

Julie K. Ward. *Searching for the Divine in Plato and Aristotle: Philosophical Theoria and Traditional Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. v, 208. € 99.99 ISBN 978-1-316-51941-7.

[Penultimate draft—forthcoming in *Classical World*]

In this book, Julie K. Ward examines the concept of *theoria* within both philosophical and what she terms as ‘traditional’ frameworks. Her primary objective is to enhance the ongoing philosophical discussion surrounding Plato and Aristotle’s accounts of *theoria* by situating them within the context of the earlier practice of traditional *theoria*. By understanding the cultural ground from which these philosophical accounts spring, Ward rightly asserts that her work enables a deeper and more sustained critical analysis of both philosophers’ theories than what is found in current scholarship.

The book features a well-structured introduction followed by six chapters and a concluding section summarizing the key points of the debate. Chapter 1 discusses the activities that comprise traditional *theoria*, giving precedence to *theoria* as festival attendance. It also introduces the family of terms relating to *theoria* and the notion of *theoria* as philosophical thinking. Chapter 2 explores the traditional usage of *theoria* in greater depth, referring to writers such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Euripides, and briefly, Plato. This examination reveals that the traditional concept of *theoria* involves traveling to festivals and shrines to observe something sacred or highly significant, and these features persist through the philosophical development of the notion.

Chapter 3 examines Plato’s treatment of both traditional and philosophical *theoria*. Ward contends that Plato stands at a crossroad between the traditional idea of *theoria* and his conception of it as abstract thinking. She insightfully demonstrates how Plato effectively contrasts traditional

theoria with philosophical thinking in several dialogues, including the *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Crito*, and *Laws*. Chapter 4 focuses on Aristotle's perspective. Ward argues that Aristotle preserves Plato's understanding of *theoria* as philosophical intellection, an activity involving the apprehension of forms, but unlike Plato, does not use traditional *theoria* to define his account. In this chapter, to elucidate the leisurely nature of theoretical activity in Aristotle's philosophy, Ward contrasts theoretical activity, valued for its intrinsic worth, with activities aimed at external ends. She highlights practical virtues related to political and military endeavors that aim at outcomes beyond the activities themselves (93-97). While her discussion illuminates the leisurely nature of theoretical activity through this contrast, there remains some ambiguity regarding Ward's stance on the purported instrumental value of moral virtue. Specifically, her analysis lacks a clear explanation of whether Aristotle believes moral virtue holds solely instrumental value.

Chapter 5 offers a comparative study of the traditional and philosophical conceptions of the objects of *theoria*. Ward demonstrates that, despite some differences, both perspectives maintain that *theoria* relies on the apprehension of a perceptible object that stimulates the cognitive faculty.

Chapter 6 examines the value attributed to the activity of *theoria*, considering whether it is valued for its own sake, for an instrumental end, or for a combination of these reasons. Ward argues that in traditional *theoria*, activities like festival attendance and sanctuary visitation primarily have instrumental value. In contrast, for Plato and Aristotle, the value of *theoria* primarily lies in the activity itself, with secondary practical or political benefits. Her claim regarding Aristotle is particularly noteworthy as she challenges the prevailing scholarship that simplifies Aristotle's position, suggesting that Aristotle's evaluation of *theoria* depends entirely on its uselessness. Ward aligns Aristotle with Plato, asserting that both philosophers see philosophical *theoria* as having both intrinsic and instrumental value. Ward's discussion of Aristotle, however, remains brief and relies heavily on metaphorical language to illustrate how contemplative *nous* or *theoria* provides practical benefits. These features leave her explanation somewhat vague and convoluted. Phrases like

“beneficial effects supervene on the activity of *theoria*” (98) and “good results may flow from it” (98) and so on lack the clarity expected of her unique contribution.

Ward employs an interdisciplinary approach that draws upon evidence from both classical studies and philosophy. Throughout, she readily acknowledges and extensively references the works of Andrea Nightingale and Ian Rutherford, highlighting the substantial influence of their ideas in classical literature. Furthermore, Ward acknowledges the noteworthy contributions of scholars in ancient philosophy, notably John Burnet, Gabriel R. Lear, Rachel Barney, Matthew Walker, and others, emphasizing their significance in shaping her research.

Overall, Ward does commendable work by offering engaging analyses of philosophical *theoria* in Plato and Aristotle within the cultural context in which philosophical *theoria* emerges. She effectively divides her work, with half dedicated to analysing traditional *theoria* through engagement with classical literature, and the other half devoted to ancient philosophy. Consequently, both students and scholars interested in classical studies, as well as those interested in philosophy, can find value in this book. Specifically, readers already acquainted with the literature to which Ward acknowledges significant indebtedness might find chapters 4, focusing on Aristotle’s conception of *theoria*, and chapter 6, delving into the value of *theoria*, particularly insightful, as Ward’s original contributions seem to be more manifest in those chapters.

Nevim Borçin

Department of Philosophy
Central European University
Quellenstraße 51, 1100
Vienna, Austria