Reiner Schürmann and Poetics of Politics

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Do not wish to be master in everything,  
for the things you mastered did not  
accompany you throughout your life.  


Beginnings are poetic. They are haunted by an ineluctable duplicity that is heard already in the Greek word *poiēsis*. On one hand, poiesis names the sort of making associated with fabrication, on the other, it points to the creative capacity to imitate action in a way that brings delight and discloses truth. This duplicity of *poiēsis* haunts the story Reiner Schürmann tells of the

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2 An earlier version of this chapter was originally published as Christopher P. Long, “The Duplicity of Beginning: Schürmann, Aristotle and the Origins of Metaphysics,” *The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008).
beginning of metaphysics in his book *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. Metaphysics is said to begin with a decisive determination of the very meaning of beginning. Indeed, it is said to begin with a certain *poiēsis*, a fabrication that systematically undermines the other sense of *poiēsis* that speaks of possible things and opens a space for the happening of truth.\(^4\) For Schürmann, Aristotle was the poet of the beginning of metaphysics, because he was the first to bring together the two senses of the Greek word *archē*, inception and domination, consolidating them into a single concept of the principle in which incipience gives way to domination as the univocal law that governs thinking and acting.\(^5\)

Ironically, Schürmann’s own account of the origin of metaphysics repeats the consolidation of the origin he associates with Aristotle. For Schürmann, metaphysics “designates that disposition where action requires a principle to which words, things and deeds can be related.”\(^6\) To identify an expression that captures this schema by which action is determined by a universal principle of domination, Schürmann appeals to the Aristotelian locution of *pros hen* equivocation in which a diversity of phenomena enter into community with one another by pointing toward one (*pros hen*) principle, or *archē*\(^7\). Although, as will be heard, Aristotle’s own account of *pros hen* equivocation cannot be reduced to the hegemonic operation of the one upon the many, the logic that drives the story Schürmann tells

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6. Ibid., 5–6.

about the origin of metaphysics forces him, not quite to deny, but certainly to underemphasize the degree to which in Aristotle the *pros hen* relation affirms difference. Schürmann’s story of the origin of metaphysics as an epoch of hegemonic principles is itself a fabrication that operates according to a logic of domination that elides those dimensions of the beginning dissonant with the narrative.\(^8\)

Thus, to begin with Schürmann is to be exposed to the poetic duplicity of beginning in a poignant way; for his is a singular thinking intent upon exposing the violence each new beginning perpetrates upon the singular itself. To begin with Schürmann is to be caught already in a double bind in which the very attempt to do justice to the singularity of his thinking requires the deployment of words that obliterate the singular by forcing it into an economy of concepts that renders it particular. Yet justice requires that we resist the temptation to do with Schürmann what he does with Aristotle; for the singularity of Aristotle’s thinking is rendered particular the moment Schürmann identifies him as the father of metaphysics. Every attempt to do justice to singularity is caught up in the poetic duplicity of beginning — the need to speak and act together and the violence endemic to such speaking and acting. This is the duplicity that Schürmann himself identifies as the condition under which life stretches itself out between natality and mortality.

Drawing explicitly on one aspect of Hannah Arendt’s discussion of natality in the *Human Condition*, Schürmann insists that the trait of natality not only “carries us toward new beginnings,”\(^9\) but more decisively, natality gives birth to principles that crush

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8 We might playfully suggest, with a glint of delight in the eye, that Schürmann’s own account of the origins of metaphysics is … metaphysical and “very, very bo-o-oring.” Even so, however, his account is neither unimportant nor unproductive, for it generated a poietic response of sorts in two of his students: see, Christopher P. Long and Richard A. Lee, “Between Reification and Mystification: Rethinking the Economy of Principles,” *Telos* 120 (2001): 92–112.

the singular.\(^1\) Natality names the thetic thrust at work in every act of institutional founding. But what gives this life-affirming condition tragic poignancy for Schürmann is the manner in which its activity denies mortality. If “mortality familiarizes us with our *singularity to come,*” natality wins a life for itself by forcing the singular under concepts that render it particular.\(^1\)

For Schürmann, then, the trait of natality is associated with life, the common, and the violence of language, while that of mortality is bound up with death, the singular, and a certain silence.\(^2\)

However, to posit natality as the exclusive trait under which the singular dissolves into particularity and to set it over against the trait of mortality as that which singularizes is to remain caught in a metaphysical logic of dichotomy that Schürmann himself does so much to call into question. Unless these traits themselves are integrated, woven into “the entire tragedy and comedy of life,” the distinction is destined to remain one more in a long line of metaphysical phantasms.\(^3\) The singularizing dimension of natality must be heard to stretch out into the universalizing function of mortality. Natality opens us to the singular as the source of new possibilities even as mortality presses

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 19. For an insightful discussion of natality in *Broken Hegemonies,* see Reginald Lilly, “The Topology of *Des Hégémonies brisées,*” *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 226–42, at 234. The passage from the Human Condition that seems decisive for Schürmann’s understanding of natality runs as follows: “The frailty of human institutions and laws and, generally, of all matter pertaining to men’s living together, arises from the human condition of natality and is quite independent of the frailty of human nature.” See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 191. Cf. Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies,* 635n33. What Schürmann sometimes seems to underplay is the extent to which natality itself carries with it singularity in Arendt: “The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world.” See Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 178.

\(^{11}\) Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies,* 19.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

in upon life indiscriminately. If the tragic names the mode in which the bonds of mortality singularize, perhaps comedy is the mode in which natality playfully bursts the totalizing bonds of mortality, not by “teaching the end of bonds,” but by opening a space for the emergence of new possibilities for thinking and acting. This space of appearance, conditioned as much by natality as by mortality, is the topos in which the individual — situated precariously between the singular and the particular — comes to presence. The site of the individual’s appearance is the one toward which (pros hen) thinking and acting must always return if they are to temper their own hegemonic tendencies and cultivate an ability to respond in ways that do justice to the appearing of things. Schürmann’s intense focus on combating the tragic denial that annihilates the singular itself eclipses the perplexing appearance of the individual at play in the space between singularity and particularity. Here a comic denial can be heard in the way the preoccupation with the tragic reinforces a long history of philosophy’s obsession with death to the detriment of life.

Let us begin again, then, with Schürmann in order first to attend to the manner in which the logic of domination at work in his narrative of the origin of metaphysics suppresses the singular poetics of Aristotelian thinking. To hear the duplicity of that beginning is already to begin to feel the play of natality and mortality that operate together in each new beginning. This will allow us to hear more clearly how Schürmann’s analysis of natality in its relation to mortality in Broken Hegemonies opens the possibility of reading Aristotle’s thinking as something other than the origin of an errancy. In Broken Hegemonies, this other Aristotle is permitted to speak and it is Aristotle’s peculiar ways of speaking that allows the individual to appear between the silence of singularity and the violence of particularity. Aristotle’s own phenomenological orientation to the ways things are said
allows the things said to open a site in which the possibility of a certain justice emerges. ¹⁴

Metaphysics as Poetic Fantasm

Aristotle's *Physics* is said to be the foundational book of Western metaphysics because it transforms the inquiry into the first beginnings (*archai*) of nature into a search for causes. This shift covers over the original sense of nature as *phusis*, a noun that retains its intimate link to the verb (*phuein*), to come forth into appearance. The attempt to articulate the beginnings of the dynamic event that is nature's appearing is eclipsed by an obsession with locating those causes that stand at the beginning of a chain of responsibility capable of answering the metaphysical question *par excellence*, why?, or *dia ti*, through what? For Schürmann, the human fetish for fabrication perverts the inquiry into origins into a search for causes. He puts it this way: “[I]t is only because man first grasps himself as architect, as initiator of fabrication, that nature can in turn appear to him as moved by the mechanisms of cause and effect.” ¹⁵ Aristotle's *Physics* introduces the four causes in order to account not merely for the sort of change at work in human making, but, as Aristotle insists, for “every natural change.” ¹⁶ For Schürmann, the attempt to extend the model of production to all natural change can be heard in the very examples to which Aristotle appeals in establishing the


¹⁵ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 100. Schürmann explicitly references Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, section 551 for the notion that the concept of causality is anthropocentric, derived from our own ability to manipulate things.

¹⁶ Aristotle links the discussion of the causes (*aitiai*) to the why question and the why question to a certain *eidenai*, or knowledge at *Physics*, 11.3, 194b17–23. See Aristotle, *Aristotelis Physica* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992). There he insists that the search for causes must be about “both coming into being and passing away and about every natural change (*metabolē*)...”
material, formal, efficient, and final causes, most of which are taken from the sphere of human fabrication or action.\textsuperscript{17}

The shift that thinks nature in terms of human fabrication is decisive for Schürmann’s account of the origin of metaphysics, because it illustrates how the model of production gives rise to an obsession with causes that comes to color our understanding of action in general and political action in particular. The drive to lead all principles of being back to ultimate causes gives rise to the tendency to conceive action in terms of ultimate rules and laws and to reduce politics to obedience. Yet, to trace this trajectory in Aristotle from the \textit{Physics} to the \textit{Politics}, Schürmann leads us along a rather convoluted path too quickly. He appeals first to that provocative and enigmatic passage at the end of the \textit{Posterior Analytics}, in which Aristotle suggests that a principle arises from perception in a manner similar to the way “a reversal in battle is generated (\textit{genomenēs}) when one man makes a stand, then another, then another, until they attain a principle.”\textsuperscript{18} “Taking this passage out of the context in which it is found — namely, as part of an attempt to account for how the principles of demonstrations are acquired — Schürmann thematizes it as an illustration of “the constitution of a principle for action.”\textsuperscript{19} He goes on to insist:

The entire army does not stop because two or three master their fear but suddenly it obeys orders again and the activity of each become again the action of all. Aristotle views command (\textit{archē}) imposing its order on the runaways just as he views substance, as \textit{archē}, imposing its unity upon the accidents. Such is the filiation between ousiology and practical

\textsuperscript{17} Schürmann recognizes that the examples that illustrate the formal cause — the two-to-one ratio of the octave and number in general — are exceptions. See Schürmann, \textit{Heidegger on Being and Acting}, 329n32.


\textsuperscript{19} Schürmann, \textit{Heidegger on Being and Acting}, 39.
philosophy. Both observations are construed in relation “to
the one.”

Yet the text of the Posterior Analytics speaks of a reversal in bat-
tle “being generated” (genomenēs), a term that evokes not the
imposition of order by a principle external to the order, but the
coming-into-being of order from within. Morphologically, the
Greek verb gignesthai, is a middle deponent: having an active
voice only in the perfect tense. In it, therefore, the force of the
middle voice must be heard. Schürmann himself recognizes
the middle voice as undermining the hegemony of a dichoto-
mous thinking that posits a simple disjunction between agent
and patient. Yet Schürmann’s own reading of the turning in
battle stifles the dimension of the middle voice that resonates
in the deponent verb. The example of the reversal, whatever its
other limitations, does not suggest that the army turns because
it begins again to obey orders from outside and above. Rather,
an order comes into being from within the army itself, as one of
its organic parts turns, lending courage to others. To read this
text as an example of the imposition of a hegemonic principle
and to put it in the service of an account of how the principle of
action is constituted, performs a double — we might even say,
duplicitous — violence: it at once abstracts the example from the
context to which it belongs and imposes upon it a reading domi-

20 Ibid.
21 With gignesthai, the first, second, third and fifth principle parts are taken
from the middle voice, the perfect stem is an active form. The problem of
how to think generation is built into the morphology of this Greek verb.
The active and passive dimensions of the verb resonate in this middle depo-
ment. In English, as Smyth insists, the middle deponent is simply registered
in the active voice. See Herbert Weir Smyth, Greek Grammar (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1956), 107. Schürmann’s recognition that modern
languages, even when they render the middle in terms of reflexivity, stifle
middle voice is even more pronounced with the middle deponent, for the
active meaning mutes the middle voice yet further.
22 Schürmann writes: “Beneath the self-affirmation of the grammatical sub-
ject and the institution of a normative-nominative system, it is necessary to
see — or rather to hear — the very stifling of the middle voice.” See Schür-
mann, Broken Hegemonies, 38–39.
nated by the trope of imposition. The reading is, quite literally, a fabrication. It enframes the text, taking it as standing-reserve for a poetic fable about the beginning of metaphysics as dominated by an obsession with production.\textsuperscript{23}

The fable becomes fantasmic as the trope of imposition is imposed first upon the fundamental, ontological relation between substance (\textit{ousia}) and its accidents, and then extended yet further to practical philosophy in general by means of an interpretation of the \textit{pros hen} relation that is itself governed by an obsession with domination. If Schürmann deploys the term “hegemony” to name the attempt to posit a norm according to which a diversity of phenomena are set in order and, further, if this thetic maneuver becomes a “fantasm” the moment it is itself effaced so that the hegemonic ordering may be legitimized as the natural order of things, then perhaps Schürmann’s own reading of Aristotle, which posits production as the law according to which the Aristotelian corpus is set in order, can itself be said to be a hegemonic fantasm.\textsuperscript{24}

And yet, there is in this story of beginning, as with every poetic beginning, a certain instability that announces itself in the very moment of its institution. To discern this instability, it will be necessary to begin again with Aristotle, in order to

\textsuperscript{23} The vocabulary here, of course, is meant to call to mind Heidegger’s essay \textit{Die Frage nach der Technik}, and particularly the meaning of \textit{das Gestell} (enframing) and \textit{Bestand} (standing-reserve). For the German, see Martin Heidegger, \textit{Die Technik und Die Kehre} (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1991), 16–23. The English can be found in Martin Heidegger, \textit{The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays}, trans. William Levitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 17–23.

\textsuperscript{24} Schürmann introduces the notion of a fantasm early in \textit{Broken Hegemonies}: “Fantasms rule by authorizing not the deduction of a finite corpus of conclusions, but the indefinite association of representations that require that one follow them … . Hence, if laws are measured against the fantasmic authority, then this fantasmic authority will be normative in the sense that one refers to it as the law of laws.” See Schürmann, \textit{Broken Hegemonies}, 6. He goes on to develop the meaning of hegemony in relation to fantasm: “A fantasm is hegemonic when an entire culture relies on it as if it provided that in the name of which one speaks and acts” See ibid., 7. See also Lilly, “The Topology of \textit{Des Hégémonies brisées},” 236.
attempt yet another beginning with Schürmann. Aristotle’s thinking does not consolidate itself into a systematic totality of thought centered upon the single experience of fabrication. Although there remains in Aristotle a tendency to appeal to examples taken from “the region of manipulable things” for heuristic purposes, Aristotle’s thinking is peripatetic and phenomenological. He remains committed throughout to living in intimate association with the phenomena of nature and his thinking is for this reason, itinerant. It will be necessary then, to follow a path of Aristotelian thinking concerning the meaning of *ousia* in order to discern an itinerary guided more by a loyalty to the perplexing phenomenon that is *ousia* than by an attempt to impose upon it the structure of fabrication. Tracing this path of thinking will allow us to return to Schürmann’s story of the beginning of metaphysics in order to discern the extent to which another beginning is recognized but suppressed.

The Poetics of Aristotelian Thinking

Aristotle’s thinking is borne by a tension that gives it life; for it is a thinking conditioned by a profound sense of what Socrates in the *Philebus* calls the “entire tragedy and comedy of life.” In that text, the comic is associated with the exposure of pretense and, in particular, with the pretense of those who, unable to adhere to the Delphic admonition, “Know Thyself,” become ridiculous by professing a knowledge accessible only to the divine. The comic, then, like the tragic, is a way of responding

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26 *Philebus*, 50b2.

to the finitude that conditions life; but unlike the tragic, which involves always a denial of ultimate conditions, the comic is intent on exposing these conditions, celebrating them, despite themselves, as the very conditions under which the possibility of community unfolds.

The tension endemic to “the whole tragedy and comedy of life” at work in Aristotle’s thinking can be heard already in the way he articulates the situation that conditions philosophy as a search for truth:

The investigation concerning truth is in one sense difficult, in another sense easy. … So if it seems that we happen to be in the condition of the common saying, ‘who could miss the doorway?’, in this way it would be easy, but to have the whole in a certain way (to d’holon ti echein), and yet not to be capable of part of it, shows the difficulty of it. 28

The path of truth is an open door. To miss the doorway is to close oneself to the play of possibility that reveals the truth of things. And yet, this openness, this playful accessibility, suggests another dimension of the truth; for the door opens upon a certain limit. It offers access to the whole, but only in a certain way (ti), for we remain always incapable of part of it, never able to grasp the totality. Aristotle gestures to this incapacity with the little indefinite enclitic adjective, ti, perhaps the most important and indeed, playful, word of the Aristotelian corpus. It injects definitive statements with a dimension of uncertainty, a play of ambiguity, comic in its capacity to expose the pretense of au-

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Hyland also recognizes the exposure of pretense as one dimension of the comic, see Drew A. Hyland, _Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues_ (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 128–37. For an account of the “Know Thyself” admonition that problematizes the “humility” interpretation embraced here, arguing that, for Socrates at least, the precept enjoins us to constitute the self in such a way that it can be guided by knowledge toward the good, see Christopher Moore, _Socrates and Self-Knowledge_, 1st edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

28 _Meta_, II.1, 993a30–993b7.
authority. The indefinite adverb serves in Aristotle throughout as a reminder of the tragicomic incapacity to grasp the whole, even as it affirms the attempt to enter the threshold that opens onto the appearance of things.

Aristotle’s thinking lives largely along the limit of this threshold, advancing always into the possibility of that knowledge all humans desire, yet returning ever again to the doorway, the liminal site of the perplexing ambiguity of appearing. This dynamic of advance and return can be heard in Aristotle’s own articulation of the pros hen relation that orients his investigation into the meaning of being qua being. He begins at the threshold, advancing cautiously toward a principle capable of establishing a certain order without annihilating difference. He writes: “Being is said in many ways, but pointing toward one [pros hen] and some one nature [mian tina phusin] but not homonymously.”

The approach is phenomenological: he attempts to attend to the many ways being is said in order to discern a certain one, a common nature to which they themselves point. Here the many ways being is said is heard to articulate something of the truth of being as plurivocal. For Aristotle, language is not a violence that closes access to the singular, but a natural phenomenon that opens us to the truth of things.

The truth of pros hen reference is heard in the way things are said. For example, a diversity of things are called healthy in reference to some one thing, namely, the healthy condition of an organic being. Thus, medicine is related to a healthy condition by restoring it, exercise by producing and maintaining it, the body by being receptive to it, and a ruddy complexion by being a sign of it. The many ways being is said point similarly to one source (archê), namely, substance, or ousia:

For some things are called beings because they are ousiai, others because they are affections of ousia, some because they are ways into ousia, or deprivations or

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29 Meta., I.1, 980a21.
30 Meta., IV.2, 1003a33–34.
qualities or the production or generation of *OUSIA*, or they are things said in relation to *ousia* or negations of any of these, on account of which it is even possible to say that nonbeing is not being.\(^{31}\)

The assertive advance of *OUSIA* seems here unimpeded even by the strange appearance of nonbeing. This initial thrust appears to take on a comic hubris when it is heard along with that famous sentence at the beginning of the path of thinking that is the middle books of the *Metaphysics*: “And indeed, in earlier times and now and always the inquiry, indeed always the perplexity concerning what being is [*TI TO ON*] is just this: what is *OUSIA*?”\(^{32}\) This shift from the perplexity concerning being (*TO ON*) to the concrete question “what is *OUSIA*?,” when combined with the identification of *OUSIA* as the one nature toward which the investigation into being must be oriented, seems initially to reinforce Schürmann’s insistence that *OUSIA* names the one hegemonic principle that sets all things in order.\(^{33}\) However, to take this beginning of the inquiry into being as indicative of the overarching structure that reveals itself in the end is to fail to traverse the difficult path of thinking that leads to a dynamic apprehension of *OUSIA*, not as the product of manufacture, but as a living expression of living being. If Aristotle orients the investigation into being toward the one that is *OUSIA*, it will be necessary to hear the way in which this one is permitted to retain a certain singularity and is prevented from entering completely into the universal that would render it particular. Indeed, the introduction of *PROS HEN* reference was animated by Aristotle’s

\[^{31}\text{Meta.}, \text{IV.2, 1003b6–10.}\]
\[^{32}\text{Meta.}, \text{VII.1, 1028b1–3.}\]
\[^{33}\text{Schürmann puts it this way: “Substance is a principle of order: as the cause of accidents, it fulfills one and the same role in regard to them, that is, to maintain them in being; substance is furthermore part of their order since it functions as the first of the categories, and it transcends their order since they do not in turn cause it to be; it also orients and gives coherence to all predicaments; finally it founds an order that is not only logical but real, based on observation.” See Schürmann, \textit{Heidegger on Being and Acting}, 109.}\]
recognition that being is not a universal genus, and so, if there was to be a single science of being, another way of thinking about the unifying nature of things would have to be delineated. *Proš hen* equivocation was initially designed to suggest a way to think being without subsuming the many ways of being under a single hegemonic universal principle. It offers Aristotle a way of articulating the manner in which a diversity of phenomena enter into community with one another without sacrificing their unicity.

By orienting his investigation into being qua being toward the one nature that is *ousia*, Aristotle embarks upon a circuitous path of thinking that, however, complex, can be traced by attending briefly to two moments of turning in which the question, “what is *ousia*?” is itself transformed. The first moment of turning comes in chapter 17 of *Metaphysics* book vii, which Aristotle explicitly marks as an attempt to speak anew about *ousia* “as though making another beginning.” Here the original ontological question — “what is *ousia*?” — seems to have led to a series of impasses because it sought an answer in some concrete entity, rather than looking for that according to which each thing is one. Aristotle insists that *ousia* escapes notice “when the thing being sought is what is a human-being, because one states it simply and does not distinguish that these things are this thing *[hoti tade tode]*.” The new beginning Aristotle suggests involves, then, a shift in perspective that requires a transformation of the sort of question being asked. The what-question is no longer sufficient, instead, what must now be sought is “why the material is something.” Aristotle continues, appealing first to an example from the region of fabrication, moving then to a living example, “so, ‘why are these things *[tadi]* a house?’, because the what it is for the house to be inhere. And this here *[todi]*, or this

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34 Joseph Owens has articulated the impetus behind Aristotle’s introduction of the *pros hen* vocabulary along these lines. See Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, vol. 3 (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 269–75.

35 *Meta.*, VII.17 1041a6–7.

36 *Meta.*, VII.17, 1041a32–b2.
body [to sôma touto] holding itself this way, is a human-being. Thus, the cause of the matter is sought by which it is something, and this is the form [eidos]. But this is ousia.”37 This new beginning reveals the eidos as that which accounts for the matter’s being held in a certain way such that it becomes whatever it is. This leads Aristotle to distinguish the material dimension of the individual from its form, calling the former an element and the later an archê, or principle.38

This shift from the what-question to the why-question, with its appeal to the example of the house, seems to reinforce Schürmann’s insistence that Aristotle’s conception of ousia fetishizes fabrication, reducing the inquiry into being to a search for causes that ends in the positing of the form as the ultimate principle of order. However, even as Aristotle attempts here to speak ousia anew, a proliferation of demonstratives — tade, tode, touto — anticipates yet another beginning, one oriented by yet a third kind of question. The demonstratives themselves demonstrate the extent to which Aristotle’s thinking remains oriented to the being of concrete beings. The demonstratives literally point, again and again, to the site of ontological encounter that conditions the very appearing of ousia. Thus, the proliferation of demonstratives anticipates already the extent to which the causal account will need to give way to a more phenomenological orientation. Ousiology is not aetiology, but phenomenology.

The end of Metaphysics book viii prepares the way for yet another beginning. There Aristotle translates the distinction between form and matter into the more dynamic vocabulary of dunamis and energeia, potency and being-at-work. He suggests that those who seek a cause of being in some thing beyond the being in question are misguided: “But as was said, the ultimate matter and the shape [morphê] are the same and one, the former as in potency, the later as being-at-work, so that seeking the cause of their being is like seeking what the cause of one thing is; for each is a certain one [hen gar ti hekaston], and that

37 Meta., VII.17, 1041b4–9.
38 Meta., VII.17, 1041b16–33.
which is in potency and that which is in activity are somehow one [hen pōs estin]." The enclitic pronoun, ti — a “certain,” and the enclitic adverb, pōs — “somehow,” announce an indefiniteness at play in the being of the one. As potency and being-at-work, matter and form are each a certain one, nevertheless, they are together somehow one. An ambiguity of unicity emerges here that destabilizes ousia, forcing Aristotle to consider the perplexing question: how are these two one? The what-question gives way to the why-question, which now turns out to be the phenomenological question as to how ousia shows itself as one.

Aristotle pursues a response to this question in terms of dunamis and energeia, suggesting ultimately that these terms cannot be understood on the model of a conception of motion (kinēsis) bound up with the paradigm of production. In Metaphysics book IX, Aristotle delineates the difference between motions, like house building, that have their ends outside of themselves, and actions (praxeis), like living, that have their ends in themselves in order to suggest that the being of ousia is itself a praxis with its end in itself. As such a praxis, ousia names a dynamic activity in which the being-at-work of a being does not relinquish its own potency-for-being. Such beings embody the living activity of possibility which Aristotle names tode ti, “this something,” or “a certain this.” Here the demonstrative tode, articulates the irreducible singularity of that which presents itself, while the indefinite ti, shatters the hermetic isolation of the singular, calling it into community with others. The tode ti expresses the individual as such. No longer singular, but not yet particular, the individual gives itself to articulation even as it retains something of an irreducible unicity.

Schürmann’s account of hegemonic principles and the beginnings of metaphysics covers over the precariously situated individual that is the tode ti. The individual is eclipsed by the division of phenomena into irreducible singulars destined to be violated by the “brutal syntax” of a language that forces concepts

39 Meta., VIII.6, 1045b17–21.
40 Meta., IX.6, 1048b18–35.
upon them, and mere particulars, thoroughly dominated by the universals that rule over them. Yet, the dynamic poetics of Aristotle’s thinking lingers on the site of the playful appearance of the individual, the beginner who lives as conditioned by its end. His thinking is able “to linger on the site in which we live” precisely because it refuses to deny the tragic limits that press in upon it, even as it attempts to articulate the truth that emerges there. It is no surprise, then, to find Schürmann encountering the poetics of Aristotelian thinking as he develops the distinction between natality and mortality in the initial stages of Broken Hegemonies.

The Play of Natality and Mortality:
The Appearing of the Individual

Let us begin again, then, by returning to the moment at which Schürmann articulates the ontological traits of natality and mortality. This distinction was said to remain caught in a metaphysical logic of dichotomy that prevents Schürmann from discerning the precariously situated individual who appears somehow between the anarchic singular and the subsumed particular. The metaphysical undertones of this dichotomy can be felt in the way it repeats the long tradition of privileging mortality, death and the tragic over natality, life and the comic. Yet in the same breath as Schürmann posits this dichotomy, he is careful to describe his project as testing the suspicion “that death joins life without, however, forming a tandem with it, that it does not reflect life symmetrically nor oppose it with a determinate negation.” Natality and mortality must be permitted to enter into an inherently unstable community, without the one being permitted to dominate the other and yet, without the two consolidating themselves into a stabilized whole. The moment Schürmann’s thinking feels the pull of metaphysical theticism,

41 Schürmann, Broken Hegemonies, 19–20.
42 Cf. ibid., 3.
43 Ibid., 23.
the powerful subsumptive force of the one, it responds with a “dispersive counter-strategy”\footnote{Ibid.} that intentionally posits difference in an attempt to undermine the hegemonic authority of the principle of unity itself. Schürmann’s is a thinking soberly bound to a ravaged site. “What if,” writes Schürmann, “the common and the singular both bind us—then is it not rather that we inhabit a ravaged site?”\footnote{Ibid., 16.}

Yet, to inhabit a ravaged site is to feel the tragic weight of singularity \textit{along with} the comic desire for community. To be assiduously bound to such a site is to be ravaged \textit{and} enrapt. It is to refuse to sacrifice the play of the comic upon the alter of the tragic; it is to hear in the call to community not only the annihilation of singularity, but also the allure of possibility, not merely the hegemonic operation of dominating principles, but also the injunction to inhabit a site, ravaged and enrapt, that opens a “network of potentials” within which justice first becomes possible.\footnote{Schürmann himself develops an understanding of responsibility along these lines at the end of the Heidegger book, using in that context the formulation “network of potentials.” See Schürmann, \textit{Heidegger on Being and Acting}, 263.}

The very attempt to articulate the meaning of natality in its relation to mortality implicitly drives Schürmann back to the beginning of metaphysics to expose its duplicity. Turning again then to Aristotle, Schürmann hears more acutely the power of those little, playful words Aristotle deploys as signifiers of his own profound appreciation the ravaged site of enrapture that conditions his thinking. In referring again to the \textit{pros hen} relation, Schürmann points to a passage in which the indefinite pronoun, \textit{ti}, appears modifying the \textit{pros hen} formulation itself, rendering it ambiguous, as if to undermine its capacity to consolidate at the very moment of its articulation.\footnote{This passage reads: “For each being there is a leading-back toward a certain one (\textit{pros hen ti}) and common thing…” and is found at \textit{Meta.} XI.3, 1061a10–11. See also \textit{Meta.} IV.2, 1003a33–34.} Emphasizing
the significance of the indefinite, Schürmann says “the \( ti \) serves to muddle the concept, making it into an indirect description.”\(^8\)

It seems, then, that language is capable not only of a violence that annihilates the singular, but also of a poetic response that does some justice to that remainder which does not enter completely into the concept, yet is nevertheless accessible to a poetic saying riveted to the ravaged site of rapture.

Thus, as always, there is more to that little word, \( ti \), than it appears. For it marks the trace of an individuality Schürmann does not think even if his thinking opens the enigmatic space of its appearing. The \( tode \ ti \) is a poetic articulation of the individual as ravaged and enrapt. It is ravaged because bound on one side by the singularity it must relinquish to enter into community and on the other by the particularity that seeks to consume it. Yet, it is enrapt because exposed to a double bind that frees it for the possibility of connection within a rich and teeming “network of potentials.” If, however, community is not to devolve ever and again into the politics of domination, the capacity to think, act, and live as conditioned by natality and mortality at once will need to be cultivated by habits of thinking and acting, indeed, by habits of speaking attuned to the poetic duplicity of beginnings. With the \( tode \ ti \) the political significance of the \( pros \) \( hen \) relation is transformed, for a thinking and acting directed toward such an insistently ambiguous one would need to operate with a heightened awareness of its own hegemonic tendencies; it would need to learn a certain poetics: the ability to respond to the duplicitous appearing of things in ways that do justice to duplicity and open new possibilities for community.

To begin to learn the habits of thinking and acting endemic to such a poetic politics, deeper and richer practices of beginning are needed. To that end, as morning gives way to afternoon, let us take up the question of incipience “as if making

\(^{48}\) Schürmann, Broken Hegemonies, 20. Schürmann goes on to suggest the Aristotle speaks often of \textit{phusis tis}, which he translates as “something like a rising” in order to emphasize the extent to which Aristotle himself remains distant from that understanding of nature that serves as a supreme referent.
another beginning,” and attend here to the final line from René Char’s poem, the *Shark and the Gull*, a poem Schürmann himself translated into English:

Make every supposed end be a new innocence, a feverish advance for those who stumble in the morning heaviness.⁵⁰

As the heaviness of morning “mounts into the eyes to crown the noon,”⁵¹ we begin again with Schürmann as he takes up a reading of Char’s poem that leads us, oddly enough, to the heart of the work of Plotinus. Here we begin to discern a way to think natality and mortality together as we attempt to settle into the ravaged site of rapture where poetic politics first becomes possible.

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⁵¹ Ibid.
"In May 1946 I sent the manuscript of the poem 'The Shark and the Gull' to Henri Matisse at Vence. During the visit that I had paid to the great painter we had not spoken of any poem in particular. I had convinced myself that Matisse was well and that his treasures continued being executed with the same sumptuous regularity as usual. Back at l'Isle-sur-Sorgue I sent him the manuscript of my poem (I love Matisse and his discrete goodness: this poem to thank him for a precise act). He answered me that in a recent series of drawings he had discovered the same theme. Here is one of these drawings."

René Char"
Le requin et la mouette

Je vois enfin la mer dans sa triple harmonie, la mer qui tranche de son croissant la dynastie des douleurs absurdes, la grande volière sauvage, la mer crédule comme un liseron.

Quand je dis: j’ai levé la loi, j’ai franchi la morale, j’ai maillé le coeur, ce n’est pas pour me donner raison devant ce pèse-néant dont la rumeur étend sa palme au delà de ma persuasion. Mais rien de ce qui m’a vu vivre et agir jusqu’ici n’est témoin alentour. Mon épaule peut bien sommeiller, ma jeunesse accourir. C’est de cela seul qu’il faut tirer richesse immédiate et opérante. Ainsi, il y a un jour de pur dans l’année, un jour qui creuse sa galerie merveilleuse dans l’écume de la mer, un jour qui monte aux yeux pour couronner midi. Hier la noblesse était déserte, le rameau était distant de ses bourgeons. Le requin et la mouette ne communiquaient pas.

O Vous, arc-en-ciel de ce rivage polisseur, approchez le navire de son espérance. Faites que toute fin supposée soit une neuve innocence, un fiévreux en avant pour ceux qui trebuchent dans la matinale lourdeur.52

The Shark and the Gull

At last I see the triple harmony of the sea, whose crescent cuts the dynasty of absurd sufferings, the great wild aviary, the sea, credulous as a bindweed.

When I say: *I overcame the law, I transgressed morality, I unfurled the heart*, it is not to justify myself before this weigher of nothingness whose murmur extends its victory palm beyond my persuasion. But nothing that has seen me live and act hitherto is witness here. My shoulder may well sleep, my youth come running. From these alone immediate and operative riches must be drawn. Thus there is one day of purity in the year, a day that hollows its marvelous gallery into the sea-foam, a day that mounts into the eyes to crown the noon. Yesterday nobility was desert, the branch was distant from its swelling buds. The shark and the gull did not communicate.

Oh You, rainbow of this polishing shore, bring the ship closer to its hope. Make every supposed end be a new innocence, a feverish advance for those who stumble in the morning heaviness.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. Translation by Schürmann.