Aristotle on the Nature of Truth

This book reconsiders the traditional correspondence theory of truth, which takes truth to be a matter of correctly representing objects. Drawing Heideggerian phenomenology into dialogue with American pragmatic naturalism, Christopher P. Long undertakes a rigorous reading of Aristotle that articulates the meaning of truth as a cooperative activity between human-beings and the natural world that is rooted in our endeavors to do justice to the nature of things.

By following a path of Aristotle's thinking that leads from our rudimentary encounters with things in perceiving through human communication to thinking, this book traces an itinerary that uncovers the nature of truth as ecological justice, and it finds the nature of justice in our attempts to articulate the truth of things.

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For

Chloe, Hannah, and Valerie

… σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίνοντας.
… *wisdom is for the ones listening to speak truth and act according to nature.*

Heraclitus, in Hermann Diels,
Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker

τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε ἅτε οὐκ οὖσι σοφοῖς ὥσπερ ὑμεῖς οἱ νέοι, ἀπέχρη δρυὸς καὶ πέρας ἀκούειν ὑπ᾽ εὐηθείας, εἰ μόνον ἀληθῆ λέγοιεν.
Back then, when they were not as wise as you young people, it was sufficient for them in simplicity to listen to an oak tree or a rock, if it should speak the truth.

Socrates to Phaedrus in Plato's
Phaedrus, Platonis Opera

… ὅμως δὲ παραλάβωμεν καὶ τοὺς πρότερον ἡμῶν εἰς ἐπίσκεψιν τῶν ὄντων ἐλθόντας καὶ φιλοσοφήσαντας περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας.
… thus, let us receive into the inquiry of beings also those who came before us, for they approached and philosophized concerning the truth.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*

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Prolegomenon

> With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.... [I]ts impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.
>
> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*[1]

The things said in this book, itself a second birth, took root in the wake of the births of my two daughters: Chloe Aliza and Hannah Aveline. The appearance of these two beginners was for me an awakening in which the world came to life in new ways as two new lives found their ways into the world. They arrived with a wonderful openness to things, indeed, with the openness of wonder. Listening at first largely by touch, they felt their way into the world. Each was in her own way receptive to the myriad expression of things. As she learned to use her hands, Chloe would slowly, determinately reach out for a toy wooden block that, once procured, released the secrets of its insistent solidity as she turned it over, pressed upon it, dropped and recovered it, and finally, as if its very essence could be tasted, placed it in her mouth. And Hannah, always with an irrepressible smile, would

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 176–7. Copyright © 1958 by the University of Chicago Press.

stretch out her hand toward the water dripping from the spigot in the bath, feel its inviting warmth and elusive liquidity, try and fail to grasp it, only then to announce with a screech of pure delight that what you really need to do with this is splash.

At such moments, as these two were beginning to get a feel for things, they were teaching their father about the profound and intimate ways things make themselves felt, impress themselves upon us, yield something of their truth to our careful, playful, and earnest attempts to discern precisely what they are and where we are with them. In these moments of tactile dialogue, I heard the faint whisper of a language that makes the world possible and opens us to the possibilities of the world. Although they could not yet speak in words, Hannah and Chloe were able to hear the ways things spoke to them, and they have learned – at first haltingly, and then with ever increasing confidence – to respond in ways appropriate to the saying of things.

Although rooted in those poignant moments of dialogical encounter in which the world opens itself to human articulation, this book is animated by the conviction that things go into words, though not without remainder, and that words are capable of articulating something of the nature of things. This conviction has ancient roots; for no thinker was more attuned to the ways words are able to give voice to the nature of things or more concerned to hear the ways nature lends itself to articulation than Aristotle. By following the paths of Aristotle's thinking as it attends to the saying of things, this book, in the spirit of Aristotelian thinking itself, seeks to say something new about Aristotle by saying something old about the human relation to nature. In so doing, it pursues a methodological strategy that is determined in the course of the investigation as a phenomenological legomenology. In this too, we follow Aristotle; for this methodological approach is grounded in the thoroughly Aristotelian commitment to allow one's thinking to be determined throughout by the appearing of things said, seeking in the many ways of saying the traces of an articulated truth. For Aristotle, as for us, truth is a matter of saying things in ways that do justice to the saying of things.

The structure of this book is chiastic; its course, centripetal: it begins by following a path intent on tracing the meaning of truth as

justice and ends having traversed a path that attempts to articulate the meaning of justice as truth. Its focal point is also its fulcrum, found in the discussion of the ligature of appearing at the end of Chapter 4. At this jointure, the path of Aristotle's thinking that seeks to *address* things according to the ways they show themselves turns toward a way of *response* that opens the possibility of thinking truth as bound to the question of justice and justice as rooted in the attempt to articulate the truth. The central metaphor announced at the fulcrum is at once mechanical and biological; it is the metaphor of the lever or joint that articulates the manner in which diverse phenomena cooperate in a world in which they have, despite their irreducible differences, been somehow ordered together into ecological community. The focal point of this ecological community, and of this book, is the response-ability endemic to ontological encounter.

The original title of this work was *The Saying of Things: The Nature of Truth and the Truth of Nature as Justice*. Although the title under which it is here published, *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth*, accurately describes the book's content, it does not quite capture the spirit in which the book was written or the structure it embodies. This book traverses a path of thinking that leads to the focal metaphor of articulation and, lifted by it, moves toward an account of justice as the attempt to put words to things by attending to the ways they show themselves and responding in light of the whole to which they and we belong. It begins with an account of the unicity of the singular, of the irreducible uniqueness endemic to each individual encountered. It then moves back through the history of things said concerning the meaning of truth in order to call attention to an ancient understanding of truth as intimately bound to interhuman being-together. Having thus rehearsed some of the things said by our predecessors concerning truth, the book turns in earnest to the central predecessor with which it will remain concerned throughout: Aristotle. Chapter 3 offers an account of Aristotle's own legomenological method, which attends to the things said by his predecessors in order to discern the truth articulated there. This is no prolegomenon to the investigation into truth but a performance of how truth shows itself in the saying of things. This leads to Chapters 4 and 5, which together trace the path of concerned address that seeks to lend voice to things as it connects with the path of

attuned response that seeks to articulate things according to the ways they show themselves. Chapter 6 offers a reading of the many ways truth is said in Aristotle as an articulation of the plurivocal expression of things organically bound up with the intelligibility of nature itself. Here is heard an account of definition in Aristotle oriented by the attempt to say things according to themselves. In Chapter 7, this attempt to say each according to itself is brought into relation with Aristotle's account of the nature of the whole in which such sayings occur. This involves an engagement with those difficult sayings concerning the divine as an erotic principle expressed in terms of the enigmatic "thinking of thinking thinking" that opens the possibility of understanding ecological justice in terms of the attempt to articulate the truth of things. This marks the move beyond Aristotle to a thinking intent on weaving the good, the beautiful, and the just into the fabric of the interhuman community with nature by assiduously seeking to articulate the truth voiced in the saying of things. In the end, the things said in the pages that follow seek to articulate the nature of truth in terms of ecological justice and the nature of justice in terms of an ethics of truth.

This book is, however, a dialogue not only with the things Aristotle says but also with certain predecessors of our own who read Aristotle with sensitivity to the spirit of his thinking. It draws explicitly on the insights of Frederick Woodbridge and John Herman Randall, whose robust naturalism allowed them to hear in Aristotle the articulation of a natural cooperation between the ways things are said and the human ability to respond in meaningful ways. It is indebted to the thinking of John Dewey, who recognized the social, political, and historical dimensions of communication and offered an account of transaction that resonates with the ecology of ontological encounter offered here, which, like Dewey, refuses to posit a radical segregation between human-being and nature. This book remains indebted in more ways than can easily be said to the thinking of Martin Heidegger, whose existential phenomenology uncovers something of the truth about truth as the site of the appearing of being and who never ceased thinking about the ways human-being inhabits language as much as language inhabits human-being.

But this book too is a kind of response offered in dialogue with friends who have taken the philosophical stakes of my previous work

on Aristotle seriously. In it is heard an attempt to listen more attentively to the things Frank Gonzalez has said about my need to attend more carefully to the things Aristotle says about the activity of the divine.[2] Chapter 7 marks a kind of response, though perhaps one that will be less than satisfying to Frank – and perhaps even to Aristotle himself – for it continues to refuse to relinquish a dimension of potency in the divine activity itself. In this book is also heard a response to Claudia Baracchi, whose critique and work have convinced me that a simple reversal of the traditional hierarchy that placed the theoretical over the practical is untenable and fails to do justice to the manner in which nature expresses itself theoretically.[3] Finally, these pages include an ongoing dialogue with three colleagues who, in different ways, have taught me to hear in Aristotle the nature of language and the language of nature. Vincent Colapietro has articulated in written and verbal dialogue a robust naturalism that opened me to the new possibilities for reading Aristotle articulated in what follows. Walter Brogan, in his thoughtful, generous, and provocative responses to my first book in book sessions held at the Pennsylvania State University and at the 2006 Ancient Philosophy Society meeting, has pressed me to rethink the nature of the universal not as that which is imposed from without but as something that shows itself in the natural expression of things. The book too is part of a dialogue with Aryeh Kosman, whose career-long attention to the things Aristotle said and whose committed attempts to do justice in writing and in person to those things said stand as its paradigm. My hope is that this response to the things said by these predecessors and colleagues will contribute to a continuing dialogue animated by a philosophical life devoted to justice and the love of truth.

In this spirit of ongoing dialogue, rooted in love and committed to justice, I dedicate this book to my daughters, Chloe and Hannah, and to their mother, Valerie, without whom neither they nor anything written here would be possible.

[2] Francisco Gonzalez, "Form in Aristotle: Oppressive Universal or Individual Act?" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005): 179–98.

[3] Claudia Baracchi, *Aristotle's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 172.

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