

Preface

Every realm of nature is marvelous: and as Heraclitus, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, is reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in that kitchen divinities were present, so we should venture on the study of every kind of animal without distaste; for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful

(645a17–24).

Philosophy, as it is practiced in contemporary Western academia, is overwhelmingly problem based. Thought experiments take our search for truth outside of the context in which it came to be a search at all. In light of this commitment, we deemphasize context—it is always only accidental.

To assuage this commitment, or, at the least, call it into question, frees us to talk about the place of context and history in our pursuit of wisdom. When we combine a search for truth about a problem with a historical approach, we use a text as a referent for what *was real* for the author. To do justice to the author's understanding is thus to bear witness to a double sense of context—it is an uncovering of a way of past thinking—whether or not the same type of thinking still holds today—in addition to a sorting through of present arguments shrouded in a certain organization; the arguments are always already *with a text*.

Reading the ancients takes us to another time, to another place: to a particular way of thinking about the world, to a specific way of experiencing life. When we turn to the ancients for wisdom, therefore, we must guard ourselves from extrapolating that wisdom from that which gives it meaning. With this said, I will discuss briefly my initial interest in understanding Aristotle's position on time (*chrónos*).

My first introduction to Aristotle's Treatise on Time (*Physics* iv 10–14) was to the arguments, the puzzles, or *aporiai* and their subsequent examination, excerpted from their context. The editors of a textbook about the issue of time presented Aristotle on time as four pages, given in translation and without introduction or annotation. My intuition then, confirmed years later, was that when taken from the wider *Physics*,

divorced from Aristotle's natural philosophy, the treatise does not make sense. As many have before me, I found the treatise inconsistent and littered with jargon. Without imposing on Aristotle everything my modern mind understands about time and space, it was difficult to begin a serious study of his arguments.

Instead of adopting Aristotle's questions about time as my own, I decided to pursue a line of questioning that would help me to understand *why* these were his questions—both in the sense that I wanted to know his general method and also in the sense that I wanted to know why he was interested in time. This required not only a reading of the rest of *Physics* iv, but a study of the rest of the *Physics*, and indeed, much of Aristotle's works in natural philosophy and logic.

It soon became apparent to me that Aristotle was not interested in time in the sense that Newton or Einstein were interested in time. Aristotle was interested in time because he was interested in change, and change only because change for Aristotle is the nature of life. This is to say that Aristotle was interested in time only because he was interested in nature, in natural beings.

Aristotle's interest in nature led me to more questions still: What did he mean by 'nature'? What was his experience of the natural world? How did he understand humans in the context of life generally? Responding to these questions is an ongoing pursuit for me, an expedition that has brought me out of Aristotle's extant work and to the places where he lived, experienced, thought, and wrote. In particular, time I spent on the shores of the Bay of Kalloni, on the Island of Lesbos in the northeast Aegean, the place where Aristotle and Theophrastus inaugurated biological study, afforded me the opportunity to perceive life in the manner I imagine Aristotle must have perceived it—in its majesty, as that which was both the same as me and also other than me. Aesthetics, from the Greek *aesthesis*, came to mean beauty, or art, in the eighteenth century. The Greek *aisthesis*, αἴσθησις, can be rendered both as perception and feeling. Aistheton, αἰσθητόν, the perceptible object, was received, integrated, perhaps considered, felt. It was taken in.

Aristotle took in nature; he took in life. We celebrate him because he was the first to systematize this taking in; he sought not just to experience nature, but to know it—to categorize the "same" and "the different," to name its purpose. As any biologist or naturalist will tell you, the type of dedication it took for him not only to conduct the exacting and detailed studies of natural objects, but to do so when biological study was considered useless, even disgusting (see the invitation to biology in *PA* i 5), points to the conclusion that Aristotle had taken in fully the natural world. His consequent appreciation for its being and diversity resulted in the most prolific body of scientific writing penned by any one person.

It is with this in mind that I undertook the project to understand Aristotle's *Treatise on Time*. Aristotle came to time because he came to nature; he came to nature because he had a certain orientation to life, to his context. It is out of reverence for this orientation, as an extension of a genuine scholarly desire to know the truth, that I offer my reader the following interpretation of Aristotle's theory of time.



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