Introduction

I.1 *Theoria* and the Problem of Univocity

To scholars of ancient philosophy, the term *theoria* (θεωρία) signifies a distinctively cognitive activity, one that for Plato and Aristotle belongs to the highest intellectual faculty and marks the possession of scientific knowledge. To classical scholars, *theoria* refers to a long-standing practice of traveling to sites to attend festivals and shrines, a tradition that has little in common with the activity described by philosophers. The contrast is further underscored in that the travel to festivals constitutes the earlier, dominant use of the term, one having its origin in the Archaic period, well before that of Plato and Aristotle. Put more precisely, the dominant use, that which we term "traditional *theoria*," in fact refers to two kinds of religious practice: (i) the travel to periodic festivals (e.g., the Olympic or Nemean) and (ii) travel to religious shrines and healing sanctuaries. The former kind occurs at fixed periods of the calendar year for a specific length of time, and the latter may occur outside fixed periods.[1] The primary point at hand is that both these uses comprise cultural practices that predate the notion of philosophical *theoria* (as contemplation) and persist for centuries.[2] Thus, the ancient practice of *theoria*, namely, the travel to festivals and sanctuaries, comprises the primary referent for the term *theoria*, and predates the philosophical use by at least two centuries.[3] From the standpoint of development and usage then, the reference to contemplation

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[1] These two uses comprise the "two broad categories" of traditional *theoria* (that which excludes the philosophical use); the use of traveling to healing sanctuaries, oracles, and Mystery sites such as Eleusis also covers cases where the visitor seeks a solution to a particular problem (cf. Dillon 1997, 60).

[2] According to Rutherford, traditional *theoria* spans about 800 years, from 6th c. BCE –2nd –3rd c. CE (Rutherford 2013, Ch. 2, 17).

[3] The generalization holds despite Herodotus' use of *theoria* referring to traveling for discovery or learning; see reference to Solon and Anacharsis (*Hist.* 1. 29, 4. 76).

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seems to lie entirely outside the dominant use, that referring to traditional *theoria*.

To philosophers, the recognition that a thing signifies a number of referents invites a consideration about synonymy and homonymy, with synonymy indicating a thing (or term) that possesses a common referent over its applications, and homonymy indicating the lack of a common referent. Put in a more precise sense as Aristotle considers the difference in *Cat*. I, first, homonymy is said to obtain when a general term, like "animal," refers to different things (e.g., a living thing and a picture of one) that lack a common essence and definition (cf. *Cat*. 1a1–3). When we consider the term *theoria*, we appear to be situated in the domain of homonymy. For we seem to have two or three different referents for *theoria* with festival and sanctuary attendance, on one side, and abstract thinking, on the other. The difficulty then lies in suggesting what key common features the referents share – in effect, we wonder whether it is possible to specify a feature definitive both of festival and sanctuary travel, as well as abstract thinking. Compounding this problem is the further issue concerning the unity of reference of philosophical *theoria* across uses by Plato and Aristotle. For example, an initial survey of *theoria* and related terms by Plato reflects homonymy, with wider and narrower uses of meaning. More precisely, the wider *theor/ia/eo* family of terms reveals two general uses with only one referring to *theoria* as abstract thinking. A similar situation concerning a plurality of uses is evident in Aristotle's works, the survey of the *theor/ia/eo* group of terms revealing a basic bifurcation between wider, generic senses and narrower, technical senses. So, for example, Aristotle employs forms of *theoreo* to signify studying or observing something, like the parts and functions of animal kinds (*De Part. An*. I 5) where he employs a wide, generic sense of *theoria*.[4] As well, however, he chooses a narrow, technical sense of *theoria* to signify the kind of scientific thinking he examines in *EN* X 7. Without going into detail on this point, it is fair to say that, fortunately, we find parallels in usage of theoric language between Aristotle and Plato, and this conclusion allows our investigation to proceed. In general, we find a pattern of usage consisting in a wide, general sense and a narrow, technical one with the former referring to studying, or considering, something and the latter having a narrower reference. Having reached this initial finding about

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[4] See, for example, *De Part. An*. 644b24–645a19; for discussion of the senses, see Ch. 4, fn. 4, and Ch. 5, sec. 5.4.

the overlap in Plato's and Aristotle's uses of *theor/ia/eo* terms, we can consider a further arrangement of meaning.

It seems possible to determine key features common to the wider and narrower uses of theoric terms in Plato and Aristotle. Since both the narrow and wide use are concerned with looking at or observing something, it seems reasonable to propose the activity of observation as the generic feature, and to propose thinking about intelligible objects as the qualification of the generic notion needed to reach the technical definition for the philosophical use of the term. At this point, we have posited two conclusions for the two philosophers' use of the *theor/ia/eo* family, the first concerning the generic notion of the terms, and the second, the technical notion of *theoria*. But, as yet, the previous problem concerning the ambiguity between the traditional sense (festival or sanctuary visitation) and the philosophical sense (intellectual contemplation) remains. However, further study in the history of traditional *theoria* as well as in the lexical range of *theoria*, *theoreo*, *theaomai* provides a way out of the problem. To begin with, the etymological connections among the *theor/ia/eo* family is unified in virtue of a root (*theor*) that signifies visual sense-perception, and specifically, looking at a sacred object or one of high significance. The perceptual feature is strongly represented in traditional *theoria*, or festival-attendance, which, while it comprehends several different features, possesses the central notions of observing something divine, and spectatorship as core features. It may be surprising to suppose that a perceptual or observational feature comprises the tether that connects the philosophical and traditional uses of *theoria*, yet, in this regard, we should consider that while philosophical *theoria* for Plato and Aristotle requires apprehending something intelligible, this apprehension is not without its visual, or perceptual, aspect. Coming to this general conclusion, however, was not immediate or obvious, and required reading from a wider range of scholarship about traditional *theoria* than initially planned. However, the synthesis of philosophical and classical concepts allows for a more informed perspective about *theoria* as a historical practice and concept.

In this regard, the work acknowledges a debt to the scholarship on *theoria* from classical studies as well as from that in ancient philosophy, as the former proves pivotal to establishing the possibility that *theoria* is not an ambiguous concept, but one with interrelated senses. Specific mention should be given in this regard to those classicists whose research on traditional *theoria* proved indispensable including Matthew Dillon (1997), Jas Elsner (with Ian Rutherford 2005), Simon Goldhill (1996), James Ker (2000), Andrea Nightingale (2001, 2004, 2005), and Ian

Rutherford (1995, 1998, 2000, 2013) to mention a few central figures. The present study is especially indebted to the work of two scholars, Andrea Nightingale's monograph, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy:* Theoria *in its Cultural Context* (2004), and Ian Rutherford's study, *State Pilgrims and Sacred Observers in Ancient Greece: A Study of* Theoria *and* Theoroi (2013). Nightingale's monograph on the cultural context of *theoria* added substantially to understanding the relation of traditional *theoria* to philosophical *theoria*, and Rutherford's work supplies the historical scope and scholarly detail necessary to understanding the history and weight of traditional *theoria*. Despite the wealth of resources afforded by these scholars, their work left some space for further research on *theoria* from a philosophical perspective. A strength of Nightingale's work concerns the focus on Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of *theoria* placed against the historical and cultural background of traditional *theoria*, and in this regard, the present work builds on her study. However, she offers some conclusions about Aristotelian *theoria* that are, to my mind, inadequately supported, and so fail to reflect the complexity of his position, with the fortunate result that it affords scholars the space for more comment. In a similar way, Rutherford's work sets traditional *theoria* in its historical scope, detailing evidence from the eighth century BCE to the second and third centuries CE in Hellenistic and Roman forms of *theoria*, including a wealth of data about its history, geography, and ethnography, but offers only a slim chapter on the intersection of *theoria* and philosophy, which allows some conceptual space for the present study.

As well, a work about philosophical *theoria* owes a debt to scholars in ancient philosophy who have contributed fine work on Aristotelian and Platonic *theoria*. While this group contains too many to list individually, some mention could be made of those whose work aided the research, such as Rachel Barney (2010), Myles Burnyeat (1999), Richard Kraut (1997), Gabriel Richardson Lear (2004, 2014), David Roochnik (2009), Gregory Vlastos (1997), and Matthew Walker (2010, 2018).[5] In the initial stages of research, Roochnik's observation about the narrow scope in the scholarship on Aristotelian *theoria* proved efficient in opening my research into the *theor/ia/eo* family of terms.[6] Gabriel Lear's work linking intellectual

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[5] Other scholars writing on Aristotle's account of *theoria* influenced my thinking, including Charles (1999, 2014), Cooper (1986), Dahl (2011), Kraut (1995), Nussbaum (1990), Patzig (1979), and Rorty (1980).

[6] Roochnik comments on the lack of attention to *theoria/theoro* in Aristotle's works apart from its consideration in his conception of happiness (Roochnik 2009, 80–81).

theoria with moral virtue alerted me to the link between contemplative and practical faculties, while Walker's monograph turned my attention to the practical effects of philosophical *theoria*. With regard to Plato scholarship, works by Burnyeat (1999) and Barney (2010) on ring composition in Plato aided my postulation of the ring form as a corollary to traditional *theoria* within specific dialogues while those by Kraut (1997) and Vlastos (1997) on the results of Platonic *theoria* on moral character provided a critical lens with which to assess the value attached to the activity.

I.2   The Interdisciplinary Approach, Synopsis of Chapters

Since the problem about the univocity of *theoria* arises from considering evidence from classical studies and ancient philosophy, it is only fitting that the solution to the problem be sought from consulting both disciplines. As a first step to solving this puzzle, we postulated a single, generic element that underlies both the traditional and philosophical notions. This move is supported, first of all, by the etymological connections among the *theor/ia/eo* family of terms, specifically, in noting that the root *theor/* signifies perception or observation, and second, by similarities arising across the *theor/* family of terms from the central literary and philosophical texts. The interdisciplinary approach, combining evidence from both classical studies and philosophy, is motivated primarily by the need to understand the cultural ground from which the accounts of *theoria* by Plato and Aristotle spring which is accomplished by situating the philosophical accounts in context of the earlier practice of *theoria*. As well as placing the philosophical accounts against traditional *theoria*, the present study allows greater sustained critical depth on the accounts of *theoria* by Plato and Aristotle than most current scholarship affords. Working toward the end of enlarging the present philosophical discussion of *theoria*, the initial chapters give an overview of traditional *theoria* and thus provide a comparative basis for the accounts of *theoria* in Plato and Aristotle. By situating their theories in relation to traditional *theoria*, we are able to reach certain novel conclusions about *theoria* at two levels. First, from a broad, comparative level, we see that relating Platonic and Aristotelian *theoria* to traditional *theoria* provides a useful background against which to evaluate the nature, objects, and value of philosophical *theoria*. Second, from a narrower perspective, it becomes evident that Plato's account in particular bears a strong tie to the traditional practice such that specific, perhaps overlooked, features take on pivotal

roles in it.[7] Again, at the narrower level, we find that Aristotle's under-standing of *theoria* as an activity of *nous* coincides with that of Plato, while disagreeing with him about the negative value of traditional *theoria*. Lastly, the wider perspective on *theoria* enables the re-conception of the dominant uses of *theoria* as comprising a single entity, albeit one with loosely connected features. We may take some of these loosely related but central features to include visual experience, the object of vision being divine or highly significant, the ideas of circular motion, and of traveling for a religious purpose. As will be developed, these features are characteristic of traditional *theoria*, and also suggestive of philosophical, especially Platonic, *theoria*, for which one may discern close affinities in the notions of visual experience of the divine, undertaking a journey with a spiritual aim, and circularity. The continuity of certain social and political features that belong to traditional *theoria*, such as its utility in expanding shared cultural values, is less obvious with Plato's and Aristotle's accounts at first glance, but in fact may be evident in some dialogues, like *Laws* (cf. Chapter 3).

Having suggested the potential gains to be won by taking a broader perspective in specific chapters, let us turn to a brief synopsis of the chapters. As we have noted, finding the interrelations between philosoph-ical and traditional *theoria* requires a general sketch of the traditional practice which is provided in Chapter 1. In addition to discussing what activities comprise traditional *theoria* – giving precedence to *theoria* as festival-attendance – the chapter introduces the family of terms relating to *theoria*, referenced as the *theor/ia/eo* class of terms, and the notion of *theoria* as philosophical thinking. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed account of the traditional uses in Classical writers, including Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Euripides, and some brief mention of Plato's employment as well. Overall, the two dominant, conjoined features mentioned by writers about the traditional use consist in traveling to a site for the sake of observing something sacred, or highly significant; these interconnected features remain, although in an attenuated sense, through the philosophical development of the notion. Chapter 3 gives a close study of Plato's treatment of both kinds of *theoria*, having the wider framework provided by an overview of traditional *theoria* in hand. To begin, we find that Plato stands at a crossroads between the older, traditional idea of *theoria* and something entirely new, his re-conception of *theoria* as abstract

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[7] For example, the feature of circularity implicit in traditional *theoria* is employed by Plato as ring form in certain dialogues, as developed in Ch. 3, sec. 3.2, below.

thinking. Yet Plato often pulls both ideas of *theoria* together, as when he makes use of the idea of traditional *theoria* as the dramatic contrast to his notion of *theoria* as abstract thinking. In one example from *Republic* V, Socrates effectively redefines the activity of *theoria* by framing the search as one not concerned with observing spectacular sights and sounds of festivals, but apprehending intelligible objects; he further clarifies that the philosopher, not festival-delegate, is a truth-seeker (cf. *Rep.* 475d–e, 476b–d).[8] Other dialogues (e.g., *Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium, Laws*) reflect an interest in using traditional *theoria* as a contrast to philosophical *theoria*, and some have the further purpose of constructing ring compositions in so doing. These select dialogues, in exhibiting a ring form, point to a further element relating to traditional *theoria*, that of circular motion.

A slight digression for clarification may be useful in relation to the connection of traditional *theoria* to the idea of circular motion. As a way to introduce the feature, we mention the use of an analogy some classicists suggest between traditional *theoria* and pilgrimage: in both, it is claimed, we find the idea of tracing a circular motion.[9] The suggestion may not be obvious; let us set aside for the moment a more evident common feature, namely, traveling for a religious end, and simply consider the motional feature.[10] In the latter regard, we assume that pilgrimage involves moving away from a starting point, one's home city, and returning to one's starting point; in this regard, it reflects a circular motion. The possible objection that the figure traced in such travel is bi-directional – moving from a starting point to a mid-point and moving back along the same path – misconstrues the nature of the return. For, as discussed in Chapter 2, the travel is conceived as passing through a mid-point and following a new path back to the initial starting point. So, in pilgrimage travel, the pilgrim leaves one site, and returns, having had some significant experience that has changed the person; in this sense, the route homeward is, at least figuratively, a new path, not a repetition of the outward path. So, if pilgrimage is accepted as an analogy, the traveling in traditional *theoria* is not properly conceived as a simple, bi-directional motion (e.g., moving from A to B, and from B back to A), but as involving a kind of circular

[8] We track Plato's use by way of the employment of the *theor/ia/eo* family of terms, including *theaomai*, a term he prefers both for visual perception and for apprehension of intelligible forms.
[9] Different aspects of the comparison are considered in Dillon (1997), Nightingale (2004), and Rutherford (2013, 12–14), for example.
[10] We note that critical attention of the analogy concerns the extent to which having a religious end is an invariant, or essential, feature of traditional *theoria*, on which see Scullion (2005).

motion. In more detail, it should be noted that Chapter 3 examines Plato's dialogues in relation to this feature: I differentiate it in kinds including spatial, psychological, epistemic, and cosmic, some having reference to philosophical *theoria.* For example, we find the notion of epistemic circular motion in *Rep*. VII, where we find a theoretical ascent and descent proposed in the cave analogy.[11] As well, Plato employs the ideas of rotation and of axial motion with regard to the soul and noetic thinking in various passages, including *Rep*. VII, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus* (discussed in Chapter 3).

Chapter 4 is devoted to Aristotle's account of *theoria* which retains Plato's technical understanding of *theoria* considered as philosophical intellection. Broadly speaking, we see the continuity between Plato and Aristotle on the nature of philosophical *theoria*, namely, that the activity consists in the apprehension of the highest objects, namely, forms. For example, in *EN* X 7–8, Aristotle describes *theoria* as the highest activity of the highest faculty, describing it as complete, continuous, pleasant and apprehending the highest objects (cf. *EN* 1177a15–b25), echoing the account from *Symp*. 211a–212a. Yet, while Aristotle retains the essential features of Plato's *theoria*, he departs from him in not once using traditional *theoria* to define his own account.[12] There are other, perhaps more substantial areas of difference between Aristotelian and Platonic *theoria*, such as metaphysical differences about the nature of objects apprehended, and the value accorded to *theoria* that receive extended consideration in individual chapters at the end of this work. As well, Chapters 5 and 6 include the broader perspective as I have adopted from the outset, considering the nature of the objects and the value given to *theoria*, both of the traditional and the philosophical kind.

Stated in more detail, Chapter 5 provides a comparative study of the traditional, Platonic, and Aristotelian conceptions of objects apprehended by *theoria*, reaching a general conclusion that despite some differences, all three accounts hold that *theoria* depends on the apprehension of a perceptible object that stimulates the cognitive faculty.[13] Regarding specifically

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[11] For discussion of the element of circular motion in Plato, see Ch. 3, sec. 3.2, below.

[12] Two reasons suggest themselves, one concerning compositional differences such as dramatic framing, style, and irony present in Plato, absent in Aristotle, the other, philosophical differences such that Plato proceeds by illustration and analogy whereas Aristotle prefers analytical reasoning; also see below fn. 16, and Ch. 4, sec. 4.2.

[13] Both traditional and philosophical *theoria* depend on visual perception of something significant that leads to higher thought, often by means of memory; the defense of this claim relies on discussion in subsequent chapters, especially Ch. 5.

philosophical *theoria*, we may generalize in concluding that for both Plato and Aristotle the objects of the activity involve forms, with the addition that some discussion is needed concerning the metaphysical distinction between Aristotelian and Platonic objects.[14] Like the previous chapter, Chapter 6 takes a broader perspective by which to examine the three views about the value of *theoria*, including whether the activity is deemed valuable for its own sake, for an instrumental end, or for a combination of these reasons. In general, the chapter finds that within traditional *theoria*, the activity primarily appears to have instrumental value in that: (i) as festival-attendance involving an official delegate, the city seeks certain results through the actions of its representative; (ii) as sanctuary-visitation, typically, the visitor seeks a cure or some kind of help from the priest or the oracle.[15] In contrast, when we turn to Plato's and Aristotle's comments on *theoria*, we find the preponderance of its value residing in the activity itself, in thinking and knowing the forms, and secondary value in its benefits, although we add some qualifications to these findings in our later discussion. So, Aristotle, echoing Plato, praises philosophical *theoria* in *EN* X 7 as the highest activity, but both also seem to suggest that such *theoria* gives rise to practical knowledge. Here we may consider Plato's view that possessing theoretical knowledge about the just and the good is needed for politics (cf. *Rep.* 519c–520e) as suggesting the instrumental value of *theoria*, a view with which Aristotle also seems to concur (cf. *EN* 1177b23–25, 1178a1–8).

In general, Chapters 1 and 2 follow a method similar to Aristotle in *Topics* II 15 where he attempts to discern various meanings associated with the use of a common term, and then, to look for lines of similarity or difference among them; in this case, the focus is on the *theor/eo/ia* family of terms. The initial, discriminating stage comprises one of three levels in the work by analyzing what we consider the primary uses of *theoria* – as festival-attendance, sanctuary-visitation, and abstract thinking – across several thinkers. After discriminating the various uses, we attempt to extract the central elements they share to construct a generic idea of *theoria* that runs through them. Armed with this general notion, we move to the second stage at which we specifically examine Plato's contribution to the concept of *theoria* in representative dialogues, focusing on the structural

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[14] I use lower-case punctuation generally, i.e., "form" instead of "Form" (also, Grube and Reeve 1992), unless the context requires that a Platonic object, specifically, is signified.

[15] Visitors to healing sanctuaries and oracles alike share the aim of seeking answers to specific problems (Dillon 1997, Ch. 3).

and philosophical implications of his uses. While Plato employs the notion of *theoria* as festival-attendance, he focuses on *theoria* as intellectual activity, redefining the latter kind as philosophical thinking which he identifies with the activity of the philosopher apprehending truth.

Still remaining at the second stage, we find that Aristotle's account retains Plato's technical understanding of *theoria* as the contemplation of essences but offers a refinement of that theory by describing the activity of *theoria* in detail in *EN* X 7–8. Aristotle's account differs from that of Plato in its lack of connection to traditional *theoria*: instead of considering festival-attendance as a foil for his own conception, Aristotle fixes his gaze on the precise notion, detailing the properties of *theoria*, such as being the highest, most complete, continuous, and pleasant of human activities.[16] In a sense, Aristotle continues the direction that Plato initiates with his critical stance toward traditional *theoria*, and his account of *theoria* as a "complete activity" (*energeia teleia*) finalizes some features implicit in Plato's account. The third stage departs from close scrutiny of the philosophers' accounts by returning to central issues arising from the three primary uses, such as, as we have mentioned, the objects each kind of *theoria* apprehends and the value attached to each kind. These questions arise in relation to all kinds, and, by taking a more comprehensive perspective, it is possible to find some similarities among them. For example, if we assume for the moment that any type of *theoria* depends, at least partly, on the activity of looking at something, the activity presupposes specific objects of observation. Yet, it is evident that the objects of *theoria* are not identical in species across kinds, and in this regard, *theoria* has different objects relative to kind. It suffices to say that whereas the objects of traditional *theoria* (namely, as festival-attendance) comprise a subclass of artifacts, including religious statues, those of philosophical *theoria* constitute another kind, namely, intelligible objects. The second question about *theoria* concerns its end, the reason for which traditional and philosophical *theoria* are chosen and pursued, that necessitates taking a broad perspective on the topic so that we may compare how each kind of *theoria* is valued. Consequently, the final two chapters revert to the comparative perspective on *theoria* with which the study begins.

It may be helpful to note, at this point, that the book does not possess an overall linear structure of argument. Considered as a whole, the chapters may be considered as tracing a pattern similar to a "pedimental"

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[16] Aristotle is not unaware of traditional *theoria*, however, referring to the *architheoros*, or leader of the embassy, in *EN* IV 2 in relation to the virtue of *megaloprepeia* (cf. *EN* 1122a22–25).