Aristotle on the Nature of Community

The reading of Aristotle's *Politics* offered in *Aristotle on the Nature of Community* builds on the insight that the history of political philosophy is a series of configurations of nature and reason. Aristotle's conceptualization of nature is unique because Aristotle does not oppose or subordinate nature to reason. Adriel M. Trott uses Aristotle's definition of nature as an internal source of movement to argue that he viewed community as something that arises from the activity that forms it rather than being a form imposed on individuals. Trott employs this account of nature and of community to defend Aristotle's four arguments for the naturalness of the *polis*, to interpret deliberation and the constitution in *Politics* as the form and final causes of the *polis*, and to reconsider Aristotle's treatment of slaves and women. Trott then argues that Aristotle is relevant for contemporary efforts to improve and encourage genuine democratic practices.

Adriel M. Trott is an assistant professor at Wabash College. She has published in *Polis*, *Epoché*, *parrhesia*, and the *Journal for Speculative Philosophy*. In addition to presenting many invited lectures, she has presented at the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, the Ancient Philosophy Society, the Hannah Arendt Circle, philoSophia, and the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. She is a regular faculty member at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum in Città di Castello, Italy. She recently won a Faculty Excellence Award for Research, a grant from the Texas division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and several Faculty Development Awards. Trott's background in politics – which includes work on Capitol Hill and on several political campaigns before pursuing her academic career – continues to influence her philosophical work.

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ADRIEL M. TROTT
Wabash College

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107036253

First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Trott, Adriel M., 1976–
Aristotle on the nature of community / Adriel M. Trott, Wabash College.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-03625-3 (hardback)
1. Aristotle. 2. Political science – Philosophy. 3. Philosophy of nature. I. Title.
JC71.A7T69 2013
320.01'1–dc23 2013026796

ISBN 978-1-107-03625-3 Hardback

To the memory of James Edwards and Lucile Hanford Trott

Contents

Preface

The past several decades have witnessed an impressive return to Aristotle's ethical theory sparked by contemporary interest in the development of character over rule-based ethical approaches and in the unity of the emotional and intellectual aspects of life. Aristotle's political theory has been less welcomed, or perhaps, less welcoming. Certainly, good work is being done on Aristotle's *Politics*,[1] but a felt resistance to the text remains. Two reasons for this lack of interest are most salient: Aristotle's *Politics* appears to be a disjointed text with no clear unifying structure or argument and Aristotle seems to defend the institution of slavery and the exclusion of women from political activity. This book counters these readings to grant the contemporary reader permission once more to read the *Politics* and even to generate excitement for reading Aristotle's political theory with the intuition that Aristotle does have something to contribute to our current political situation.

I came to this project out of a sustained study of the history of the idea of nature prompted by and in conversation with Dennis J. Schmidt, who was at Villanova when I was a doctoral student. From this study, I concluded that the history of political philosophy can be understood in terms of the various ways nature is configured in relation to reason. This insight directed me to Aristotle, who was the first to claim that political life is natural. Aristotle seems to avoid the problems of subsequent conceptions of political life articulated both in the work of his own commentators and in that of his great dissenters because Aristotle neither opposes nor subordinates nature to reason. Thus, Aristotle could conclude that the *polis* was natural while still encouraging and even requiring

[1] Inter alia Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992) and Jill Frank, *Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

human involvement in its establishment and human concern with its success. Similarly, he could assert the prominence of the work of *logos*, and its capacity for pursuing justice, without drawing a distinction between those who were of reason and those who were closer to nature, as the social contract theorists do.[2]

Coupled with this focus on the relation of nature and reason was the slowly pervading insight among scholars of ancient Greek philosophy that the language of the tradition has become reified to the point where we have largely succeeded in turning the Greeks into Scholastics or even moderns rather than reading them with the ear of an ancient Greek. Returning to the grammar of the Greeks where terms that have since become technical remain resonant with the strength of metaphors and the texture of concrete references, commentators have revived the fresh distinctiveness of Greek thinking by making it strange to us once more.[3] In this book, one aspect of this distinctiveness, I argue, is that Aristotle (and perhaps, the Greeks in general) thinks of politics in terms of activity, an insight I first learned through the work of Hannah Arendt.

[2] See Carole Pateman's critique of the operation of the opposition between nature and reason in the social contract theorists in *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[3] In the twentieth century, this trend can be traced to the work of Martin Heidegger and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. Heidegger's numerous lecture courses on ancient Greek philosophy influenced his students from Hannah Arendt to Jacques Derrida. Many of these lectures, including important ones on Aristotle's philosophy, have been published in the past twenty years, including *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), which begins with a sustained treatment of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert Metcalf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); and *Aristotle's Metaphysics Θ 1–3*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek. Gadamer also encouraged this hermeneutic return to the ancient Greeks in numerous essays and books, including *Truth and Method*, rev. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) and *The Beginning of Philosophy*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 1998). For contemporary work in this tradition, see inter alia John Sallis, *Being and Logos* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) and *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's* Timeaeus (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Christopher P. Long, *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking and Aristotelian Legacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Claudia Baracchi, *Aristotle's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jill Gordon, *Plato's Erotic World: From Cosmic Origins to Human Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Marina Berzins McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Anne Marie Schultz, *Plato's Socrates as Narrator: A Philosophical Muse* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

By placing activity at the center of political life and understanding nature in Aristotle as the internal principle from out of which a natural thing fulfills itself, political activity as that which comes forth from within the human being could provide an avenue to justify political life even as the community remains open. The active questioning of human beings and political communities regarding their end operates like the natural principle whereby we move toward the end. Both the question of what political community should look like and the question of who should be a part are for Aristotle the questions that continue to characterize political life. Keeping these questions at the fore and encouraging consideration of them makes political life never complete, in the temporal and in the ontological sense, where the line can never be firmly drawn between who is justly excluded and who is not.

Certainly work had to be done to show that Aristotle's *Politics* is a text whose various arguments and considerations work together to offer this depiction of political life. This book is a foray into that effort and a culmination of a project that developed out of my research for my doctorate from Villanova University in 2008. I am ever grateful for the friendship and guidance of my thesis advisor, Walter Brogan, who taught me to read Aristotle with new eyes and ears that return to the original resonances of Aristotle's language. His insightful feedback on this manuscript, born out of his intellectual generosity, was invaluable. I was challenged and excited about the productive possibilities for configuring nature to reason in numerous seminars at Villanova, including Julie Klein's Spinoza seminar and Kevin Miles's Arendt seminar. Jack Caputo, whose work first attracted me to Villanova, has supported and encouraged me as a scholar and a person throughout my graduate career. I am grateful to John Carvalho, who wrote his dissertation on Aristotle's *Politics*, for our productive disagreements and for his continuing confidence in my success.

The Ancient Philosophy Society has been a welcome community in which to introduce elements of this project. Benjamin Grazzini and Ryan Drake served as commentators on papers that developed into portions of this book. Aryeh Kosman and I presented a panel together at the annual meeting in 2009 and his feedback was much appreciated. Joshua Hayes read the entire manuscript and offered helpful reorganization suggestions and provoked me to sharpen my treatment of the efficient cause in Aristotle. I am especially grateful to Christopher P. Long, who offered extensive comments on the manuscript. Jill Gordon's excitement with my project and willingness to teach some of it to her students

encouraged me that there was an eager audience for a fresh reading of the *Politics*. I was further assured of such an audience by a week in 2012 at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum in Umbria, Italy, that drew together faculty and students interested in Aristotle's *Politics* and I am grateful to Sara Brill, the director of the seminar, for her efforts. Brill also kindly invited me to present my reading of Aristotle's treatment of slavery at Fairfield College. I am similarly indebted to Anne-Marie Schultz who gave me the opportunity to present portions of this project focusing on Aristotle's ethics at Baylor University.

Beyond the Ancient Philosophy Society, I am grateful to Jill Frank, who offered feedback on one of the chapters, and Stephen G. Salkever, with whom I taught at Bryn Mawr College. Salkever's excitement for the *Politics* and for anyone doing work on the *Politics* was motivational. The feminist society, *philoSophia*, was a receptive audience to my reading of Aristotle's treatment of women. Thanks are also due to Nazareth Pantaloni for his quick and willing help with some elusive references and for his wise and reassuring counsel. Colleagues at the University of Texas, Pan American, provided helpful feedback on portions of the manuscript. I am obliged to the students at the University of Texas, Pan American, who accepted the challenge to let philosophy be meaningful for living.

I am especially indebted to those with whom I have been privileged to form community, far and wide, deliberating together over what it means to live well. Leigh Johnson, John Bova, Ashley Vaught, Shannon Lundeen, and Amie Sanders have been friends in thought and life. My parents taught me to question convention and seek grounds for knowledge to their occasional chagrin. My siblings, Kimiko, Joshua, Loren, Jedidiah, and Victoria, are some of the best organizers of pains and pleasures that I know. Both of my father's parents, James Edwards and Lucile Hanford Trott, died during the writing of this book. My grandfather was a Harvard-trained architect who spent his life farming in Montana on my grandmother's family land. When she died, my grandmother left masterpieces of short stories and poems strewn about the home in which she raised six children, little prizes for those taking down the estate. I envied them their wit and wordsmithing, Mensa members both. The last time I spent with both of them together, my sister Loren and I spent two hours trying to solve a riddle they told, eager to show we had inherited some of their wit. I am honored to share in the riddle-solving of the family they nourished in so many ways and I dedicate this book to their memory. Finally, Jeff Gower, the man I married in the course of writing this book, enlivens my spirit: our life

confirms the truth that the deliberate choice to live together constitutes friendship.

Parts of this book were previously published in a number of articles. The third chapter grew out of "*Logos* and the Political Nature of *Anthrōpos* in Aristotle's *Politics*," published in *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 27 (2010): 292–307. The first part of the fourth chapter developed out of "The Human Animal: The Natural and the Rational in Aristotle's Anthropology," published in *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16 (2012): 269–86. As part of the celebratory issue of the tenth anniversary of the Ancient Philosophy Society, *Epoché* also published a small segment of a part of the argument about political rule over master rule, "Ruling in Turn: Political Rule against Mastery in Aristotle's *Politics*," *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17 (2013), which is more extensively developed in Chapters 5 and 6.