ARISTOTLE ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL NATURE OF POETRY. THE OBJECT OF *MIMESIS* ACCORDING TO *POET.* 9

Ch. 9 of Aristotle's *Poetics* has been the subject of many scholarly discussions[1] which have explored the epistemological status of poetry and historiography in Aristotle. In his remarks on the philosophical character of poetry in *Poet.* ch. 9, Aristotle does not mention Plato, nor does he do that anywhere in this work although Plato had at more than one occasion in his dialogues touched upon the role of poetry, its impact on the various capacities of the soul, in particular of the youth, and the effect of performances of poetic works on the citizens of the polis. On the other hand, Aristotle cited outside of the *Poetics* Plato's judgment on Homer (see below p. 245) and proved that way that he was very aware of Plato's views on poetry. In my reading, Aristotle's comments on the philosophical character of poetry are an alternative concept, a counter-concept to Plato's distinct views on *mimesis* and on tragedy in particular. The issue of the philosophical character of poetry in its relationship to historiography in Aristotle's *Poetics* cannot be fully appreciated without using Plato as a foil, and I will start this paper by addressing first issues on which these two philosophers differ in their attitude to poetry as far as it is relevant for our topic. I will then discuss problems in the understanding of Aristotle *Poet.* ch. 9 in particular regarding historiography, and finally turn to the explanation of Aristotle's effort of elevating poetry to the level of being of philosophical nature.

1. The dispute over Homer

In *Poet.* 25 Aristotle offers "solutions" to objections that have been raised about poetry. He rejects the demand of true presentation and a criticism of poetry which is based on the observation that things represented in

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[1] Lengthy lists of relevant publications are found in Carli 2010 and 2011. I am commenting on Carli's former paper below p. 270 in the Appendix.

poetry are *not true*.² Aristotle's response uses a saying of Sophocles who claimed to present people as they must be while Euripides described them as they are (25. 1460 b 33). Sophocles did not start this form of presenting better men, he is preceded by Homer who is the first poet mentioned in *Poetics* who presented men "as better" (2. 1448 a 11), a manner of *mimesis* in which Sophocles will follow him (a 26) since both poets present men who are good (σπουδαῖοι); in this genre, however, Homer is poet to the highest degree (4. 1448 b 34).

This and other Aristotelian remarks ("divine")³ contrast with the judgment on Homer by Plato as the introduction of his treatment of this epic poet in *Rep.* 10. 595 b 9 shows. While Socrates refers first to his long friendship which prevents him from speaking freely, he goes on to say that he values truth higher and explicitly considers any bonds of friendship and respect for the man Homer less relevant than truth:

> One needs to speak, I said, although *friendship* and respect I have from youth on for Homer hinders me from speaking … however, *the man does not deserve to be honored more than truth* …⁴

This is very different from what Aristotle thought *about Homer* in the *Poetics*. However at *Nic. Eth.* 1. 4 Aristotle obviously quoted from *Rep.* 10 Plato's remarks on Homer:

> It is perhaps better to look closely and review in which way one speaks of the universal although such an investigation is difficult since men who are *friends* introduces the forms. It seems, therefore, to be better and necessary to *tear down bonds of friendship for the sake of saving the truth*, in particular as philosophers. When two things (the person and truth) are *close* (φίλοιν) it is our responsibility *to honor the truth more*.⁵

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² "True" (ἀληθινός) in the meaning of "like in real life": *Pol.* 3. 11. 1281 b 12, in painting.

³ 1459 a 30 f.: "For that reason as well, as we said, Homer appears divine compared with the other (poets) …"; "all these devices (like *peripeteia*, recognition) Homer used first and well … In addition to this he surpassed all other works in diction and expression of thought", 24. 1459 b 12–16; "in many other aspects Homer deserves to be praised", 1460 a 5.

⁴ Plat. *Rep.* 10. 595 b 9 Ῥητέον, ἦν δ᾽ ἐγώ· καίτοι φιλία γέ τίς με καὶ αἰδὼς ἐκ παιδὸς ἔχουσα περὶ Ὁμήρου ἀποκωλύει λέγειν ... ἀλλ᾽ οὐ γὰρ πρό γε τῆς ἀληθείας τιμητέος ἀνήρ.

⁵ Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 1. 4 1096 a 11 Τὸ δὲ καθόλου βέλτιον ἴσως ἐπισκέψασθαι καὶ διαπορῆσαι πῶς λέγεται, καίπερ προσάντους τῆς τοιαύτης ζητήσεως γινομένης διὰ τὸ φίλους ἄνδρας εἰσαγαγεῖν τὰ εἴδη. δόξειε δ᾽ ἂν ἴσως βέλτιον εἶναι καὶ δεῖν ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ γε τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα ἀναιρεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ φιλοσόφους ὄντας· ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντοιν φίλοιν ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

Obviously, Aristotle did not make here a statement about poetry in general or that of Homer in particular but *about Plato's philosophy*, more accurately about his Theory of Forms which Aristotle rips apart bit by bit.[6] The personal decision of the critic to distance himself from a close friend who was in the case of Plato the long-dead poet Homer becomes now that same decision of the student Aristotle distancing himself as philosopher from his teacher Plato, the philosopher, with the additional slight that Plato's whipping boy Homer is reinstated as a divine poet by Aristotle in the *Poet.* (23. 1459 a 30 f.) whereas he assigns in *Nic. Eth.* to the critic of Homer, Plato, the undesirable place of being at the receiving end of a criticism he himself had expressed in very much the same words against a poet – and Aristotle does this in a more severe manner since the personal bonds of friendship must be destroyed (δεῖ ἀναιρεῖν).

Plato reveals in *Rep.* 10 what the truth is about Homer who is no longer his friend. Two different issues are raised. First, Plato identifies the emotional power of Homer's poetry as a paradoxical reaction in the audience: men who listen with *grief* to heartbreaking stories *enjoy* this *pain* at the same time (10. 605 c 10 ff.). Plato argues that this experience feeds and strengthens the tendency to pity with the result that in one's own suffering one cannot easily hold it down (κατέχειν) and one indulges in self-pity.[7]

Aristotle at *Poet.* ch. 14 shares the view of the paradoxical nature and experience of pleasure when listening to heartbreaking stories.[8] However, instead of seeing as its result that the tendency to pity is strengthened and a permanent weakness of the soul to withstand pity is created Aristotle demands (δεῖ) that the poet has to produce the *pleasure derived from pity* (1453 b 12) and establishes the pleasurable removal (κάθαρσις) of these emotions as the goal of tragedy. The pleasure the audience of the tragic performance realizes is that of κάθαρσις (*Pol.* 8. 7. 1341 b 36–40; 1342 a 7–15), a concept which might well use a sexual analogy, however, there is nothing ethical in this process.[9]

Plato's second strategy in *Rep.* 10 of rejecting poetry, after condemning its emotional harm, is to assign it to the lowest ontological level

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[6] Flashar 1977, 1–16.

[7] *Rep.* 10. 606 a 7 – b 8. The idea of feeding and strengthening a part of the soul that should be controlled echoes the previous description in books 8–9 of the gradual degeneration of the soul by which, step by step always another higher part is subjected by a lower one: 553 d; 560 b 7.

[8] Arist. *Poet.* 13. 1453 b 12 "since the poet has to arouse through *mimesis* the pleasure that results from pity and fear…", cf. 1453 a 35 f. "the pleasure that belongs to tragedy".

[9] See Schütrumpf 2005, 667 f., n. on *Pol.* 8. 7. 1342 a 14.

(596 e 6 ff.). Here he distinguishes three levels, illustrated by the analogy with three kinds of beds, one created by god, another by a carpenter, and one by a painter which looks only (φαινομένην) like a bed. The painter does not produce one but only imitates it; his is a creation three steps removed from the nature of the very thing. And then in an application of this analogy to poetry, Plato argues that the tragic poet is accordingly three steps removed from truth – the result reached for the painter of a bed, namely that it appears only to be a bed, is valid for all forms of *mimesis* as well, including poetry. We have here the traditional contrast of truth and appearance (598 b), the latter being represented by imitation.

Plato continues this line of argument by approaching the same subject from the perspective of knowledge (598 c). In a lengthy diatribe Homer is singled out as someone who does not know anything about the things he writes. He is unable to promote virtue since he grasps only its images (εἴδωλα), but not its truth (600 e). "The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only" (601 b 9).

The title of my paper is: "Aristotle on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry". In Aristotle's *Poetics* we will not face a revival of the Platonic view[10] that denies to *mimesis* knowledge or philosophical quality, just the opposite. The re-evaluation of *mimesis* becomes evident in Aristotle's attitude to Homer. In ch. 8 Aristotle analyses Homer's arrangement of the events in the *Odyssey* in terms of his own philosophy, that is in ascending order of the strictness of the connection of individual events, starting with accidental (συνέβη) on the low end, over likely (εἰκός), and ending with necessary (ἀναγκαῖον)[11] as the other extreme. Homer's accomplishment in this case consisted in a judicious act of selecting out of "all things that happened to him (Odysseus)" those events which followed by necessity or likelihood from one another so that he created a "single action" (μία πρᾶξις).[12] Aristotle does not claim to offer new insights into the nature of

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[10] A. Schmitt does not make this distinction when he speaks throughout his paper of a "Platonisch-Aristotelischen Nachahmungskonzept": Schmitt 1998, 27, cf. 39 n. 48.

[11] 1451 a 22–28 "when composing the *Odyssey* he included in his poem not all things that had happened (συνέβη) to him such as being wounded on the Parnassus and pretending madness in the assembly – after one of those things had happened it was neither necessary nor likely that the other event took place – but he composed the *Odyssey* around one single action as we take it and in the same way the *Iliad* …" Cf. *Met.* Δ 30. 1025 a 14 f. where συμβεβηκός is contrasted with both "by necessity" and "for the most part" – at *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357 a 34–37 "what is likely" is defined as "what happens most of the time".

[12] Von Fritz 1956, 120 f., speaks rightly of "konzentrierter Darstellung", "Konzentration".

mimesis but only identifies in terms of his own philosophical concepts the principles Homer had followed.

In a later chapter *Poet*. 23. 1459 a 17 ff. Aristotle contrasts the structure of the epic plot created by a poet that has as its subject a single and complete *action* (as Homer had organized his two epics) with works of history. A historical account has as its subject matter events that affected one or more persons during a single time span or events that followed one another; however, none of these events needs to be related with the other and needs to contribute to realizing one end but occurred as they happened by chance.

2. Historiography and poetry

Earlier, in *Poet*. ch. 9, Aristotle hade made theoretical statements about the philosophical rank of poetry and historiography. Exactly like Plato in *Rep*. 10 had compared poetry and *mimesis* with other disciplines, so does Aristotle at *Poet*. ch. 9 use a professional activity as analogy, however, his choice of historiography for a comparison with poetry has the advantage over Plato's use of crafts that historiography describes *people* who *act* (9. 1451 b 11, cf. below p. 265 f. with n. 75) – as poetry does (6. 1449 b 22; b 36) – and not who *produce objects* like beds[13] as in Plato.

At *Poet*. 9. 1451 a 35 – b 12 Aristotle writes:

> What we have said before makes it clear that a poet's task is not to tell the events that have happened but in a way as they might well happen and those that have the potential (to happen) according to likelihood or necessity. The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse – indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would be no less a kind of history, whether

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[13] Schmitt 1998 starts his paper by referring to the view found in contemporary philosophy and early Renaissance commentaries that the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis* in his *Poetics* is based on the tenet that art imitates nature. While Schmitt proves the flaws of this view he does not free himself completely from it but retains nature, "Natur" (26). However, Aristotle never refers in *Poetics* to nature as object of imitation, "Nachahmung". The alternative Aristotelian principle that art improves where nature is deficient (Schütrumpf 2005, 556 n. on *Pol*. 7. 17. 1337 a 1) would fit the option of presenting men who are better, and Aristotle uses τέχνη in exactly this context at *Pol*. 3. 11. 1281 b 10–13. However, he avoided to refer in *Poetics* to this or any other philosophical content of τέχνη. One reason for this fact might be the difficulties he would have faced: it is the task of poets of comedy to present men who are worse than us, and here the principle that art improves where nature is deficient fails. Nature is a most problematic concept for the explanation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

written in meter or not. The real difference is this, that one tells events that have happened and the other as they might happen. For this reason poetry is of a more philosophical and more serious nature[14] than history is. For poetry describes more events that are universal whereas history describes[15] the particular events. 'Universal' is what sorts of things a person of a certain character suits[16] to say or do according to likelihood or necessity; and it is this (universality) at which poetry aims by attaching names (to the characters). The 'particular' is what Alcibiades did or suffered.[17]

Aristotle approaches the subject of *Poet.* ch. 9 from the perspective of the authors of works of literature – which is in line with the many references in this work to Homer or tragedians. More narrowly, at *Poet.* 9 Aristotle picks up the subject first addressed in ch. 1, namely to clarify what an author has to accomplish in order to deserve to be called "poet".[18] In ch. 9 he rejects as task of a poet to "say" or "tell"[19] – we would use the expression "to

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[14] In my rendering I add "of nature" in order to express the neuters of φιλοσο-φώτερον and σπουδαιότερον, cf. Kühner, Gerth 1898, 58 f. on the generalizing function of a neuter after a masculine or feminine noun, cf. Plat. *Hp. ma.* 287 e 4 παρθένος καλὴ καλόν. That Aristotle used a more generalizing expression is commonly ignored, e.g. by v. Fritz 1956, 116; 122; Schmitt 2008, 14; Carli 2010, 314 f. "poetry is more philosophical and more serious"; Carli 2011, 321; 323; 333.

[15] Here some interpreters add from the characterization of poetry "mehr" (v. Fritz 1956, 116: "die Geschichte dagegen (sei) μᾶλλον καθ᾽ ἕκαστον, wobei gar kein Zweifel daran bestehen kann, dass dem Zusammenhang nach das μᾶλλον ebenso zu καθ᾽ ἕκαστον wie zu καθόλου gehört", cf. 117; 122; 127: "das καθόλου, das auch in der Geschichtsdarstellung zu finden sein muss" (for other scholars following v. Fritz cf. Zoepffel 1975, 7 with nn. 6 and 7); Schwinge 1996, 15 f.; "eher" Schmitt 1998, 38; id. 2008, 388: "(mehr) einzeln"; Carli 2010, 315; Carli 2011, passim, in particular 335.

[16] See Schütrumpf 1980, 327–341, "Exkurs II: Teleologie in der Geschichte" (against Day, Chambers 1962).

[17] *Poet.* 9. 1451 a 36 – b 12 Φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ᾽ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικὸς καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἄμετρα διαφέρουσιν (εἴη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι καὶ οὐδὲν ἧττον ἂν εἴη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων)· ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ᾽ ἱστορία τὰ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον λέγει. ἔστιν δὲ καθόλου μέν, τῷ ποίῳ τὰ ποῖα ἄττα συμβαίνει λέγειν ἢ πράττειν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, οὗ στοχάζεται ἡ ποίησις ὀνόματα ἐπιτιθεμένη· τὸ δὲ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον, τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν. The translation in the text used that by W. H. Fyfe, Cambridge 1932, but was considerably changed.

[18] 1447 b 13–20 repeated at 9. 1451 b 28, cf. the whole passage b 27–32 with 1. 1447 b 22 f.; 4. 1448 b 34, see above p. 245.

[19] 9. 1451 a 37; b 1; b 4; b 7.

write" – the events that have happened since his task is rather to tell events "of the sort as they might well happen and those that have the potential (to happen) according to likelihood or necessity". He eliminates the use of meter as a criterion to distinguish between the historian (ἱστορικός) and poet (ποιητής); the work of Herodotus must be considered history (ἱστορία). Only now do we learn that the option rejected before "to tell the events that have happened" is the task of the ἱστορικός whereas Aristotle repeats the former statement that to tell events "of the sort as they might happen" is the task of the poet. He proceeds now to a conclusion which for the first time contains a value judgment: "For this reason ποίησις is of a more philosophical and more serious nature than ἱστορία is".

The category of writing in whose explanation Aristotle is interested in this chapter is poetry (ποίησις). From its morphological origin, namely the suffix -σις, ποίησις is a *nomen actionis*,[20] indicating an action that takes place. Since the work in which Aristotle discusses this issue is the Τέχνη ποιητική, the use of ποίησις could be illustrated from *Met.* Z 7. 1032 a 27: "all acts of producing (ποιήσεις) come about either from τέχνη or capability or thought …" – for poetry the first and, as we will see below (p. 262), the second source are effective. When Aristotle remarks at *Poet.* 9 that ποίησις "attaches names"[21] he cannot refer to a completed work of poetry – in this case he would have said "it possesses names" – but must refer to the creative act of composing poetry of which one element is to attach names. Aristotle considers this *activity* more serious and philosophical – with this statement he does not talk about the readers for whom reading poetry is a more serious pastime than reading works of historians but about the poets' creative act.[22] Such value judgments on activities are very Aristotelian.[23]

Ἱστορία which is contrasted here with ποίησις can, therefore, not be "history" as a period of the past in the sense of "history teaches us",[24] let alone the academic discipline "historical studies", but is the act of

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[20] Schwyzer 1959, I, 505 f.; 522.

[21] 1451 b 10, cf. 1451 b 13 on *poets* of comedies.

[22] Gudeman 1934, 206. Cf. the judgments on poets of different genres at 4. 1448 b 24 ff.; 1449 a 3.

[23] Cf. *Nic. Eth.* 10. 7. 1177 b 1 ff. on the higher value and satisfaction of a philosophical life; *Pol.* 1. 7. 1255 b 33; 7. 13. 1325 a 25 about the low rank of a master's understanding of how to use slaves.

[24] For this idea he uses "the long period of time and the many years" (τῷ πολλῷ χρόνῳ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν), *Pol.* 2. 5. 1264 a 2. "Historical events" are πράγματα προγενόμενα, *Rhet.* 2. 20. 1393 a 29; in the phrase αἱ τῶν περὶ τὰς πράξεις γραφόντων ἱστορίαι (*ibid.* 1. 4. 1360 a 36), ἱστορίαι does not refer to "history" but τὰς πράξεις does, cf. Kennedy 1991, 55: "the research of those writing about history".

collecting the relevant material – this is not mentioned by Aristotle who does not seem to have appreciated the toils of such an effort of which Thucydides was aware (1. 22. 3) – and of composing a factual account.[25]

While ποίησις is clearly used in *Poet.* 9 as *nomen actionis*, the distinction of this meaning from that as *nomen rei actae*[26] is not clear-cut since the work an author composes in accordance with the principles of his genre will eventually be completed and contain the respective content and goals he followed. In fact ποίησις can be used in *Poet.* as *nomen rei actae*,[27] and it is only a small, and legitimate, step to consider Aristotle's concepts about the *production* of a poem, or about an historical account, as valid for the *works* of poetry, or historiography, in which these principles are materialized. An additional step would be to use the term poetry in the widest sense for any work that meets the requirements by virtue of which an author is a poet (see above p. 249 f.), and Aristotelian ποίησις can be understood in this general meaning. Ἱστορία, however, is writing on events of the past or present times, historiography,[28] or as *nomen rei actae* a work of historiography.[29] However, the translation "history" should be avoided because of the ambiguity of this term.

Poetry does not describe in an unqualified way what is universal but does so to a higher degree, "rather", "more" (μᾶλλον). This qualification "rather", "more" I understand in absolute terms[30] as being "rather close" to the presentation of the universal,[31] and not as referring to the preceding comparison with historiography – in that case, if poetry contains more of the universal than historiography, Aristotle could concede that in historiography universals are included to some extent[32] and that historiography would not be limited to the role of describing particulars pure and simple but

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[25] Finding here a concept of "history" would ignore "the necessary distinction between the activity of the human mind and the object at which this activity is directed, 'history'", Zoepffel 1975, 8, cf. 12.

[26] Schwyzer 1959, 422. Generally they are based on *nomina actionis*.

[27] *Poet.* 1. 1447 a 10; 22. 1458 a 20; 23. 1459 a 37; *Pol.* 5. 7. 1306 b 39, see Bonitz 1870, 609 b 32 s.v. ποίησις "carmen".

[28] Zoepffel 1975, 12 "Geschichtsschreibung".

[29] Cf. the plural at *Poet.* 23. 1459 a 21.

[30] Bonitz, 1870, 445 a 9–11 s.v. μᾶλλον "i. q. potius", cites *Poet.* 13. 1453 a 36; *Pol.* 8. 6. 1341 a 22. Cf. Schwyzer 1959, I, 184: θᾶσσον "recht schnell", cf. *ibid.*, n. 4.

[31] This seems to be the understanding of Butcher 1911, 35 as well who translates: "poetry tends to express the universal", and Rostagni 1945, 52: "Il μᾶλλον indica che cosi è in generale *tendenzialmente;* "cf. Schwinge 1996, 118.

[32] "…und damit ein bißchen Allgemeinheit auch für die Historia zu retten versuchen", Zoepffel 1975, 15; Schmitt 2008, 388, argues that historiography contains particular and universal "in an undetermined mixture" ("in unbestimmter Mischung").

could do that to a higher degree than poetry while it shares at the same time with poetry the description of universals.[33] This reading extends the argument used to make the distinction between philosophy and poetry in terms of difference in degree (of containing universals) to the other distinction, that between poetry and historiography, where completely different conditions are valid. This application of Aristotle's argumentative strategy of describing the distinction between poetry and philosophy in terms of degree (μᾶλλον) to the distinction between historiography and poetry blurs the lines because it makes poetry include the description of particulars and historiography that of universals so that one can consider the question of what the correct relationship between universal and particular in historiography is.[34]

Such an implication is made explicit when some scholars[35] suggest that the qualification "more" (μᾶλλον) must be understood in the second part of the contrast ("historiography narrates the particulars") as well. This addition would soften the limitation of the task of historiography: instead of being an account of particulars it would grant historiography to be philosophical, although to a lesser degree. My reading that poetry describes universals "to a higher degree" in the described way would eliminate historiography as the contrast implied in this clause but would refer instead to philosophy as the standard, and this is supported by the following remark that "poetry *aims at*" (στοχάζεται) the presentation of what is universal, and philosophy is the science of being in so far as it is universal.[36] By contrast, in the second part of the distinction where the 'particular' is defined as "what Alcibiades did or suffered" (which picks up from a 5: the poet does not "tell events that have happened") anything comparable to "aiming at" as in the case of poetry is missing. The parallelism of the contrast is incomplete[37] since Aristotle does not add here in which way historiography deals with particulars as he had done in the case of poetry – does historiography deal with particulars "more" or "exclusively"? –, and this omission is the reason for the controversy over the rank of historiography.

Obviously without noticing, interpreters have given to the modifier "more" (μᾶλλον) in the clause "poetry narrates more things that are

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[33] Von Fritz 1956, 122, who expresses the view that what happens in reality contains a καθόλου, obviously referring to 1451 b 30–32. However, this is not the nature of historical reality but an exception, see Zoepffel 1975, 16 n. 48.

[34] Von Fritz 1956, 122.

[35] S. above n. 15.

[36] *Met.* K 3. 1060 b 31.

[37] Contra Carli 2011, 334.

universal" a double function, on the one hand in the sense of comparing the degree of universal which *poetry* and *historiography* respectively contain (*poetry* to a higher degree than historiography), and on the other hand with the function of comparing the degree to which *poetry* or *philosophy* respectively deal with universals (*poetry* to a lesser degree than *philosophy*).[38] However, "more" can have only one *comparandum*, and if the *comparandum* is historiography Aristotle would not indicate whether poetry differs from philosophy in the statement of universals – and if they differ, to which degree they do. This clarification, however, seems needed. The clause "poetry narrates rather the things that are universal" justifies first why poetry deserves to be grouped together with philosophy – against the background of the Platonic position e.g. in *Rep.* 10 this is a provocative statement (see below p. 264–266) – and indicates second that a difference in the degree of containing universal exists nevertheless between poetry and philosophy.

The structure of the argument starting with 1451 b 7 "historiography … tells events that have happened" and ending a 10 "historiography narrates the particulars" is that of ring composition. Within these two statements on historiography clarifications on poetry are inserted:

> the *poet* tells events of the sort as they might happen. For this reason *composing poetry* is of a more philosophical and more serious nature than historiography is. For *poetry* narrates rather things that are universal.

In all three sentences the poet or poetry respectively are the grammatical subject, and the issue is the rank of poetry, and both descriptions of its content: "the poet narrates what might happen" and "poetry narrates more things that are universal" serve first of all this purpose to justify grouping poetry with philosophy. Once this result has been established, the consequences for the comparison with historiography are evident since now its content is determined: "historiography narrates the particulars". The statement "poetry narrates rather the things that are universal", when understood as determining the relationship of poetry towards philosophy adds a new idea and has a deeper meaning than if understood as repeating its superiority over historiography, something that has been said and is by comparison rather trivial.

There is one more problem with raising the status of historiography: Aristotle is careful to phrase this discussion in the first part of *Poet.* ch. 9 completely in terms of what poets or historians "say", but he avoids

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[38] Thus explicitly Schwinge 1996, 116.

the term *mimesis* which is the focus of the whole treatise (last mentioned
8. 1451 b 30 f.). *Historia* is not included under the forms of *mimesis*[39] as
one should expect if the historian shares with poetry the aim of presenting
universals, albeit to a smaller degree. In *Poet.* 9 Aristotle returns to *mimesis*
only after the comparison with ἱστορία is concluded and the task of the
poet is determined again (1451 b 28 f.).

The view expressed in *Poet.* chapters 9 about the task of the historian
as describing events "that have happened" and correspondingly about the
rank of historiography reflects Aristotle's concept of "doing" (πρᾶξις).
According to *Met.* A 1. 981 a 15 ff.[40] actions deal with the particular (τὸ καθ᾽
ἕκαστον), they affect an individual, e.g. a doctor treats a specific person,
and in the same way the historian describes the actions and experiences of
an individual, "what Alcibiades *did* or *suffered*". However, Aristotle did
not include in his description of the task of the historian an account of what
Alcibiades *said*,[41] e.g. in his speech found in Thucydides *Hist.* 6. 16–18.
That in speeches generals and statesmen often discuss options available
in terms of past experiences which they regard relevant for the decision
to be made is not considered by Aristotle, and in choosing to ignore the
speeches in works of historiography he truncates the content of historical
works available to him and denies their deliberative content which makes
them examples of the better genre of rhetoric as he himself states in the
introductory chapter of *Rhet.* 1.[42] Isocrates, and Iphicrates for that matter,
are cited often in that work, but neither from Herodotus the speech of the
Athenian Miltiades (6. 109. 3–6) or the Spartan Demaratus (7. 102–104),
nor a speech of Pericles, Cleon, or Alcibiades found in Thucydides.
Recognizing Aristotle's bewildering omission of the, as we could say,
philosophical elements of deliberative speeches in historiography (which
he made the subject of his own philosophical enquiry in *Rhet.* and *Pol.*)
should serve as a warning against a charitable reading that attributes to
Poet. ch. 9 a higher appreciation of its intellectual content as scholars have
attempted it, with K. v. Fritz as one of the more prominent representatives

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[39] Contra Schmitt 2008, 376 f. Von Fritz 1956, 115, acknowledges that Aristotle
in *Poet.* did not use *mimesis* for historiography, however, he sees in Duris *FGrHist*
76 F 1 with his criticism of Ephorus and Theopompus because of their lack of *mimesis*
an affinity with Aristotle.

[40] Cf. *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356 b 30–33.

[41] In the chapter on his method of writing on the Peloponnesian war, 1. 22, Thuc.
begins explaining his approach by reference to composing *speeches* and moves only
then to the *events* (ἔργα) of the war.

[42] *Rhet.* 1. 1. 1354 b 23–25: "deliberative speech is more noble and beneficial to
the polis than that about private contracts".

of this school. Such attempts are well intended for the reputation of historiography but face major hurdles. Historiography describes the fate of an individual like Alcibiades, and to an individual "many and endless things happen" (8 1451 a 17). However, as the *Rhetoric* teaches, "the particular is endless and not comprehensible", that is, it defies knowledge. Attempts to attribute to Aristotle the view that he recognized as a matter of principle the existence of universals in the reality of human affairs must fail; at best they are exceptions (see above n. 33).

In my reading of *Poet.* ch. 9, there did not exist, or needed to exist, for Aristotle a category of writing that dealt with the past or with contemporary events in order to formulate universally valid principles, he rather sees the task of the historian limited to reporting particular events affecting individuals as he indicated in the beginning of this chapter and repeats it later in exactly the same words.

The contrast between the universals, καθόλου, and the particulars, καθ᾽ ἕκαστα, of *Poet.* ch. 9 are for more than one reason of a different sort than the same terms, and the human conditions associated with them, e.g. at *Met.* A 1.[43] Here experience (ἐμπειρία) is a knowledge based on familiarity with particulars (καθ᾽ ἕκαστα) whereas τέχνη possesses knowledge of universals (καθόλου).[44] Experience (ἐμπειρία) as a knowledge of particulars, καθ᾽ ἕκαστα, is more than familiarity with one single issue but is knowledge of results in many cases (981 a 7–9), and as an insight that is based on an extended number of cases, experience (ἐμπειρία) goes beyond the account of single events presented in historiography, events which do not allow such an insight.[45] If experience (ἐμπειρία) as the competence in one area, based on finding similar patterns in a limited number of cases, is defined as dealing with particulars how can historiography, which *lacks* the knowledge of typical behavior which experience (ἐμπειρία) possesses, deal – to some degree –

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[43] In scholarly literature, however, *Met.* A is often referred to in order to explain the concept of *Poet.* 9, cf. Zoepffel 1975, 17 f.; Carli 2010, in particular 309–312, see below p. 270 appendix.

[44] *Met.* A 1. 981 a 5 ff. Historiography is not a τέχνη since no τέχνη is concerned with an individual, *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356 b 30–34.

[45] While the capability of ἐμπειρία is gained through many memories of the *same thing* (980 b 29) and as knowledge of particulars ἐμπειρία is a perfect precondition for actions which are applied to particulars (*Met.* A 1. 981 a 13–20, cf. *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356 b 30–33), in *Poet.* 9 historiography which also deals with particulars ("what Alcibiades did") is not the result of *many* memories of *the same things* but records, preserves for memory, the "countless" (*Poet.* 8. 1451 a 17), *many things* that happened (23. 1459 a 23). Different historical events that follow one another or happen simultaneously at different places lack the coherence which allows them to result in one end, *ibid.* a 26–29.

with universals? In fact, historiography in *Poet.* 9 is not at all associated with any specific ability of the authors who compose such works whereas poetry is (*Poet.* 4. 1448 b 4 ff.; b 24 ff.; 8. 1451 a 22–24).

If one wants to place the discussion of *Poet.* ch. 9 in the framework of the Aristotelian "particular" – "universal" concept, historiography as an account of particular events as they develop corresponds rather to sense-perception (αἴσθησις) whose objects are particulars (*Eth. Nic.* 3. 5. 1112 b 34 – 1113 a 2; 6. 12. 1143 b 4 f.; *Anal. Post.* 1. 81 b 6) and which registers only a fact observed without being able to give the cause for it.[46] Describing historiography as an act of (recording) sense-perception (αἴσθησις) does justice to the modus operandi of Greek historians: Herodotus (2. 99. 1) comments at some stage of his work that the previous description is his "sight" (ὄψις) and "investigation" (ἱστορία) and that he will relate the accounts of the Egyptians as he heard them combined with his own inspection (ὄψις) ; and Thucydides claims: "some of the speeches I heard myself" and "I myself was present" at some events of the war (1. 22. 1 f.) which he describes. According to Aristotle, "sight" is the chief sense (*De an.* 3. 3. 429 a 3: *Met.* A 1. 980 a 24–27), and for a historian to be an eyewitness means nothing less than exercising the most important sense. However, while sight, more than any other senses, produces knowledge (Aristotle *Met.* A 1. 980 a 26 f.) and senses provide the most authoritative knowledge of particulars (*Met.* A 1. 981 b 11) it requires judicious sorting and combination of the data sense perceptions provide to acquire the most modest understanding of particulars: experience (ἐμπειρία), as a first step before the mastery in the respective area, called τέχνη which grasps the universals, is obtained. Sense-perception (αἴσθησις) is not irrelevant for formulating knowledge of universals since induction (ἐπαγωγή) relies on sense-perception (*Anal. Post.* 1. 13. 81 b 5–9), however, knowledge of universals cannot be obtained through sense-perception (αἴσθησις, *Anal. Post.* 1.13. 81 b 28).

In light of the *scala*, the ascent from particulars to universals, historiography, which gives an account of particular events observed, cannot be credited with conveying some sort of universal as it has been claimed. The approach to the particular-universal concept in the *Poetics* is very different from that in the texts which deal with the acquisition of universal knowledge: in *Met.* A 1 sense perception, memory, experience, τέχνη, and finally science are clearly distinguished steps in ascending

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[46] *Met.* A 1. 981 b 10–13; *Nic. Eth.* 2. 9. 1109 b 22 f., cf. Schütrumpf 2005, 350 f., n. 24, 4 on *Pol.* 7. 7. 1328 a 19. For αἴσθησις as the basis of Aristotle's *Historiai* see Zoepffel 1975, 33–35.

order where the lower one produces the higher one (cf. *Anal. Post.* 1. 31. 88 a 2–6) whereas in *Poet.* 9 historiography and poetry are not described as two stages on a continuous scale of abilities which first approach and then grasp the universal, καθόλου, in an ever higher degree; in *Poet.* 9 particular and universal are simply contrasted. In *Met.* A 1, there is no ability that combines – in whichever degree – a grasp of particular and universal as it is claimed for historiography. Aristotle's approach in *Poet.* 9 is not that of acknowledging "philosophical elements of historia" (Carli 2011, 321 ff.) which would mean recognizing in history qualities of philosophical nature, that is universal validity. Just on the contrary, he considers the quality of the material a poet and historian have to work with as basically identical:[47] there existed in Homer's time knowledge of "all the things that had happened (συνέβη) to him (Odysseus) … after one of those things had happened (γενομένου) it was neither necessary nor likely that the other event took place (γενέσθαι)" (8. 1451 a 25–28) – these events (γενομένου, γενέσθαι) are those historiography describes (τὰ γενόμενα). Or in different terms: historiography describes one period of time, "(all[48]) the things that *happened*[49] during that period; all these events are related to one another as it happened by chance".[50] As simultaneous events they do not result in realizing one and the same end, and as far as they are successive events "at times" (ἐνίοτε) "no single τέλος is reached" – this statement rephrases in teleological terms the connection of events which was expressed in ch. 9 in terms of necessary or likely: actions or events that do not contribute to one end (ch. 23) are neither likely nor necessary elements of the one and unified action tragedy presents and, therefore, "no part of the whole" (8. 1451 a 34 f.).

While there is no difference in the quality of the material Homer had available about Odysseus and that of a historian, the poet Homer did not include in his epic "all the things that had happened to Odysseus", ἅπαντα

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[47] Zoepffel 1975, 16, makes the same observation starting from a different angle.

[48] I added "all", which is contained in the quantitative ὅσα.

[49] To elevate the role of historiography Schwinge 1996, 114, dismisses a form of historical account that conveys only individual facts, "Einzelfakten" because it could have only the form of lists on a chart ("tabellarische Liste"). However, "telling everything that happened" is not done in an appealing way (as Herodotus' *History* undoubtedly succeeded in) by using the form of a chart.

[50] 23. 1459 a 22 f. ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη περὶ ἕνα ἢ πλείους, ὧν ἕκαστον ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα, cf. συμβαίνει at 8. 1451 a 17. Carli's translation of ἔτυχεν "as the case might be" (2011, 329; 331) eliminates both the meaning of τυγχάνω and the reference to an event of the past. By rendering the phrase as a timeless potential, she opens up the option to find higher standards of a relationship between historical events met that come closer to philosophy than the Greek text correctly understood allows.

ὅσα αὐτῷ συνέβη (8. 1451 a 25), whereas the historian by his obligation
to accuracy and completeness[51] cannot discard events that are either not
related to one another in causal terms of likelihood or necessity or events
that do not result in a single end, but he describes "(all) the things that
happened during the period" (ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη) of his investigation.
However, it is the difference of approach in the use of the abundance of
known events related to the subject in question and the use of material
that is of the nature as all human actions or events possess it, namely to
suffer under "great uncertainty" or "instability" (πλάνη, *Nic. Eth.* 1. 1.
1094 a 15–18) that distinguishes poet and historian. The historian is
faithful to the reality as he finds it, warts and all, while the creative act of
the poet[52] consists in weeding out irrelevant events (s. above p. 247 with
n. 12) and structuring the plot to become a coherent story that is guided
by likelihood or necessity. This poetic creation should not be considered
as "unreal",[53] after all the events described must be "possible", but as a
"Überwirklichkeit", a higher reality since all irrelevant elements have been
removed and only what follows with likelihood or by necessity is left.

Such an act of "editing", revising material Aristotle denies to be the
task of the historian, and in this determination he ignores the nature of
historiography he was familiar with. Reference to likelihood, εἰκός, is
found in fifth-century historiography,[54] e.g. in Herodotus and Thucy-
dides.[55] This fact that historians used or referred to arguments based on
likelihood throws light on Aristotle's lopsided view of historiography in
Poet. ch. 9 where he denies to historiography presenting insights that at
least allow to view certain developments or outcomes as something that
could be expected or was *likely* to happen but assigns to it only a (reliable)
account of specific individual facts.

If Aristotle failed to recognize in historiography a more universal
claim, such as establishing patterns of events or identifying causes that
typically lead to certain results, based on discovering common elements in
the multitude of individual experiences, the task of the historian to describe

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[51] Cf. Carli 2011, 330 n. 39.

[52] There is an exact parallel for the orator, cf. Schütrumpf 1994, 185–187, on the
"creative act of the orator" as distinguished from his use of existing material.

[53] Schwinge 1996, 112: "was es in der Realität so nicht gibt, was mit der Realität
nicht kongruiert".

[54] Cf. Schütrumpf 2011, 246 f.

[55] In Hdt. 8. 68. 2, Artemisia argues that if the Persian king were to march with
his troops into the Peloponnese it would be unlikely (οὔτε … εἰκός) that the Greeks
who had come from there would remain on Salamis instead of returning home; cf. the
argument at 7. 150. Westlake 1969, chapter 10: "Ὡς εἰκός in Thucydides", 153–160.

"things that happened" needs not be understood as demeaning. Aristotle himself is critical of authors who get the chronology of events wrong,[56] and in this demand he stands in the best tradition of Thucydides who directs the same criticism against Hellanicus (1. 97. 2).

Furthermore, Aristotle can be said to have done justice to another aspect of history that is fully reflected in historiography, namely the awareness that events happen by accident and the recognition of the presence of τύχη. Thucydides reports on occasion that a certain condition or situation had occurred by mere chance: Athenian ambassadors who happened (ἔτυχε) to be in Sparta on unrelated business requested to be heard on accusations made by the Corinthians (1. 72. 1). A part of the Corinthian army missed on its retreat the road and entered a private property which happened (ἔτυχε) to be enclosed by a large ditch which offered no exit so that the Corinthians were killed (1. 106). One Athenian ship of those which had escaped the sea battle succeeded in sinking a Spartan merchant ship "that happened to be (ἔτυχε) anchored". "After this had happened unexpectedly and against calculation (παρὰ λόγον, cf. 4. 55. 3) the Spartans were struck by fear" whereas the Athenians regained confidence and managed to turn their defeat into victory (2. 91. 3 – 92. 4). A potential question about whether there was some reason for that vessel to be moored is anticipated by the statement that this was just happenstance (ἔτυχε) – obviously important events like a victory in a battle are not always the result of planning or occur by necessity or can be calculated as having a likely result but can start with a situation that is given by mere chance. This list could be expanded,[57] and clearly the historian Thucydides understood well that things happen by accident and described them in that way, using ἔτυχε. The established use of this concept in historiography should deter from assigning to it a different, more philosophical meaning when it is referred to by Aristotle (*Poet.* 23 1459 a 24) to describe the way events are linked in historiography. The tradition of historiography on which Aristotle writes in *Poet.* 9 has been ignored in modern attempts to elevate historiography.

The statement in *Poet.* 9 that writing poetry is in its nature "more philosophical than historiography" might reveal a narrow view about

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[56] *Ath. Pol.* 17. 2; *Pol.* 2. 12. 1274 a 30, cf. Schütrumpf 1991, 377, n. 47, 14 on 1274 a 25.

[57] Thuc. 5. 76. 3; 6. 61. 2; 102. 2: while the Syracusans managed to destroy part of the Athenian defense lines, Nicias "who happened (ἔτυχε) to be left there because of illness" saved the circle. Cf. 1. 78. 1 f. on the παράλογον of war, cf. 84. 3; 140. 1; 87. 2 f.; 4. 18. 3–5; 64. 1 "fortune (τύχη) which I do not control"; 5. 37. 3; 102. 1.

writing history and the character of works of historiography[58] – or
reveal an Aristotelian attitude of not giving credit to the *philosophical*
accomplishments of others,[59] however, it should not be construed as if
Aristotle denied to the *study* of history philosophical significance.[60] At
Pol. 5.12 1316 a 25 ff. he criticizes a simplistic theory of constitutional
change, as that found in Plato's *Republic* books 8 and 9, by referring
to specific historical events that contradict Plato's theory. Knowledge
of specific historical events can serve to prove a theory that provides
too general explanations, as that of Plato, to be false – familiarity with
particulars unmasks false claims of universal principles! Historiography
is not expected to incorporate universal elements in order to provide
insights, however, in a philosophical context, that of political theory, it
is the knowledge of specific events that discredits universal assumptions,
and this is the way historiography is used by Aristotle – with a healthy
mistrust for so-called universal truths. And for the political practice,
awareness of the very nature of the multitude of events that happen without
causal connection can take the sails out of professional doomsayers who
predict catastrophes if certain measures are taken or not taken. Aristotle's
realistic view of the nature of historical events should be considered a
healthy antidote against the certainty of political pundits – and against the
trust in the success of quick fixes promised. Historiography as described
by Aristotle at *Poet.* 9 does not lack usefulness for philosophy.

Furthermore, the role of historiography is more than negative: in
Pol. books 4–6 Aristotle refers to numerous historical events in order
to support his insights about patterns of political developments. The
political philosopher can *make use* of history in a manner that produces
universal insights, e.g., that democracy is more stable and free from
civil war than oligarchy (*Pol.* 5. 1. 1302 a 8 ff.). At *Rhet.* 1. 4. 1360 a
30–37 Aristotle considers *studying* the past as useful for legislation and
historical works as useful for deliberative speech.[61] This should not be

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[58] De Ste. Croix 1992, 23–32.

[59] At *Nic. Eth.* 10. 10. 1181 b 12 ff. Aristotle claims that "those who preceded him
had left the matter of legislation uninvestigated", denying any merit to Plato's *Laws*.

[60] I differ from Carli's 2011 approach in that I do not elevate the philosophical
character of history (335 "history is … not unrelated to philosophy"), and of histori-
ography for that matter, but acknowledge the usefulness of a factual description of "all
things that happened in one period of time to one or more men; each of these events
are related to one another as they happened to occur …" 23. 1459 a 22–25. I argue that
historiography as characterized in *Poet.* does not contain anything ready to be used by
the political philosopher.

[61] Cf. *Rhet.* 2. 20. 1393 a 30 – b 2.

interpreted as if historiography informs about patterns of events so that someone with the knowledge of such patterns can point out that such and such actions had typically such and such results. Aristotle does not burden the historian with the task of providing such insights. Therefore, it is left to someone interested in such knowledge to acquire it himself[62] by bringing together related events and drawing the conclusions they allow, and Aristotle knows that *finding similar* events is difficult (*Rhet.* 2. 20. 1394 a 3). A single work of history might not provide examples of similar events, and Aristotle at *Nic. Eth.* 10.10 1181 b 17 f. promises himself to examine the causes of preservation and destruction of constitutions from the *collection* of constitutions (ἐκ τῶν συνηγμένων πολιτειῶν) – a constitution of one or a few cities would not contain sufficient material for the purpose of a political theorist.[63] However, the value of such historical work should not be underestimated, it possess the same rank as his *Natural Historiai*, which provide the facts (ὅτι) whereas the systematic study of the movement of animals will give the cause (διότι).[64]

3. The Philosophical Nature of Poetry – the rejection of Platonic *mimesis*

The issue here is not only to get a better idea of Aristotle's understanding of history or historiography,[65] but the nature of poetry. Since poetry deals "rather with universals" is writing poetry a τέχνη whose knowledge is one of universals? Avoiding such an identification of poetry and τέχνη, Aristotle allows the possibility that a poet's accomplishment is owed to his φύσις: when he singles out Homer for composing his epics around

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[62] Correct Carli 2011, 336: "Embedded in the multifarious and unique situations that the human world offers to *our observation* are recurrent causal patterns, which the *perceptive observer can detect and use* to make his case" (my italics – E. S.).

[63] For legislation, an orator must be familiar not only with past events but also with the constitutions of others: *Rhet.* 1. 4. 1360 a 30–35.

[64] *De inc. an.* 704 b 9–11; for the cause and purpose, see 704 a 4 ff.

[65] At 6. 23. 3 Thucydides has Nicias remark that in his plan to set sails he surrendered himself as little as possible to τύχη, and prepared for it so that in all likelihood (ἀπὸ τῶν εἰκότων) he could do this safely, and in this alternative he expands on the preceding one of the need both to succeed (εὐτυχῆσαι) and deliberate/ decide (βουλεύσασθαι) well. Nicias knows of the limits of human planning since he acknowledges that being successful is difficult for humans, however, the option remains to plan well and calculate a *likely* good outcome – Nicias with his planning as statesman and general attempts to introduce in the real world (that will become history) predictability based on likelihood.

a single action he leaves the alternatives open whether Homer got this right "due to τέχνη or nature" (*Poet.* 8. 1451 a 24). Τέχνη could be made responsible here for one – important – accomplishment, Homer's decision to construe the plot in such a way that it is the presentation of one action, but τέχνη is not made responsible for the success of Homer's epic poetry as a whole. Explaining poetry as the result of τέχνη would reduce it to an intellectual process of knowing universals while ignoring the poetic talent. This was alluded to in *Poet.* 8 with reference to "nature". Aristotle ignores τέχνη as the source of poetic accomplishment when he later considers only the alternative that poetry is the work "of a man who possesses natural talent (εὐφυής) or is mad" (17. 1455 a 32 f.). Above we referred to *Met.* Z 7. 1032 a 27: "all acts of producing (ποιήσεις) come about either from τέχνη or capability or thought …", and capability (δύναμις) would cover "natural talent" (εὐφυής). The role of τέχνη for the poet could be adequately described by adapting the explanation of τέχνη given for rhetoric: "to understand the reason why orators succeed" (*Rhet.* 1. 1. 1354 a 9–11). The exact equivalent to this statement is in the *Poetics* the remark: "The tragedy that is most beautiful according to the (standards of) τέχνη is construed in the described way".[66] This description is valid in light of *Nic. Eth.* 10. 10. 1181 a 17 "…and the ability to judge is of utmost importance as in works of music". Τέχνη according to this concept cannot provide the artistic qualities of a genius but saves from making mistakes and formulates specific insights a poet should take to heart.

In *Poet.* ch. 9 likelihood and necessity are the two alternatives of certainty used to qualify what "might happen" or "what sorts of things a person of a certain character it suits to say or do" as they are presented by poetry. Reference to likelihood, εἰκός, was in judicial rhetoric of the 5th cent. an argumentative strategy of expressing certain expectations about how things might ordinarily happen or have happened.[67] With regard to disputed accounts each party cites specific personal conditions which make certain actions by certain people more likely and all but exclude other possibilities. There might well be exceptions to a pattern of behavior assumed, but as a rule of thumb likelihood offers some reasonable guidance when forming a judgment about specific events based on assumptions of typical behavior. Aristotle shares the traditional view about the role of likelihood used in rhetoric. In *Rhet.* 1 he links what is "likely" to things that

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[66] Cf. *Poet.* 13. 1453 a 22 ff., cf. a 18 ff.; a 12 ff.; 1. 1447 a 8–13; 7. 1451 a 9–11; 9. 1452 a 10 f.; 11. 1452 a 32; 13. 1452 b 31ff.

[67] S. Schütrumpf 2011.

happen in a certain way "most of the times", adds that likelihood belongs to the realm of things "that can take place or occur in a different way" as well, and illustrates likelihood by comparing it to the role of universals contrasted with particulars (2. 1357 a 34–37).[68]

These concepts are discussed in a fundamental manner in *Nic. Eth.* 1 where Aristotle describes the method he follows in this treatise. In the area of human actions where there is so much instability, uncertainty, and fluctuation (1. 1094 b 14 ff.) one does not need to despair, give up at attempts of explanation, and deny any sort of regularity or predictability. While Aristotle rejects the strict standard of mathematics for the study of human affairs he demands that when talking about things that happen "most of the time" one is content to base one's conclusions on premises that correspond to this nature of the subject matter;[69] it is the task of an educated person to take into account these specific conditions (*Nic. Eth.* 1. 1. 1094 b 11–25).

To find in the *Poetics*, where *mimesis* is presentation of *men who act* (s. below p. 265 with n. 74), likelihood as the standard that links character of a man/woman and actions (s)he performs, fits perfectly the theoretical assumptions Aristotle develops in *Nic. Eth.* 1 about the philosophical character of philosophy of human affairs and its application in his *Rhet.* We are dealing in tragedy with humans who make decisions in situations and developments they cannot, given human limitations, completely understand, analyze, and make predictions with the exactness of mathematics – following the lower standard of εἰκός seems a reasonable way to explain the causal connection between events or between character and actions. Should one not be satisfied with this standard?

However, in *Poet.* 9 Aristotle adds the higher standard, necessity, ἀναγκαῖον, which he had rejected in *Nic. Eth.* 1. According to *Nic. Eth.* 6. 6 and other statements,[70] what takes place by necessity belongs to science, but not to the realm of human affairs which is characterized by

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[68] In *Anal. Pr.* 2. 27. 70 a 2 ff., of the two kinds of premises of enthymemes Aristotle distinguishes, one is based on things likely. He explains "likely" as a premise that is accepted as common view: "likely is what men know to happen or not to happen or to be or not to be most of the time, for instance that men who are envious hate …" What is likely is *known* from experience.

[69] Aristotle supports this distinction by pointing out at *Nic. Eth.* 1. 1. 1094 b 25–27 the absurdity of accepting when a mathematician says what should be believed (πιθανολογέω) and of demanding from an orator scientific proofs. The exactness in political theory comes close to that of rhetoric.

[70] 6. 6. 1140 b 31: "Since science is a conviction about universals and things that are by necessity …", cf. 3. 1139 b 22 f.: "The object of science (τὸ ἐπιστητόν) exists by necessity; therefore, it is eternal …"

the fact that things can turn out in different ways, which is the reason that our assumptions about them are of a more limited nature and meet only the lower standard of εἰκός. This way of looking at things is confirmed by *Poet.* 9 where Aristotle remarks that "nothing stands in the way that events that took place are of that sort as they might *likely* (εἰκός) happen" (1451 b 30 f.) – he does not concede that events took place as they *must* (ἀναγκαῖον) happen. By introducing necessity, ἀναγκαῖον, Aristotle in *Poet.* 9 transcends the sphere in which the subject matter of tragedy, human actions, unfolds, and he transcends that sphere since human actions do not meet the standard of necessity[71] he envisions for the presentation of actions in poetry.

Given this other option by which Aristotle allows that the standard of necessity, ἀναγκαῖον, can be met by poetry in the sphere of actions, it is no surprise that he declares poetry to be more philosophical in its nature and implicitly close to science. We could not find ourselves in a more different environment than that of Plato's views about *mimesis*. Plato had denied to *mimesis* any form of truth (see above p. 247), while Aristotle goes to the other extreme by assigning to the content presented in works of poets a degree of certainty that can transcend the limited certainty of human affairs and assume the higher certainty of necessity as it characterizes natural science.

How does Aristotle accomplish this radical change? Instead of looking at objects and their ontological rank in terms of reality versus artistic presentation as Plato had done, Aristotle considers the nature of the connection between the various parts of the plot (s. above p. 247 n. 11) and furthermore the relationship between character and action, including the statements of those involved (*Poet.* 9. 1451 b 9, quoted above n. 17; 15. 1454 a 33). While the first aspect of universal seems to be developed specifically for literature since it deals with the sequential arrangement in poetry of various human actions or events which does not fall under any other discipline, the second one, the connection of character and action, is formulated elsewhere, e.g. in *De an.* 3. 11: "The universal statement orders that a man of this sort does something of this sort".[72]

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[71] Cf. *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357 a 22 ff.: "so to say nothing" of the things one does and deliberates about "is the result of necessity"; for additional evidence s. Schütrumpf 1980, 339 n. 54.

[72] *De an.* 3. 11. 434 a 16–19: ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἡ μὲν καθόλου ὑπόληψις καὶ λόγος, ἡ δὲ τοῦ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον (ἡ μὲν γὰρ λέγει ὅτι δεῖ τὸν τοιοῦτον τὸ τοιόνδε πράττειν, ἡ δὲ ὅτι τόδε τοιόνδε, κἀγὼ δὲ τοιόσδε) …, cf. *Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356 b 30–32 on the universal operation of medicine which considers "what is healthy for a man or men of this sort" (τί τῷ τοιῷδε ἢ τοῖς τοιοῖσδε scil. ὑγιεινόν ἐστιν). The character presented in poetry

In any case, instead of comparing different objects taken by themselves in isolation in a vertical dimension, viewing them as model or imitation as Plato had done, Aristotle focusses on the specific sort of relationship between either different events or between a character and his/her actions both as they exist in the real world described by historiography and as they are created in poetry in a horizontal dimension according to the strictness of their connection, and here poetic fiction beats reality in terms of the standard of certainty. In this approach Aristotle succeeds at reversing the rank of reality and objects of *mimesis* Plato had assigned to them. This should affect translation. In Plato *mimesis* is "imitation", an imperfect and cheap imitation, for Aristotle this translation must be avoided, *mimesis* is "presentation" of something better than an existing object or chain of events.[73]

I consider it remarkable, both in this context and in others, that Aristotle can start with concepts that are completely Platonic and then move away from them by giving them a twist Plato had not thought of. The statement that the object of *mimesis* are men who act, in *Poet.* 2 ("Since those engaged in *mimesis* present through *mimesis* men who act", πράττοντας, 1448 a 1), does not go back to Aristotle's famous concept of ἐνέργεια as the crucial element of the definition of happiness of man in *Nic. Eth.* 1. 6. 1098 a 5 ff., but reproduces almost verbally the insight by Plato into the condition of men poets deal with:

> The art of *mimesis* presents through *mimesis* men who commit acts (πράττοντας) that are forced upon them or voluntary and who believe to have done well or poorly because of their acts.[74]

I regard this passage in Plat. *Rep.* 10 the model for Aristotle's statement in *Poet.* 2 that men who act are the object of *mimesis*. However, it never seemed to have occurred to Plato in this context that instead of entities

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is not that of an individual – the exception are persons targeted by poets of iamboi (*Poet.* 9. 1451 b 14).

[73] Cf. von Fritz 1956, 120, after Gomme. Not observed by Schmitt 1998, in particular 26; id. 2008 passim, e.g. the translation of 2. 1448 a 16–18: "Tragödie … will Charaktere nachahmen, die dem heutigen Durchschnitt … überlegen sind" (p. 5); cf. *ibid*., 204: "Literatur ist eine Form der Nachahmung". Carli 2010, 321: "The *physis* that *technē* imitates"; 325; ead. 2011, 325; 332.

[74] Cf. Plato *Rep.* 10. 603 c 4 ˇΩδε δὴ προθώμεθα· πράττοντας, φαμέν, ἀνθρώπους μιμεῖται ἡ μιμητικὴ βιαίους ἢ ἑκουσίας πράξεις, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πράττειν ἢ εὖ οἰομένους ἢ κακῶς πεπραγέναι, with Arist. *Poet.* 2. 1448 a 1 Ἐπεὶ δὲ μιμοῦνται οἱ μιμούμενοι πράττοντας, ἀνάγκη δὲ τούτους ἢ σπουδαίους ἢ φαύλους εἶναι …

(men who act) taken by themselves as object of *mimesis*, one could focus on the causal link between the quality of persons and that of their actions and speaking, as Aristotle does in *Poet.* ch. 9. In other words, Plato in *Rep.* 10 did not go behind the persons who act in order to establish the reason why they act in their specific way or what makes them do or say certain things. Contrast Aristotle:

> Since (tragedy) is presentation of action, and the action is performed by men who act (πραττόντων) who must have a certain quality in character and intellect …[75]

Plato might have precluded this dimension because in *Rep.* 10 he used painting as the paradigm for his assessment of *mimesis*, and painting does not allow to express clearly the causal link between the quality of persons depicted and that of their actions.[76]

Does this mean that the crucial argument employed in the *Poetics*, namely the causal link between the quality of persons and that of their actions and speaking, is Aristotle's innovation with which he succeeded in lifting poetry from its low place of imitative depiction of appearances, to which it was relegated by Plato, to the high rank of a work of philosophical nature? I do not think so. In a famous passage in the *Theaetetus* Plato contrasts the common man presented by the Thracian maid with the philosopher.[77] The latter

> investigates what man is and what is appropriate for such a nature to do or to suffer.

I see in this statement[78] four elements which Aristotle shares in his argument for the philosophical nature of poetry:

> 'Universal' is what sorts of things a person of a certain character will on occasion say or do according to likelihood or necessity.

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[75] Arist. *Poet.* 6. 1449 b 36 ἐπεὶ δὲ πράξεώς ἐστι μίμησις, πράττεται δὲ ὑπὸ τινῶν πραττόντων, οὓς ἀνάγκη ποιούς τινας εἶναι κατά τε τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν (διὰ γὰρ τούτων καὶ τὰς πράξεις εἶναί φαμεν ποιάς τινας) …

[76] Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 8. 5. 1340 a 30 ff. about the visual arts which do not contain likenesses of characters as music does.

[77] Plat. *Tht.* 174 b 3–6 τί δέ ποτ᾽ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος καὶ τί τῇ τοιαύτῃ φύσει προσήκει διάφορον τῶν ἄλλων ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, ζητεῖ τε καὶ πράγματ᾽ ἔχει διερευνώμενος.

[78] Plat. *Rep.* 3. 400 d 6 ff. cannot have inspired Aristotle (contra Schmitt 2008, 392–397), since any reference to philosophy is missing.

(1) Plato describes what the nature of a philosophical enquiry is, (2) he takes human nature as the reference point, (3) in Plato "nature" is universal human nature, not that of an individual since the philosopher does not care about individuals like what his neighbor does, as in Aristotle the character presented in poetry is described as universal (see above p. 249 with n. 14 and 16; p. 264 with n. 72), and (4) Plato asks what is appropriate for such a nature (τῇ τοιαύτῃ φύσει) to do or to suffer. Aristotle in his turn identifies as philosophical the presentation of a relationship between the quality of men and their actions and speaking that is defined by necessity or likelihood.

The equivalent to the attention to the things in front of oneself which the Thracian maid expects from men is in Aristotle the approach of historiography which presents individuals and their specific *actions* and *sufferings* (the same alternatives as in Plato) of an individual (above n. 17) and therefore lacks the universality which gives poetry its philosophical quality. In Plato the positive alternative to the limited perspective of the Thracian maid about what deserves man's attention, namely the things in front of one, is that of the philosopher who investigates "what man is and what is appropriate for such a nature to do or to suffer", and for Aristotle *one* positive alternative to the limited perspective of historiography which recounts specific events that do not need to have a causal connection is *mimesis* which is "more philosophical" because it "narrates rather the things that are universal" which is defined as "what sorts of things a person of a certain character it suits to say or do according to likelihood or necessity", and "it is this universality at which poetry aims …"

Plato and Aristotle share the view that the subject matter of philosophy is the universal, their disagreement is about the nature of poetry or of the creative process, *mimesis*. Here Aristotle has a much higher view of the artist than that of being a very skilled imitator who tries to reproduce a replica of the real world. One might dispute whether the analogies used by Plato in *Rep.* 10 in order to judge the rank of art and in particular of poetry are of any value at all. Placing works of art on a level below real objects seems a misunderstanding of what art is. Artists developed amphorae, pieces of jewelry, and musical instruments from primitive forms and transformed them into perfect pieces of the greatest art which underwent changes of style in shape, color, and ornamentation. Often these works of art are not just a better reproduction of an existing object but owe their existence to a creative act of the artist. Plato avoids such an objection by making the producer of a thing imitator of a divine creation. But did the gods design model furniture, beds and all? Is such a view of gods not even more of blasphemy than the idea that they act justly in business transactions Aristotle reviles at *Nic. Eth.* 10. 8. 1178 b 8 ff. There

Aristotle mocks the assumption that gods could be seen in typically human (inter)actions like closing contracts and repaying deposits. It seems to me, that the analogies used in *Rep.* 10 are quite helpful in order to illustrate the different ontological levels that exist, but less so, to put it mildly, to help understanding the nature of poetry or men's way to act.[79]

In any case, the reversal of Plato's position on *mimesis* in general, and poetry in particular, in *Rep.* 10 proposed by Aristotle in *Poet.* ch. 9 is nothing short of revolutionary and demonstrates again the independence of the student from his master. If this new way of viewing and judging poetry was accomplished through the influence of the post-*Republic* dialogue *Theaetetus*, it does not diminish the revolution of the formulation of the positive view about the philosophical nature of *mimesis* and poetry we find in Aristotle.

However, does this result provide a better understanding of poetry and tragedy in particular? In Aristotle *Poet.* ch. 9 the objects of mimesis are men viewed according to the nature of the relationship between their quality and the way they act or speak, and this relationship follows at least the standard of likelihood or can meet the higher one of science since it can be "necessary". However, what is the appeal of poetry if it gets closer to the universality of philosophy, even of science? Does Aristotle mistake a creation that links action and character in a philosophically satisfying manner for poetry? This concept is only half of the story. Tragedy at least is the account of reversal of fortune, and Aristotle makes an effort to explain *what sort of man* should be affected by it and what the cause of this reversal of fortune is so that the tragic emotions are roused. In *Poet.* ch. 13 Aristotle makes clear that the downfall of the hero is not caused by a character flaw, but a ἁμαρτία, even a great ἁμαρτία, of a man who is "rather better than worse". Where is here a connection of necessity or likelihood between character and misfortune?[80] There is none, and Aristotle himself stresses this point when he states that the person affected is innocent, ἀνάξιος – and innocence is a condition for ἔλεος, pity, to be felt by others (1453 a 5).

The importance of the argument of *Poet.* 9 that proves the philosophical character of poetry for the assessment of Aristotle's understanding of

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[79] Cf. Annas 1982, 1–28.

[80] Contra Carli 2011, 326: "poetry … enables the reader/spectator to understand … why dramatic characters of a given kind … are bound to suffer or flourish". Correct more than 50 years earlier von Fritz 1956, 119: "…dass es nicht im Charakter der Antigone liegt, dass sie unter allen Umständen untergehen muss". He points out that it was Shakespeare who created tragedy in which the story developed solely from the character.

tragedy needs to be limited. The universal affects the relationship of character and actions but cannot grasp what can happen in one's life. The sequence of the argument in the *Poetics*, the structure of the steps of the development of thought, must not be ignored. Apart from the relationship between character and action that meets philosophical standards discussed in ch. 9, there is the possibility that men become victims of a reversal of fortune without deserving it as explained in ch. 13, and this cause of one's downfall defies a philosophical explanation in terms of the likely or necessary link between character and action insisted on in ch. 9. "Acting involuntarily" is an important element of Aristotle's analysis of tragedy,[81] and this sort of action is *not* the result of one's character. However, the early concept of likelihood and necessity remains valid in the latter context, and in the connection of the different events the causality of a stricter ("necessary") or more lax ("likely") nature is not given up (9. 1452 a 4 δι᾽ ἄλληλα). Aristotle expects the emotional responses of pity and fear to be aroused by such a causal link which the viewer perceives as the inevitability of the fate he anticipates with trepidation.

These emotions are not demonized as by Plato but accepted as a healthy emotional reaction that does not cause harm but is part of our emotional makeup as humans. Poetry is of philosophical nature insofar as the actions of the characters are not whimsical but a likely or necessary result of the sort of persons they are. However, life, the situations one faces and the people one interacts with cannot be controlled by individuals, and it is this conflict of the rational relationship between character and action of an individual on the one hand and the potential of failure in interactions with others[82] on the other that is tragic in the Aristotelian sense. Actions affect others, and the outcome of some actions is not intended but of the sort that the person who acted deserves pity. There is no philosophical explanation of this sort of happening, however, there is the Aristotelian way of subjecting these complex conditions of human life to a sober analysis as offered in the *Poetics* where the individual actions are explained from the character of the person who acted, with empathy both for the characters of the drama who acted or were affected and empathy for the audience which can allow itself to be moved by the suffering they witness.

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[81] Cf. Schütrumpf 1989, 131–145.

[82] Cf. in *Nic. Eth.* 3. 3 the reference to plots in tragedy: Merope did not know that the enemy was her son, 1111 a 11 f.

Appendix

As a starting point of her discussion of Aristotle's arguments in *Poet.* ch. 9, Carli 2010, 303, uses one of Aristotle's definitions of limit, border, πέρας, at *Met.* E 17. 1022 a 5 f.: "limit is called whichever form (*eidos*) size or an object that has size possesses" and presents as Aristotle's view of poetry that it "depicts not actions but their (*eidos*)" (323, sect. III: 319–328 "*Mimêsis and form*", cf. already 305; repeated 326, cf. 333 "connection between *mimêsis and form*"; "formal structures that make up our world"; 325: "Poetry … is faithful to the (living) form of human events"; 335 "the poet brings to light a form"). I do not understand why Carli chose this definition of πέρας, but not the following at *Met.* E 17: "limit is called the end of everything – of this sort is that at which a movement or action (aims)" (1022 a 5 – a 8) which states exactly what poetry represents and historiography lacks: *Poet.* 23. 1459 a 25–29. Reducing Aristotle's statements on the more philosophical character of poetry, that is *mimesis*, to "form" does not cover the complexity of the topic, cf. 9. 1452 a 3 "mimetic presentation of things that arouse fear and pity", cf. b 32 f., and I do not see what is gained by this inexplicit concept "form". Aristotle might have objected what he remarked against Plato's definition of ἀρετή as "good condition of the soul" and "to do right", namely that it is too general, while he preferred a more specific explanation (*Pol.* 1. 13. 1260 a 24–28). And he would have been able to formulate this principle of εἶδος if it was the key to his understanding of poetry. Why shouldn't he, but why didn't he? Poetry is only "more philosophical than history" but is not philosophy (correctly Carli 2010, 303), and one needs to seek exactness in each area only to the degree which the nature of the subject matter allows (*Nic. Eth.* 1. 1. 1094 b 23 ff.). The "educated" person would not apply the categories of philosophy to poetry. It is never discussed by Carli whether the use of *Met.* E 17 is a legitimate approach to the understanding of tragic *mimesis*. With too much ease Carli construes a deeper philosophical meaning where none exists: actions as "the object of poetry understood as 'things that are possible' (*ta dunata*)" she interprets as "events that happen in such a way as to realize their most proper *possibility* (my italics – *E. S.*), their distinctive potentiality (*dynamis*), and thus unfold so as to realize the 'aspiration' of their *physis*" (325). However, there is no connection between the factual judgment about δυνατόν in the sense of what can happen, in whichever way, opposed to what is impossible, as explained in *Rhet.* 2. 19. 1392 a 8 ff., and the potential for realizing "their most proper *possibility*", and how does this relate to the tragic reversal of fortune?

For the questionable use of "nature" as object of *mimesis* (Carli 2010, 305; 321: "it might be preferable … to clarify the nature of *mimêsis* using the conceptual apparatus that Aristotle develops to explain the relation between art (τέχνη) and nature (φύσις);" cf. quote above p. 265 n. 73; Carli 2010, 323; 325; 335 and passim) see above n. 13 my comments on Schmitt.

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In *Rep.* book 10 Plato had assigned to the whole of mimesis and specifically to poetry a place three removed from truth and inferior than the reality of human affairs. By contrast, Aristotle in *Poet.* ch. 9 declared poetry to be more philosophical than historiography, that is superior to the description of men's interactions. How does Aristotle achieve this new and positive assessment of poetry? Instead of taking objects by themselves and placing them into a vertical hierarchy according to their ontological rank as model and imitations on different levels, Aristotle views literature under the aspect of the stringency of the causal connection of events with one another or the connection of actions with the character that produces them. This causal relationship can be of the weaker form of likelihood or the strong form of necessity. Likelihood corresponds to the form of exactness which according to *Nic. Eth.* 1 the philosophical discourse on issues that occur in a specific way at best most of the time, like those which form the subject of ethics, allows. The other possibility of poetical presentation, necessity, transcends the conditions of practical philosophy and meets the standard of science. In tragedy the poet construes the plot according to these principles of universality, and comes closer to philosophy than a description of factual events is. It is possible that the expression of this standard of poetic presentation in *Poet.* ch. 9 is owed to Plato's *Theaetetus*.

В X книге "Государства" Платон отводил всем миметическим жанрам третье место по степени удаленности от истины – низшее, чем самой реальности человеческих дел. Напротив, Аристотель в "Поэтике" (гл. 9) назвал поэзию более философской, чем историография, то есть поставил ее выше, чем описание деятельности людей. Как именно Аристотель пришел к этой новой положительной оценке поэзии? Вместо того чтобы рассматривать вещи сами по себе и располагать их в иерархии, в соответствии с их онтологическим рангом, как образец и подражания на разных уровнях, Аристотель рассматривает литературу с точки зрения строгости причинной связи событий друг с другом

либо связи действий с характером, который их производит. Подобная каузальная связь может иметь слабую форму – правдоподобия или же строгую – необходимости. Правдоподобие соответствует той степени точности, которую (согласно *Nic. Eth.*) допускает философское рассуждение о процессах, не подчиненных строгой закономерности, как те, что составляют предмет этики. Однако другой уровень поэтического изображения, необходимость, превосходит возможности этики и соответствует стандарту науки. В трагедии поэт создает сюжет именно согласно этим принципам универсальной необходимости и приближается к философии больше, чем это происходит при описании реальных событий. Возможно, что Аристотель обязан такой трактовкой образцового поэтического изображения в 9-й главе "Поэтики" платоновскому "Теэтету".

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