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1

The Saying of Things

> The whole vast scheme of things seems to be engaged in expressing what it is.
>
> Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge, *The Realm of Mind*[1]

Human speech is rooted in our inchoate encounters with things. It grows in response to their primordial language, nourished by our attempts to come to terms with the world into which we are born. If, as Hannah Arendt claims, action corresponds to the human condition of natality insofar as it names the capacity to begin something new, speech must be heard to belong to a world of action in which new possibilities open as we are addressed by a language always operative in our encounters with things.[2] Human speaking emerges in and through acts of response to the saying of things.

If human speaking is intimately bound up with action in the manner Arendt so powerfully suggests, it is because the speech acts that give rise to human speaking are themselves predicated on an ability to respond to things in ways that do justice to the paradoxical ways they show themselves, at once lending themselves to and eluding

[1] Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge, *The Realm of Mind: An Essay in Metaphysics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 62.
[2] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

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human articulation. However insightful, Arendt's analysis of the human conditions of action and speech does not go far enough. By grounding speech in "the fact of distinctness" and "the actualization of the human condition of plurality," she registers only the human side of the dialogue, in effect muting the eloquence of things. Distinguishing first between otherness, which belongs to everything that is, and distinctness, which names the capacity to exhibit variation endemic to organic life, Arendt goes on to emphasize the peculiar being of human-being:

> But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something – thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.[3]

Yet this taxonomy mutes the unicity of things, dampening the extent to which even inanimate things communicate distinction and distinguish themselves. The term 'unicity' is designed to point, *mutatis mutandis*, to that in things which corresponds to what Arendt identifies as the human condition of uniqueness. If 'otherness' names the abstract difference that marks the sheer multiplicity of things,[4] 'unicity' names the concrete phenomenon of singularity that announces itself in each ontological encounter. Human uniqueness as a condition for the possibility of human speech and action is always already funded and made possible by an irreducible ontological unicity that belongs to the nature of things.[5] Here 'ontology' must be heard in a strict sense, for it articulates the very λόγοι of the ὄντα, the gathering of beings in a communicative transaction in which the beings involved express themselves as they are even as

[3] Ibid., 176.
[4] Ibid.
[5] To lend more determination to the term 'unicity,' it is perhaps helpful to draw it into relation with Peirce's category of "Firstness," which he defines in a letter to Lady Welby this way: "Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else." Charles S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8:328.

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they are transformed in and by their encounters with one another. If human uniqueness is an echo of the ontological unicity that makes itself felt in such encounters, human articulation, anthropology, would then need to be heard as bound up with and held accountable by the ongoing and abundant dialogue of things.

Although all human speaking participates in this dialogue, the dialogue itself belongs to the nature of things. Heraclitus, who remained in continuous dialogue with nature, writes:

> This λόγος holds always, but humans are not quick to apprehend [ἀξύνετοι] it, both before hearing it and once they have first heard it. For although all things happen according to the λόγος, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience the sort of words and deeds I describe according to nature, distinguishing each and declaring [φράζων] how it is.[6]

This indictment of the human capacity to listen attentively to the λόγος at work in nature and to apprehend what is experienced there remains today a provocative challenge to us, we who live in an era often oblivious to the λόγος.

As technology allows us to penetrate ever deeper into the nature of things, nature itself becomes ever more unfamiliar. Our expanding ability to manipulate nature for our own purposes threatens to annihilate the symbiotic relation to the λόγος of things that has sustained the human species since our most distant ancestors first became capable of language. Human action itself has been transformed by its newfound technological supremacy. For the first time in its history, human action has the power to compromise the very ecosystem that sustains life. With this increased power comes increased responsibility.[7] Yet responsibility as an ethical imperative capable of animating action is itself ultimately rooted in the *ontological* ability to respond attentively to the λόγος of things. Here too technology has a

6 Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Zurich: Weidmann, 1996), 150, fr. 1.

7 Jonas has articulated how the extended scope of human action transforms the nature of action itself and moves the question of responsibility to the "center of the ethical stage." The axiom of the theory of responsibility is that "responsibility is a correlate of power and must be commensurate with the latter's scope and that of its exercise." See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), x.

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role to play, for as it transforms human action, it also opens new possibilities for human communication. If, however, the new modes of communication opened by technology are to cultivate communities of justice, they must learn to attend to the λόγος of things. Heraclitus thus speaks directly to us when he talks of those who "are at odds with the λόγος with which above all they are continuously conversing [διηνεκῶς ὁμιλοῦσι], with that which manages the whole [τῶι τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι], and the things they encounter every day; these appear foreign [ξένα] to them."[8] To be at odds with the λόγος in this way is symptomatic of a certain homelessness.[9]

If this homelessness is a function of the inability to attend to and live with the λόγος with which we are in a continuous and sustaining dialogue, a sort of homecoming is possible if we learn anew the language of things. Heraclitus himself hints at how to begin such an endeavor when he suggests, "A lifetime is a child playing . . . the kingdom belongs to a child."[10] To observe a child as she feels her way into the world is to be reminded of those initial encounters in which things announce their irreducible unicity and provoke the playful response that is the soil in which human language takes root and begins to grow. If, however, human language is not to be uprooted by its own ingenious devices, it will need to return again and again to the site of its birth: the ontological encounter with the things of nature. It will need to recapture something of that childlike sense of wonder so long associated with philosophy.

At the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle speaks of the wonder of philosophy:

For it is through wondering that human-beings both now and at first began to philosophize, wondering first about the strange things close at hand, and

[8] Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 167, fr. 72.

[9] Heraclitus evokes this sense of homelessness with the words ξένα, strange or foreign; ὁμιλεῖν, to be together with, to come or live together, to live in familiarity with or to be conversant with; and διοικεῖν, which means to manage, direct, or conduct, but in which the Greek οἶκος – house, abode, dwelling – continues to sound, as can be heard more acutely in the verb's substantive manifestation: διοίκησις, which means housekeeping. See ξένα, n.; ὁμιλεῖν, v.; διοικεῖν, v.; οἶκος, n., in George Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

[10] Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 162, fr. 52.

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then little by little in this way devotedly exerting themselves [προϊόντες] and coming to impasses about greater things, such as about the attributes of the moon and things pertaining to the sun and the stars and the coming-into-being of the whole.[11]

In his philosophical practice, Aristotle never loses this childlike sense of wonder, even as he exerts himself with devotion to the things of nature. This passage, with its recognition of the "strange things close at hand" and its intimation of that desire which stretches out toward the coming-into-being of the whole, might be heard as a kind of response to the Heraclitean indictment of humanity as deaf to the λόγος of the things encountered in everyday experience. And a second passage too might be heard as an indication of a way of proceeding, a μέθοδος, in the wake of the wonder evoked by the appearance of things strange. Again as if responding to the Heraclitean insistence that human-beings are like the inexperienced [ἀπείροισιν], Aristotle writes:

Inexperience [ἡ ἀπειρία] is responsible for a weakening of the power to comprehend the things agreed upon [τὰ ὁμολογούμενα συνορᾶν]. Hence those who dwell in more intimate association with the things of nature [ἐνῳκήκασι μᾶλλον ἐν τοῖς φυσικοῖς] are more able to lay down the sorts of principles that admit of a wide and coherent development; while those unobservant of the existing things [ἀθεώρητοι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὄντες] because of long discussions more easily show themselves as people of narrow views.[12]

Aristotle responds to the Heraclitean diagnosis of homelessness with a prescription for a sort of homecoming that enjoins a devoted commitment "to dwell in more intimate association with the things of nature" and a diligent willingness to ground our words in our encounters with things. To return home in this way, however, is not to deny that dimension of exile that also conditions the human relation to nature.

[11] Aristotle, *Aristotelis Metaphysica* (henceforth *Meta.*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), I.2, 982b11–17.

[12] *On Generation and Corruption* I.2, 316a5–10. This translation owes much to H. H. Joachim's, found in Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vols. 1 and 2, Bollingen Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:515.

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We inhabit a natural world that exhibits a rich diversity that forever retains a certain strangeness. This sense of strangeness, this feeling of homelessness, is itself rooted in the recalcitrant unicity of things that invites dialogical engagement and lends itself to articulation without being exhausted by it. If the appearing of things strange provokes the wonder with which philosophy begins, philosophy's assiduous attempts to enter into dialogue with the things it encounters must always be tempered by a deep appreciation for the inexhaustible unicity of things that brings it up against the limits of its own capacities of comprehension. Such limits, however, are themselves announced by and in the saying of things.

A PERIPATETIC METHODOLOGY

Aristotle's thinking, animated by a desire to "comprehend the things agreed upon" and to "lay down the sorts of principles that admit of a wide and coherent development," never ceases to attend to the many ways beings are said. Yet Aristotle has no philosophy of language, no sustained systematic account of the nature of language and how it functions in philosophical investigation. Rather, his is a philosophy that lives in and from language, drawing life from it and allowing it to draw life to him. His thinking inhabits language; it is alive to the saying of things. Thus, Aristotle returns again and again to the many ways things are said, holding his thinking always accountable to the ways things express themselves and attending always to the things humans have said, forever listening for the echo of truth articulated there. If he has no philosophy of language, it is because his philosophical practice is guided throughout by the logic of things.

To pursue the direction of thinking Aristotle's philosophical practice embodies, it will be necessary to become rigorously *peripatetic*. If the students who followed Aristotle as he walked the paths of the Lyceum discussing issues of pressing philosophical concern were called *peripatoi*, the ones who walk, we too must cultivate an ability to follow along the paths of Aristotle's thinking as it seeks to put things into words and allow words to articulate the nature of things. The peripatetic approach is methodological in the etymological sense: it

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names a way of following along after, μετὰ-ὅδος, the λόγος of things.[13] This λόγος belongs as much to the structure of nature as to the powers that seek to discern the nature of that structure. Put differently, nature expresses itself according to a λόγος that lends itself to articulation.

Yet the peripatetic methodology is no mere academic exercise in reconstructive hermeneutics; rather, it names a certain habit of thinking that belongs to a particular way of being toward things. *The peripatetic methodology is legomenology.* The things said, τὰ λεγόμενα, open a way into the nature of things; and it is the nature of things to express themselves. To become peripatetic, then, is to attend carefully to the ways things are said and to strive to respond to the saying of things in ways that do justice to what has been said. The name for this habit of thinking rooted in a way of being toward things is ontological response-ability. The peripatetic methodology, as a legomenology, is the philosophical practice of ontological response-ability oriented by and attentive to the saying of things. Ontological response-ability is at play wherever the expression of things opens itself to articulation. The site of the ontological encounter between

[13] The peripatetic methodology differs from that of developmentalism, which remains limited for two fundamental reasons. First, developmentalism has come to be oriented by an overriding concern for systematic consistency intent on purging Aristotelian thought of contradiction. Yet the appearing of contradiction is for Aristotle the very sort of diction that announces the presence of a matter for thinking. Aristotle attends to such dictions carefully, not as intractable contradictories, one side of which must be destroyed to allow the other to reign, but as impasses to be navigated, oriented always by the beacon of the appearing of things. Second, the developmentalist approach is often too dependent on a set of biographical details – about Plato's influence on Aristotle, his time away from Athens, what was written "early" and what "late," etc. – that are forever controversial and ultimately unreliable. Nevertheless, the great insight of the developmental approach articulated by Werner Jaeger is the recognition that Aristotle's texts give voice to a thinking that "lives and develops," to use the phrase Jaeger borrows from Goethe. See Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. Richard Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 4. The peripatetic methodology affirms the developmentalist recognition that the Aristotelian corpus was not born spontaneously and complete but rather grew over time as Aristotle lived in intimate association with the phenomena of nature and, indeed, the λόγοι of friends. See Christopher P. Long, *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy*, SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 14.

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expression and articulation has historically been identified as the locus of the happening of truth.

Here, however, the site of the happening of truth must be rethought in terms of ontological justice. Such a shift from the question of truth to that of justice is anticipated but not fully developed by Martin Heidegger in his 1925–6 lecture course entitled *Logic: The Question Concerning Truth*. There Heidegger reverses the traditional understanding of truth as a property of judgments, insisting rather, "The statement is not that in which truth first becomes possible, but reversed; the statement is first possible in the truth, insofar as one has seen the phenomenon that the Greeks meant with truth and that Aristotle grasped with conceptual sharpness for the first time."[14] This reversal grows out of Heidegger's own intense engagement with the meaning of declarative saying – λόγος ἀποφαντικός – as articulated in the *De Interpretatione*. To anticipate a position that will be developed more fully in Chapter 4, Heidegger articulates the meaning of declarative saying this way: "[t]o say that which is said from the thing itself [*der Sache selbst*] so that in this speaking what is spoken about becomes visible, accessible to that which grasps."[15] When this formulation is heard together with Heidegger's determination of phenomenology toward the end of his life as "the possibility of thinking, at times changing and only thus persisting, of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought," the importance of declarative saying for phenomenology announces itself.[16] By orienting his thinking to

[14] Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, ed. Walter Biemel, vol. 21, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1976), 135. Heidegger's reversal runs counter to a received orthodoxy that locates truth in judgments. Ross, e.g., identifies the ordinary meaning of truth in Aristotle as belonging to a judgment that corresponds to reality. See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's "Metaphysics": A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 2:275. Wilpert too insists that the judgment is "the authentic carrier of the property of truth." See Paul Wilpert, "Zum Aristotelischen Wahrheitsbegriff," in *Logik und Erkenntnislehre des Aristoteles*, ed. F. P. Hager (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 117.

[15] Heidegger, *Logik*, 133.

[16] Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 14, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 101. For the English, see Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 82. In what follows, the page number of the German text of Heidegger's writings will be cited first followed by that of the English translation if available.

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the phenomenon of truth, understood here in terms of the Greek ἀλήθεια, or unconcealedness, Heidegger points to a way of saying that is phenomenological in nature: it seeks to articulate what each thing is by attending carefully to the ways the thing shows itself.

Here "thing" translates the Greek πρᾶγμα, which Heidegger thematizes in a vein that resonates with American pragmatism: for Heidegger, the πρᾶγμα is "that with which one has to deal – what is present for the concern [*Besorge*] that deals with things."[17] This formulation does justice to the rich plurivocity of Aristotle's own use of the term πρᾶγμα, which must be heard in its relation to πράττειν, to act. "Thing" in this sense retains a connection always to the world of human action even as it comes to refer to a wide diversity of things, from subjects of predication to individual beings encountered, from states of affairs or situations to the general "facts of the matter," from individual actions to the actions that make up the plot of a drama.[18] This is the robust sense of "thing" to which James explicitly appeals in laying out the meaning of pragmatism.[19]

[17] Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 17, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 14/10. For the English, see Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Kahn argues that existence, for the Greeks, belongs not to facts, propositions, and relations, but to particular things. See Charles Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'to Be' and the Concept of Being," *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966): 261. At first Kahn thematizes the lack of a "systematic distinction between fact and thing" as a "failure." He goes on, however, to suggest that this may not be a shortcoming but precisely what allows the Greeks to articulate the problem of truth and being so acutely (262).

[18] This articulation of the plurivocity of πράγματα in Aristotle draws from Pritzl's account of what he calls "Aristotle's practice of ambiguity regarding πράγματα." See Kurt Pritzl, "Being True in Aristotle's Thinking," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1999): 184. Pritzl cites examples of each of these uses of πράγματα: as subject of predication, see, e.g., *De Interpretatione* 7, 17a38; *Topics* I.8, 103b8; *On Sophistical Elenchus* 24, 179a28; as individual existing being, see *De Anima* III.8, 432a3; *Physics* II.8, 208a15; *Politics* II.9, 1280a17–19; as states of affairs or facts of the matter, see *GC* I.8, 325a18; *Physics* VII.8, 263a17; as actions, see *Nicomachean Ethics* II.3, 1105b5; IV.6, 1126b12; as related to the plot of a drama, see *Poetics* 14, 1453b2, 6 and 1450a15, a 37. The use of "things" in such a plurality of senses moves decisively beyond my own earlier, limited critique of the "logic of things" that operates in the *Categories*; see Long, *The Ethics of Ontology*, 19–29.

[19] James emphasizes the relation of πρᾶγμα to action in establishing its meaning for pragmatism when he insists that "the term is derived from the same Greek word

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If, however, Heideggerian phenomenology is fundamentally oriented by our encounters with such things, encounters that exhibit the peculiar logic of ἀλήθεια, truth as unconcealedness, American pragmatism, particularly as articulated in the work of John Dewey and John Herman Randall, emphasizes the historical, social, and communal dimensions of the truth of such πράγματα. Indeed, the pragmatism of Dewey and Randall, informed by the robust naturalism of George Santayana and Frederick Woodbridge, shares with Heideggerian phenomenology a deep appreciation for the importance of Aristotle's insistence that being announces itself in and through λόγος and that human λόγος belongs as much to being as being belongs to it. Together, these two traditions of thinking draw out Aristotle's own naturalistic phenomenology of truth, in which the truth of things is discernible to those who live in intimate communion with the things of nature. To live such intimacy involves seeking to articulate the nature of things by allowing them to speak for themselves and endeavoring to respond in ways appropriate to the things having been said.

Thus, Heidegger's reversal of the relation between the statement and truth – "The statement is not the locus of truth, but truth is the locus of the statement" – must be thought in yet more radical terms; for the site of ontological encounter is the locus of truth insofar as it evokes a response bound up with and always accountable to the ways things express themselves. The topology of truth gives way to an ecology of justice. If 'ecology' names a way of being at home with the λόγος of things and 'justice' names a way of being oriented toward what is proper to each in the context of the whole, then an 'ecology

πρᾶγμα, meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come." See William James and John J. McDermott, *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition, Including an Annotated Bibliography Updated through 1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 376. Here, in his lectures entitled *What Pragmatism Means*, James explicitly locates the source of pragmatism in Peirce's essay "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in which Peirce too emphasizes that objects are ineluctably bound up with our practical dealings with them: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." See Charles S. Peirce, Nathan Houser, and Christian J. W. Kloesel, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1:132.

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