending on Galatea, on his mother, on nature, on a possible stranger—in short, on pretty much everybody but him.

The end of Polyphemus’s love song is bitter. Quite unlike Odysseus trying to go back to Penelope and Telemachus, Polyphemus convinces himself to come to his senses, to stay where he is, and to distract himself from his love for Galatea. Beyond being born in a legally and linguistically limited environment, Polyphemus here chooses to take account of a voice in himself as one takes account of both one’s father and one’s friends (ll. 72–79):

“O Cyclops, Cyclops, where have your wits flown away? 
Show some sense, go and weave some baskets, collect 
Green shoots for your lambs. Milk the ewe 
At hand; why chase the one who runs away? Maybe 
You’ll find another Galatea, and a prettier one too. 
I’m invited out for night-time play by lots of girls, 
And they giggle together as soon as they see I’ve heard. 
On land I too am clearly a man of some consequence.”

However grotesque it may appear at first, Polyphemus’s situation is by no means one unfamiliar to human beings. Hence we entered this detour beyond the Aristotelian and Homeric texts simply to make the point that Polyphemus in fact partakes in a special modality of *logos* we encountered in chapter 6: the optative mood, the mood of wishing and praying. His self-centered interpretation of the situation and his complete lack of commitment for changing it precisely fit the structure of wish, a desire that is cut off from all action. And however comedic, it is in fact this aspect of Polyphemus that is humane, and Theocritus clearly ends up sympathizing with him (ll. 80–81):

“So by singing the Cyclops shepherded his love, 
And more relief it brought him than paying a large fee.”
For, while we can easily think how Polyphemus could have indeed joined Galatea, we can also imagine a situation where this is simply impossible, where Polyphemus’s “cure” or plan of “action,” namely “poetizing,” may well have been the only resource. Galatea could have simply refused Polyphemus. She could have been prevented from seeing Polyphemus by her family. She could have been dead. In such a case, Polyphemus may have wishfully imagined to join her in an afterlife, in a world to come, in another Ithaca. And this is as specifically human as Odysseus’s inventiveness in remedying his nostalgia and returning to the arms of Penelope.

What this supposedly comedic Polyphemus teaches us about logos is then the following: since human logos is an exposure, beyond autopsia, to that which one has not experienced firsthand, human beings are able to remain stuck in their own perspective and experience, be it idyllic or traumatic, in a specific way, that is, in a humane way. It is precisely because they can overcome their own perspective that human inability to do so takes a specific form, the form of Job’s long-repressed protest against God, the form of wish in all its frustrated versions: remorse, resentment, obsession, utopian fiction, nostalgia, or melancholy. Human alogia is as wonderful or terrifying than human logos.

The Oedipal

So much then for the character who is “worse than us” according to Aristotle’s Poetics. Who is the character that is “better than us” again such that it may well shed light on the human condition from the reverse angle? Aristotle suggests that characters that are “better than us” are to be found in tragedy, not in comedy. More specifically, the Aristotelian paradigm of tragedy is Sophocles’s King Oedipus. The paradigmatic tragic hero is Oedipus whose action he precisely qualifies as deinon. Here human blindness is more tragic than Polyphemus’s, since it results not from human confrontation with impossibility, but comes forth through human possibilities, deliberate decisions, words, and actions. As Cycloptic blindness illustrates something about human confinement in autopsia, Oedipal blindness may have something to teach us concerning a life altogether detached from autopsia.

There are a great number of ways in which Oedipus can be contrasted to Polyphemus. Unlike Polyphemus who has no god because he is the son of one, Oedipus is the son of a human, and he is a zealous follower of god’s oracles. Instead of having limited linguistic skills like the solitary heartbroken shepherd Polyphemus, Oedipus is the very one who cunningly solves the riddle of the Sphinx and becomes at once the savior of a city, the father of a family, and a bold king. With all his messengers, soldiers, oracles, family
members, and advisors at the opening of the tragedy, Oedipus appears as a panoptic character. At the very opening of the tragedy, he is all eyes, hands, and feet at the throne of his city in the middle of the stage facing a new riddle in the form of a wicked epidemic, something unthinkable in the blessed island of the Cyclopes. This multiplication of the “organs” of the King of Thebes is a perfect example of human *logos* as our ability to understand and relay that which we have not experienced firsthand: the messages carried by messengers, the oracles related by soothsayers and then relayed by others, the numerous stories handed on from generation to generation, the various genealogies, orders, threats, inferences, curses, vows, and promises . . . In *King Oedipus*, the whole action is speech, and speech is hyperactive. Unlike Polyphemus who either becomes a “lover of war” or fails to identify himself with the desires of his loved one, Oedipus the *xenos* is welcomed by the Thebans and saves them, marries their widowed queen, and becomes king. And in contrast to the frustration, rage, and resentment of Polyphemus, Oedipus is majestic, righteous, and magnanimous. Compared to the Cyclopes’ xenophobic island, finally, Thebes is a cosmopolitan and liberal environment, the xenophile city par excellence.

The contrast shows itself best in the context of language. Called out for help by Polyphemus, the Cyclopes fail to understand that “nobody” does not have a univocal sense in that context, that is, that “nobody” and “Nobody” are homonyms. Oedipus and other characters in the tragedy do the exact opposite: they all fail to notice that “the killer of Laius,” “the one who slept with his mother,” “Laius and Jocasta’s son,” and “Oedipus” are all synonyms. Whereas the Cyclopes were limited to the literal senses of words (“nobody” as a proper name), the Thebans are so immersed in the multivocity of *logos* that they precisely fail to take things literally. The oracles are always overinterpreted, they are understood not literally, but are constantly distorted by the assumptions of the listener.

Jocasta, for one, does not recognize the face of her own son. She fails to recognize his natural identity, because she is led astray by his conventional identity as the “son of the king of Corinth” or as the “witty stranger that saved Thebes from the Sphinx.” So she takes him to be a *xenos*. Oedipus, in turn, misidentifies himself and his parents only because he is cast out of Thebes and returns there afterwards. Rural life as such is closed to such conventional *mis*identification, because it is closed to conventional identification. The tragedy is made possible because, as citizens, everybody in the play is thinking merely in terms of conventional symbolism.

The symbolic character of nouns entails a structurally determined confusion: precisely because nouns necessarily open up a distance between the
sounds uttered and the meaning, the same things are said in many ways not only in different languages, but even within one language, and because the same nouns can mean fundamentally different things. In a word, the first level of articulation of logos opens the possibility of ambiguity, equivocation, homonymy. It is because of homonymy that even nouns are subject to interpretation. In chapter 6, we saw how this inherent “flaw” of nouns follows precisely from their convenience, and why homonymy is a necessary consequence of the enormous economy of language: “Nouns and the quantity of logoi are finite, whereas things are infinite in number. Thus it is necessary that the same logos and noun signify a number of things” (SE 1, 165a11–14). This enables Sophocles to beautifully show Oedipus tragically determined to either kill whoever “himself” killed Laius or die “himself”—supposing these synonymous designations to be homonymous.44

To sum up our comparison between the character who is “worse than us” and the one who is “better”: the Cyclops lives a self-centered, closed, rural life of synonymy where things that share names also share their “logos of being” naturally as animal voices are signs of pleasure and pain, as bones fit into their joints; Oedipus, on the other hand, lives a political life of homonymy, a life open and devoted to others, a life of conventions, contracts, symbols, and interpretations. As the Cyclops was blind to others and was exposed to being blinded by another’s cunning or beauty, Oedipus is oblivious to himself and, sure enough, ends up blinding himself.45

When Aristotle insists that there be nothing in the plot of the tragedy itself that is alogos, but only in past events, his example is King Oedipus.46 It is his disregard for his shady natural roots that ruins Oedipus’s plans for starting over and freely redefining himself. After Jocasta recognizes who Oedipus is and condemns herself to silence, Oedipus, seeing her terror, bravely cries:

Let whatever disaster come! However lowly it may be, I want to see my origin [sperm’ idein]. In her womanly arrogance, she is ashamed of my ignoble roots. But I consider myself to be the child of Fortune [paida tês Tychês] the generous, and I am not ashamed of it. It is Fortune who was my mother, and the years of my life that made me lowly and great. This is my origin, nothing can change it: why would I refuse to learn who I was born from? (1076–85)

Oedipus’s true hubris, his true misunderstanding of human limitation, exhibits itself in this claim to be a purely rational agent, a self-transparent individual, freely defining himself, consciously engaging with others through contracts, the child of no real parents, but “the child of Fortune.” This is what
makes him “bigger than nature,” “better than us,” detached from the alogia of his past, and so terrifying. And this makes his downfall not simply realistic, but paradigmatic. This detachment from his natural roots could make Oedipus simply neglect the question of his origins. And yet, on the contrary, it pushes him forward in the gradual unfolding of his self-recognition.\textsuperscript{47}

We have thus come to the end of our elaboration of Polyphemus and Oedipus as two figures that shed light on the human condition as having logos, that is, as having access to that which one does not and may never experience firsthand. Repeatedly used by Aristotle as paradigms, they both instantiate specifically human forms of alogia. The one is immersed in his cave, in his self-centered life, in his rural familial circle, in his natural environment and in a language innocent of the ambiguity that is typical to logos and always requires interpretation. The other one lives his cosmopolitan and public life as a self-determining rational individual agent detached from his natural origins, so wrapped up in his free interpretations and assumptions that he is blind to his familial origins, to his irrational attachments, and to his childhood.

So the Cycloptic and the Oedipal are two limiting-cases of human logos, or, alternatively, two forms of specifically human alogia: a deficiency in logos and an exclusive immersion in it that is wonderfully and terrifyingly possible only for a being that has logos.

3. Nous

Yet not all alogia is human. Aristotle’s works present a sense of alogos that is not a privation of logos, but is altogether foreign to logos. In contrast to Cycloptic or Oedipal alogia, this one is positive, a positive state, a hexis.\textsuperscript{48} Thereby this alogia testifies that, despite its extremely varied functions, logos is not a key opening all doors and the single overall logic of all being. For Aristotle there is a form of carelessness that is not vice, a kind of a lack of prudence that is not foolish, a way of being that does not hold onto different terms in their difference. For Aristotle there is a state that has no extremes and thus no middle to exclude or include. It is different from science, but it is not ignorance. Beyond compositeness and manifoldness, the world, even the sublunar realm, has oases of positive simplicity, of pure acts.\textsuperscript{49}

This is nous.\textsuperscript{50} And nous is to be distinguished from logos on all levels.\textsuperscript{51} Unlike composite beings that have a “logos of being” in the sense of “standard” (see our chapter 1), nous is everlasting transparency and purity: “There is a sense in which nous makes all things; this is a positive state like light: for in a way light makes colors in potentiality into colors in actuality. This nous
is separable, impassive, unmixed, since it is at work in its being” (DA III, 5, 430a14–17). Unlike beings that are both potentially and actually so that what it is for them to be is at issue (see chapters 2 and 3), nous leaves no room for change, for decisions and choices, for deliberation, for consensus or compromise, for intermittence, for not being at work, and for somehow not being what it is for nous to be: “Nous does not think intermittently. Separated, it is only what it truly is, and this alone is immortal and eternal . . . and nothing thinks without this” (DA III, 5, 430a18–25). Unlike sensation as a logos, holding on to the form of sensibles without yielding to them or affecting them (see our chapter 4), “nous is the form of forms” (DA, III, 8, 432a3). Unlike locomotion which takes the form of a practical syllogism, nous is not moved, but rather moves without itself being moved.53 Unlike prudence (see chapter 5), “nous apprehends the terms of which there is no logos” (NE VI, 8, 1142a25–26). Unlike logos as predication, affirmation, or negation, “nous is not something in relation to something else [ti kata tinos]” (DA III, 6, 430b26–29). Nous is thus naturally associated not with the strictly human, but with the divine in the human.55

Since, among the intellectual positive states by which we are in truth, some are always true (knowledge and nous), and some admit of falsity like opinion and calculation, and since no other kind of knowledge is more accurate than nous, and since the sources are more knowable than demonstrations and all knowledge is with logos, thus there would be no knowledge of the sources; and since no knowledge admits of being more true than nous, then nous would apprehend the sources; from this one sees also that the source of demonstration is not demonstration, just as the source of knowledge is not knowledge. So if we have no kind of truth other than knowledge, then the source of knowledge would be nous; it would be the source of the source, just as all knowledge stands to all things. (APe. II, 19, 110b5–17)

On a similar line of demarcation, Aristotle writes in the Politics that “logos for us, and nous, is the telos of nature” (Pol. VII, 13, 1334b15). Reason, rationality, or intelligence may appear to us today as a superpower defining and distinguishing human beings. We hope to have shown that for Aristotle logos distinguishes humans from other animals in two of its senses (“reason” and “speech”), but that these two together with the other two senses of logos (“standard” and “ratio”) all refer back to one basic meaning shared by all living nature and most of nature as such. Yet Aristotle does not hypostatize or
epitomize *logos* in the context of beings as such (since God and the ultimate constituents of the cosmos seem to lack it), nor in the context of ultimate human capacities and happiness, since *nous* is without *logos*. And if *logos* has been surprisingly neglected both by Aristotle and by his posterity, it may be because *logos* has been eclipsed by the priority and divinity of *nous*, thereby abandoning its worldly, observant, deliberating, concrete, hesitant, and humane character in order to become the Word.