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**Title:** Aristotle on Melancholia: The Discovery of Bipolar Depression

**Abstract**

Since Hippocrates, melancholia has been considered long-lasting depression. Aristotle's account, however, differs from this tradition. Instead of focusing on despondency, he mentions episodes of volatility/excitability that are like the manias that people with bipolar depression experience. Moreover, Aristotle's hylomorphic theory holds that, because we are form and matter composites, the psychological and physiological effects of a disease like melancholia are both important. Bipolar depression is also best managed by a conjunction of psychological and physiological approaches. All this shows that the melancholia Aristotle described was actually bipolar depression. In section 1, I will explain both the Hippocratic and Aristotelian accounts of melancholia. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, three revealing points are made about melancholia. First, it involves vehemence and excessive desires. Second, it is a species of *akrasia* (lack of self-control). Third, it can arise from an unfortunate bodily constitution. More evidence that Aristotle is describing bipolar depression comes from the author of *Problems*. They tell us that Heracles, Ajax, and Bellerophon are all melancholic. Each of their stories subsist of a high period followed by a low period, just like bipolar depression. In section 2, I will show that Aristotle's hylomorphism commits him to the view that treating both the melancholic's body and soul are what makes for successful management of symptoms. Looking to *On the Soul*, we can see that medication or therapy alone are not sufficient to manage melancholia. Instead, because we are form and matter composites, managing melancholia will involve both approaches. Indeed, this is what the current research on bipolar depression shows. I conclude by responding to a further question one might have. We now recognize three kinds of disorders subsumed under the term 'bipolar depression.' I argue that the types of bipolar depression are too similar for Aristotle to have been referring to just one.

**Keywords:** Aristotle, melancholia, bipolar depression, hylomorphism

**Bio**

Cara Rei Cummings received her PhD in philosophy from the Johns Hopkins University in May 2022 and now works as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Johns Hopkins University Office of Undergraduate Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity. Her area of specialization is ancient Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle. Currently, her research is focused on providing a better understanding of Aristotle's moral psychology, e.g., regarding both the *megalopsuchos* (magnanimous person) and the *akratēs* (person lacking self-control). She can be reached at ccummi15@jhu.edu.