Aristotle on the Nature of Truth

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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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

of justice' points to a way of inhabiting the world rooted in an ability to respond to the saying of things held accountable by the unicity of each and the integrity of the whole. The ecology of justice is marked by an asymmetrical reciprocity in which things lend themselves to human articulation even as they insistently express more than can be adequately articulated.[20] The question of truth is transformed into a question of justice in those palpable moments of ontological encounter in which things relinquish themselves to us in such a way that we are made acutely aware of their insistent unicity.[21] This irreducible unicity holds all our attempts to put things into words accountable to the many ways things express themselves. If truth has always operated at the site of the relation between thinking and things, between human articulation and the expression of nature, then the attempt to locate the proper place of truth in one or the other is misguided, for truth belongs neither to thinking nor to things, but to their encounter – an encounter in which truth is always a matter of onto-logical response-ability, that is, of eco-logical justice.

TOWARD AN ECOLOGY OF ONTOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

To think truth in terms of justice is to further develop a path of thinking initiated by Aristotle and taken up by Heidegger and the tradition of American pragmatic naturalism. And if in pursuing this path we retain a loyalty to the peripatetic methodology, it is because the peripatetic way of proceeding acutely recognizes that thinking is always funded by a long history that determines its direction and opens it to new possibilities. To begin to discern the possibilities that emerge from an active engagement with the legacy of Aristotelian thinking, it will be instructive to turn first to something said by Frederick Woodbridge,

[20] Emmanuel Levinas once criticized Martin Buber for determining the relation with the otherness of the Other in terms of mutual reciprocity, suggesting that "he has not taken separation seriously enough." See Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Library of Living Philosophers (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 149, 47. Yet we must learn to hold the reciprocity that makes relation possible together with the asymmetry that characterizes its reality.

[21] The use of the term 'insistence' is indebted to John Smith, who understood 'insistence' to name a primordial thereness, an insistent presence. See John E. Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," *Review of Metaphysics* 24, no. 4 (1971): 597–8.

who identifies Aristotle as the thinker who most powerfully impressed upon him the importance of language for philosophy.

In his "Confessions," Woodbridge writes, "Knowledge, with [Aristotle], is largely a matter of *saying* what things are.... And although truth is not a matter of nature, the *saying* of things is.... Existence is provocative."[22] The saying of things is natural in a twofold way corresponding to the pregnant ambiguity of the genitive that operates in the formulation: "the saying *of* things." Taken subjectively, the genitive points to the natural fact that things speak, that being expresses itself. Taken objectively, the genitive announces the insistent objectivity of being that, however elusive, still always also lends itself to articulation. By nature, things speak and are spoken of: saying and being live together.

The life of being in its relation to saying is rich and manifold. Aristotle puts it this way: τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς – "Being is said in many ways."[23] The morphology of the term λέγεται articulates an ambiguity of voice that resonates with the ambiguous genitive articulated by "the saying of things." Λέγεται can be heard in the passive voice, in which case it means "to be said" and being is taken as the object of the saying; or it can be heard in the middle voice, in which case it means "to say for itself" and being is taken as expressing itself. The many ways being is said resonates with and gives voice to the diverse expressions of things. A certain symphony between saying and being is heard in Aristotle's famous formulation, a symphony muted by the modern presumption of dissonance between language and nature, mind and body, subject and object. Aristotle's thinking, however, remains guided throughout by the verb λέγειν, to speak, and particularly by the third person singular, middle/passive form λέγεται, which appears repeatedly in a diversity of contexts, as if a leitmotif that signals the consonance of saying and being.[24]

[22] Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge, *Nature and Mind: Selected Essays of Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, Presented to Him on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday by Amherst College, the University of Minnesota, Columbia University; with a Bibliography of His Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 24.

[23] *Meta.* VII.1, 1028a10.

[24] If quantitative evidence could justify qualitative claims, it would be interesting to point out that by far the most frequent iteration of the verb λέγειν in the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, according to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, is the middle/passive

Yet consonance is not identity and to insist upon it is not to deny discord. Being remains elusive even as it lends itself to articulation. Because Aristotle allows his thinking to be oriented by the saying of things, he is able to cultivate a habit of thinking capable of doing justice to the many ways being is said without naively denying that something is always also withheld in the manifold expressions of things. This habit of thinking is a ἕξις in the strict Aristotelian sense: it involves holding oneself in a certain way by active effort and attention.[25] The habit of thinking Aristotle both cultivates and practices involves the ability to respond to the many ways being is said in a manner appropriate to the very saying of things. In this, however, it is akin to the virtue he himself designates as truthfulness – ἀλήθεια.[26]

Aristotle situates the truthful person (ἀληθευτικός) between the braggart (ἀλαζών) who exaggerates and the ironic person who understates things. The truthful person, in contrast, is said to be one who is able to call each thing by its right name (αὐθέκαστος), neither exaggerating nor diminishing it.[27] Thus, the excellence of truthfulness involves a certain way of saying things. The Greek αὐθέκαστος names a person who is blunt, someone who quite literally says it like it is. By articulating the excellence of truthfulness in terms of a certain way of speaking, Aristotle at once links the question of truth to

λέγεται, with 1,213 instances. The next most frequent is the infinitive itself, with 562 instances.

[25] Aristotle insists that excellent action involves not only doing the right thing, but doing it in the right way; it entails holding of oneself somehow (πῶς ἔχων). Specifically, the action should be done knowingly (εἰδώς), it should be chosen (προαιρούμενος) for its own sake, and it should be done in such a way that one cannot be moved completely into an opposite condition (ἀμετακινήτως). See Aristotle, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea* (henceforth *NE*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), II.4, 1105a30–33. Sachs suggests the significance of ἀμετακινήτως when he insists that the addition of the additional prefix μετα- indicates that such actions are done steadfastly but not rigidly. Joe Sachs, *Aristotle: "Nicomachean Ethics,"* ed. Albert Keith Whitaker, Focus Philosophical Library (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), xiii. Rather, such actions involve the entire dynamic structure of Aristotle's understanding of ethical virtue in which a ἕξις is won slowly over time by doing things in the right way, at the right time, and as a result of the right deliberate choices. This notion of ἕξις, then, is nothing like rote habit, but is a dynamic and active condition that requires constant attention, effort, and reflection.

[26] *NE* II.7, 1108a19–20.

[27] Ibid., IV.7, 1127a21–6.

character (ἦθος) and thus to action *and* draws this ethical meaning of truth into relation to what is often designated as his official theoretical definition of truth as correspondence.[28] In *Metaphysics* IV.7, Aristotle writes, "On the one hand, the false is to say [τὸ μὲν λέγειν] that what is, is not or that what is not, is; on the other hand, the true is to say that what is, is and what is not, is not, so that the one saying that it is or is not is either speaking the truth or is false."[29] Truth here as in the ethical context is a matter of saying it like it is. It involves an ability to articulate things in a way that does justice to the ways they express themselves.

The formula by which Aristotle is said to inaugurate the tradition of truth as correspondence remains in Aristotle bound to a much older conception of ἀλήθεια as truthfulness. Aristotle introduces the excellence of truthfulness in the context of considering those virtues that are rooted "in social relations [ὁμιλία], in living together, and in sharing in common words and deeds."[30] In so doing, he draws on an ancient, Homeric understanding of ἀλήθεια as intimately linked to verbs of saying that are directed toward encounters with individuals in a rich nexus of social contexts. Yet such social encounters and the truthfulness that belongs to the relations between humans cannot be divorced from the apparently more abstract determination of truth as saying it like it is; for both require a ἕξις cultivated by dwelling in intimate association with the things of nature, attending assiduously and responding appropriately to the ways things express themselves.

Thus, in a preliminary way that will gain depth and determination in the chapters that follow, it is possible to say that truth grows at the site of ontological response-ability, where an ability to attend to the ways things speak and to articulate responses that do justice to the saying of things is cultivated. Ontological response-ability involves an

[28] Brentano explicitly thematizes the meaning of truth in Aristotle as an "*Übereinstimmung*" between cognition and things. See Franz Brentano, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 17–18. More recently, Deborah Modrak has unequivocally insisted that Aristotle "opts for a correspondence theory of truth." Deborah K. W. Modrak, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

[29] *Meta.* IV.7, 1011b25–29.

[30] *NE* IV.6 1126a11.

ethics of truth. 'Ethics' here is understood in terms of the Greek ἦθος, or character, which Aristotle himself associates with ἔθος, or habit.[31] The ethics of truth thus involves a certain character, an active way of holding oneself, indeed, a ἕξις won in the course of lived experience informed by a deliberate engagement with the saying of things.

Although Aristotle's thinking embodies an ethics of truth capable of responding to the many ways being is said, this ἕξις has long been paralyzed by the thick layers of scholastic sediment under which it has been buried for generations. Ironically, John Dewey, who has done so much to rehabilitate Aristotle's rich understanding of ἕξις, remains himself committed to the calcified caricature of Aristotelian thought. Nevertheless, attending to the things Dewey says about Aristotle opens us to a deeper understanding of the dynamic logic that operates at the site of ontological encounter, a logic that points to the transformative potential endemic to the attempt to think truth as justice.

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey announces with a certain reticence the debt his pragmatic naturalism owes to Aristotle: "Aristotle perhaps came nearest to a start in [the] direction [of a naturalistic metaphysics.] But his thought did not go far on the road, though it may be used to suggest the road which he failed to take."[32] Unlike Santayana, who unequivocally suggests that the secret of Aristotle lies in the fact that he was "the greatest of naturalists,"[33] Dewey always hesitates, equivocates, and qualifies: whatever his naturalistic tendencies, Aristotle remains for Dewey a naturalist in potency only. He points in the direction of naturalism, but fails in the end to bring his thinking to life.

Dewey's hesitancy in relation to Aristotle devolves often into intense polemics based more on abstract caricature than on a rigorous

[31] Ibid., II.1, 1103a17–18.

[32] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 48. The naturalism delineated here is designated "pragmatic" for two reasons. First, it is designed to emphasize the manner in which this conception of naturalism remains focused on and concerned with τὰ πράγματα in its diversity of meanings. Second, it is designed to distinguish pragmatic naturalism from earlier forms of naturalism in the American tradition, specifically the sort of naturalism embraced by transcendental thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau.

[33] George Santayana, *Dialogues in Limbo: With Three New Dialogues* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 244. Woodbridge follows Santayana in speaking of Aristotle's "thoroughgoing naturalism." See Woodbridge, *Nature and Mind*, 5.

engagement with the thinking articulated in the Aristotelian texts. Each moment of praise for Aristotle is immediately qualified: "Aristotle acknowledges contingency, but he never surrenders his bias in favor of the fixed, certain and finished. His whole theory of forms and ends is a theory of the superiority in Being of rounded out fixities."[34] The alleged rejection of contingency seems to sting Dewey all the more given the acknowledgment it denies. Dewey himself situates his naturalistic metaphysics in a space between the stable and precarious dimensions of existence: "We live in a world which is an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies, tight completenesses, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences as yet indeterminate."[35] Yet although Dewey denies Aristotle the capacity to hold the tension between the stable and the precarious, Aristotle's thinking too is alive to singularity, uncertainty, and ambiguity even as it feels the pull of order and stability. For whatever reason, Dewey repeatedly reinforces that hackneyed vision of Aristotle as father of "*the* genteel tradition … which identifies the fixed and regular with reality of Being and the changing and hazardous with deficiency of Being."[36]

However, to reinforce such a petrified caricature of Aristotle is to succumb to a static and reductionist habit of thought anathema to Dewey's own naturalistic orientation. Naturalism, for Dewey, at its most basic level, entails a commitment to doing justice to the rich complexity of the things encountered in living experience. Experience itself, for him, is "'double-barreled' in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality."[37] His naturalism is integrative and holistic: it seeks to articulate the complexity of things in their togetherness.

This integrative naturalism distinguishes pragmatic from other forms of naturalism that seek to reduce the world and experience

[34] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 48.
[35] Ibid., 47.
[36] Ibid., 49.
[37] Ibid., 8.

to a nature understood exclusively in materialistic terms.[38] Randall captures the antireductionist, integrative orientation of American pragmatic naturalism when he insists that for the pragmatic naturalist "[t]he world is not really 'nothing but' something other than it appears to be: it is what it is, in all its manifold variety, with all its distinctive kinds of activity."[39] Such a naturalistic engagement with the world endeavors to do justice to variety without doing violence to integrity. Its interrogations turn to the varied, rich experience of things in order to give voice to hitherto unknown dimensions, functions, and structures of reality without destroying what they seek to articulate.[40]

This integrative, interrogative naturalism is animated by the deep recognition that human-being is natural being. For Dewey, who prefers to speak in epistemological terms, this means experience and nature belong together: "[E]xperience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience that is experienced, but nature.... Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience.... Experience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches."[41] Aristotle puts it this way in the famous first line of the *Metaphysics*: "All human beings by nature stretch themselves [ὀρέγονται] out toward knowing."[42] For Aristotle, as for Dewey, this stretching out is not simply an active accomplishment of the subject; rather, it is a dynamic *transaction*, to use Dewey and Bentley's term,[43] in

[38] For a critique of this sort of reductionistic naturalism in the European context, see Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 169–85. While Husserl's critique of naturalism focuses more on its inability to set philosophy on the secure path of science than on its reductionistic tendencies, it is largely because of these tendencies that naturalists in this vein are able to presume that natural science is in no need of further grounding in a more fundamental philosophical science.

[39] John Herman Randall, "Epilogue: The Nature of Naturalism," in *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*, ed. Yervant Hovhannes Krikorian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 361.

[40] This formulation owes much to Randall; see ibid.

[41] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 4a.

[42] *Meta.* I.1, 980a21.

[43] John Dewey and Arthur Fisher Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 103–18. Here Dewey and Bentley explicitly distinguish between 'interaction,' which views self-actions in the tradition of classical mechanics and so as fundamentally isolated from the situation in which such actions always occur,

which what is actively desired permits itself to be passionately received and what receives allows itself to be transformed by that which it desires. Aristotle articulates the complexity of this transaction in a single word: ὀρέγονται, the middle voice of ὀρέγειν, which means to stretch out, extend, to reach out, hand, offer, give. In the middle voice, however, ὀρεγέσθαι, when used with an object in the genitive case, as it is in the first sentence of the *Metaphysics*, takes on the meaning of to grasp at, to reach after, and thus, indeed, to desire.[44] The middle voice gestures, however, also to the transactive nature of this desiring. The grammatical subject is in a sense both active and passive in relation to its grammatical object; in stretching out toward that which it desires, the subject is itself transformed. Here, Aristotle's λόγος must be heard to articulate that complex and dynamic relationship between experience and nature, subject and object – the saying of things. The site of this dynamic transaction, which, strictly speaking, is prior to the analytic distinction between subject and object, is quite literally onto-logical: it is the site of the encounter between τὸ ὄν and ὁ λόγος, between being and articulation.

The transactive dimension of ontological encounter opens the space in which to think the complex dynamics of the relation between being and articulation. Drawing on Dewey, John E. Smith insists that "articulation is not alien to Being, but, on the contrary, belongs to it essentially."[45] To say this, however, is not to reduce being to being known; rather, it is to recognize that articulation belongs to being, but does not exhaust it. Indeed, Vincent Colapietro has put the point beautifully: recognizing that expression is integral to being, he reminds us that "[b]eing is always in some respect mercury in the mind's hands: the more pressure our conceptual fingers expend in their efforts to hold being firmly in their clutch, the more lubricious it proves to be."[46] Yet the mercurial elusiveness of being – however insistent – does not mute the ways things communicate and lend themselves to articulation.

and 'transaction,' which insists that the observer, the observing, and the observed belong together (104).

44 Liddell and Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, s.v. ὀρεγέσθαι, v.

45 Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," 594.

46 Vincent Colapietro, "Striving to Speak in a Human Voice: A Peircean Contribution to Metaphysical Discourse," *Review of Metaphysics* 58 (2004): 386.

For pragmatic naturalism, however, the articulation of being happens as communication. Smith puts it this way: "Communication is the presupposition rather than the aim of articulation."[47] Ontological encounters with πράγματα occur in specific social, political, and historical contexts that themselves cannot simply be read out of such encounters in an attempt to distill the pure objectivity of things. Rather, objectivity communicates itself within such contexts on the basis of our pragmatic transactions with things. Dewey recognizes this when he too grounds expression in communication: "The heart of language is not 'expression' of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought. It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership."[48] Here, the meaning of ontological response-ability gains further determination; for ontological encounter is rooted in transactional communication, in a dynamic activity – indeed, a complex community conditioned by social, political, and historical realities – from which the truth of things emerges as beings communicate with one another.

Ontological response-ability is rooted in the insistent objectivity of things. The objectivity at play in ontological encounter can be discerned by drawing the German *Gegenstand* – to stand over against – into dialogue with the English 'object': objectivity names the capacity to *object* in ontological encounters where beings *stand over against* one another.[49] Truth here emerges as a question of justice that becomes possible when articulations subject themselves to

[47] Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," 602.

[48] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 179.

[49] The notion that objectivity is grounded in an object's ability to object to what is being said about it, i.e., to hold that which stands over against it accountable, draws on this striking formulation by Latour: "Objectivity does not refer to a special quality of the mind, an inner state of justice and fairness, but to the presence of objects which have been rendered 'able' (the word is etymologically so powerful) to object to what is told about them." See Bruno Latour, "When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of 'Science Studies' to the Social Sciences," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 115. Latour's own insistence that the etymological meaning of the Latin *res*, thing, refers already to an "*assembly* of a judicial nature gathered around a topic, *reus*, that creates both conflict and assent" indicates the extent to which the very meaning of objectivity is bound up with the question of justice.

the objections of objects in transactive communication. The ability to respond in ways that do justice to such objections is the soil in which meaning first takes root. To insist that meaning emerges naturally from our transactive communications with things is to contextualize truth without rendering it relative.[50] *It is to recognize that meaning becomes objective and truth insistent only in transactional communication as beings hold one another accountable in the asymmetrical reciprocity of ontological encounter.*

As this last formulation suggests, the dynamic activity that conditions ontological communication involves not only cooperation, but also a certain intransigence, not only reciprocity, but also a certain asymmetry, the remainder that serves as a reminder of the inexhaustible unicity of things. This recalcitrant remainder functions in the logic of ontological encounter as an erotic principle that enjoins responsibility.[51] As a principle, the remainder points to that which initiates ontological encounter even as it retains a certain autonomous authority; as erotic, the remainder plays upon desire, inviting cooperative communication even as it remains ultimately elusive. To seek truth in ontological encounter is to attempt to do justice to the elusive eloquence of things.

[50] Dewey writes, “Meanings are objective because they are modes of natural interaction”; see Dewey, *Experience and Nature,* 190.

[51] For a discussion of how erotic principles operate in the political thinking of Socrates, see Christopher P. Long, “Socrates and the Politics of Music: Preludes of the Republic,” *Polis* 24, no. 1 (2007): 90.