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The notion of θεωρία and the advocacy of the contemplative life have often been considered as central and specific to Greek philosophy, and have thus received quite a great deal of attention. For a very long time, it has been however heavily biased in favor of Plato and Aristotle. Many philosophers have taken their views about contemplation as more or less representative of the views of Greek philosophy as a whole, or even of ‘the Greeks’ or ‘the Ancients’ about theory and practice, as if no other philosophical position had been voiced on this topic in Antiquity.\(^1\) As for historians of Ancient philosophy, during the last fifty years, they have focused on Plato and, above all, Aristotle to the point that it seems that θεωρία and the contemplative life have no history outside the Republic and the last chapters of the Nicomachean Ethics.\(^2\)

Although this focus might be a by-product of academic fashion, it testifies also to a belief in the lack of significant theoretical ambitions in Ancient philosophy after Plato and Aristotle. Hans Blumenberg aptly spelled out this belief in his Hauptwerk, Die Legitimität der Neuzeit.\(^3\) According to his analysis, the theoretical curiosity defining philosophy for the Presocratics, Plato and Aristotle was drastically limited by Hellenistic philosophers through a combination of metaphysical dogmas about the cosmos and scepticism about knowledge of nature. Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics offered an essentially therapeutic philosophy directed chiefly against theoretical

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\(^1\) See for example Pieper (1952), despite his apt mention of Antisthenes; Arendt (1958) ch. 1, who distinguishes only between the Greeks and the Romans; Heidegger (1977) or Rorty (1979) 11, 38–39.

\(^2\) In the huge bibliography on θεωρία and the theoretical life in Plato and Aristotle, see for example Festugière (1936); Adkins (1978); Gigon (1987); Cooper (1987); Gastaldi (2003); Lisi (2004); Richardson Lear (2004) and Nightingale (2004).

\(^3\) Blumenberg (1985) 243–325.
investigation, which was held to be useless and even damaging for man in his search for happiness. As for Platonists (Cicero, Philo, Apuleius or Plotinus), Blumenberg approaches them mainly, if not only, as preparing the Christian censure of curiositas. This view of Hellenistic and Imperial philosophy seems quite wrong to us, and, although it cannot be discussed in detail here, it is a chief overall purpose of this volume to show that θεωρία and the theoretical life survived after Aristotle and were the objects of thorough debates, powerful arguments and original applications from Theophrastus to the end of Antiquity.

Ours is obviously not the first study on the post-classical history of θεωρία, but the previous attempts have been either vast overviews, which could not do justice to the complexity of the various post-classical philosophers’ positions, or were undermined by too loose a definition of their topic. For example, Alberto Grilli’s Il problema della vita contemplativa nel mondo greco-romano, which covers the Hellenistic and early Imperial age, is in fact concerned with the peaceful life away from politics and gives pride of place to εὐθυμία, more than to θεωρία proper. Other studies about the Stoics simply assimilate their claim that ethics is dependent upon physics to an advocacy of contemplation. As Michael Erler shows in his paper about Epicurus in this volume, more attention should be paid to specific uses of the notion of θεωρία by each author, to the practical consequences of the various ways of life and to critical engagements with Plato or Aristotle. Shifting the attention from Plato and Aristotle to their successors does not entail ignoring Plato and Aristotle but, on the contrary, taking stock of their profound influence.

This volume is in fact less concerned with the post-classical debate about ways of life as such than with the appropriation, criticism and transformation of Plato’s and Aristotle’s positions about θεωρία and the contemplative life from Theophrastus onwards. This is only natural in a volume arising from a conference, the fifth of the Diatribai di Gargnano, which was part of a series devoted to the history of Platonism from the early Hellenistic age to Late Antiquity. But there are also strong historical and philosophical reasons to this focus.

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See for example Festugière (1949); Boll (1950); Snell (1951); Redlow (1966); Vogl (2002). Joly (1956) is also useful, but devotes only 60 pages (out of 194) to post-aristotelian authors. See the critical remarks by Festugière (1971) 249 and Boyancé (1959).

Forschner (2002). As noted by Festugière (1949) 75–76, arguing about or from the order of the cosmos and contemplating it are two different things. Although both are present and connected in Stoicism, they should be distinguished.