The Middle Included

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The Middle Included: Logos in Aristotle.
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The project of this book originated from my fascination with quite a humble natural phenomenon. I will explore this issue at length in chapter 6, but let me briefly talk about it just so that the reader may have an idea about where this book came from.

A scout honeybee sees flowers to exploit in a certain field. She returns to the hive, and describes her firsthand experience of the location and quality of the bounty to the other bees. Of course, these bees understand the message, since they will fly off to the exact location and exploit the field. And indeed, when they return to the hive, they too can convey their new firsthand experience to still others. But before they have this firsthand experience, they do not or cannot relay to others what for them is not a firsthand experience.

Honeybees seem capable of understanding what is for them a non-firsthand experience, but not of relaying it. There are indeed animal species that are capable of relaying non-firsthand experience, especially animals that imitate. But while these species are capable of relaying this non-firsthand experience, they seem to do so without understanding it.

Is there an animal species that has the capacity for both understanding and relaying non-firsthand experiences? Of course. We, humans, indulge in this capacity. We understand non-firsthand experience as honeybees do, but we can also relay it. We relay non-firsthand experience like, say, imitating bird species do, but we do so while understanding that of which we never had, do not have, or may never have, a firsthand experience. A sentence like “I feel great today” is comparable to the message the scout honeybee conveyed to the other bees: I convey my firsthand experience to you who are capable of understanding what, for you, is not a firsthand experience. But when you say to others, “Ömer is feeling great today,” something different is happening: like honeybees and unlike imitating birds, you are understanding a non-firsthand experience, but, like those bird species and unlike honeybees, you are also relaying that content to others. Since your audience may also relay the same information to still others, this capacity boosts the speed with which information is propagated. As there is no relay among honeybees, only the scout honeybee can inform other bees. Hence, the rate of propagation of that information will follow a linear growth. Among humans in everyday life, however, since the receiver can in turn relay the message to still others
without having to undergo the experience firsthand, the propagation of information can grow *exponentially*.

But this capacity is not only ubiquitous in our everyday exchanges. It also sheds light on significant aspects of human experience. For it is this capacity that enables me to communicate, not only that I feel great today, but also that Socrates was executed in 399, that there are igneous rocks on the surface of the moon, and that the form “circle” can be instantiated in an infinite number of cases. I had understood these messages, as you just did, without ever needing to have a firsthand experience of Socrates’s death, of the surface of the moon, or, indeed, of the infinite instantiations of the form “circle.”

Actually, almost all science, all fiction, all history, all news media, all education, all propaganda, all gossip, all utopian fiction, all sophistry as well as all philosophy structurally require that the message relayed be such that its content was not, is not, or even cannot be, experienced firsthand. Yet indeed, when I speak, I may be expressing my firsthand experience, but I may also be lying, I may be relaying something I heard from someone else who has heard it who knows where. Further, you may further propagate this dubious message without having to check its truthfulness. So I am exercising this capacity not only when I say that Socrates was executed in 399, but also when I say that Socrates was *not* executed in 399. Again, I am drawing on the same capacity when I say, regardless of their actual or potential truth-value, that Athenians will regret their execution of Socrates, or that his execution was ordained by fate, that he will converse with great poets in the afterlife, or that he will be resurrected. So, besides our everyday communications, it is the major human institutions and traditions that require this capacity for both understanding and relaying non-firsthand experience. And once the communicating parties possess this capacity, there is no preestablished control over the truthfulness of the messages. This capacity pervades our experience. And with it, truth, for us, becomes less a given than a task.

As I shall argue in chapters 5 and 6 of this book, when Aristotle famously says that humans are the only animal species having *logos*, he is referring to *this* capacity of understanding and relaying non-firsthand experience along with firsthand experience. But while developing this claim, I noticed how ubiquitous and polysemic the word *logos* was in the Aristotelian corpus. It meant “standard,” “ratio,” “reason,” and “speech,” among other things. As I found no survey of the meanings of *logos* in Aristotle either in his own texts or in his posterity, I undertook the project myself and devised this book.

Thus, specifically, this book is about one of the most important words in all philosophy and science, *logos*, as it was used by one of the greatest figures in these fields: Aristotle. It is an argumentative survey of the four fundamental
meanings of this word, “standard,” “ratio,” “reason,” and “speech,” as they appear in Aristotle’s logic, philosophy of nature, and ethics and politics.

On a more general level, however, I consider this book to be about rationality. From this point of view, chapters 1 and 2 deal with the inner structure or requirements of rationality by means of an analysis of the sense of *logos* as “standard” in Aristotle’s logical works. In chapters 3 and 4, I move on to rationality *in nature*. There I offer an analysis of natural motion, life forms, organisms, animal perception and behavior, by turning to the sense of *logos* as “ratio” in Aristotle’s philosophy of nature. Finally, in chapters 5 and 6, I offer an account of our rationality and use of language as humans, by elaborating, in Aristotle’s ethics and politics, the last two fundamental senses of *logos*: “reason,” and “speech.”

In short, this book is about the meanings of *logos* in Aristotle and the relation between them, with a view to, and a claim about, the specificity of human language.
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