CHAPTER 6

Speech

Logos in the Politics

So far we have seen three major senses of *logos* in Aristotle: “standard” in chapters 1 and 2, “ratio” in chapters 3 and 4, and “reason” in chapter 5. In each of these senses, I have argued, *logos* refers to a relation holding its terms together in their difference instead of collapsing one to the other or keeping them in indifference. In this last chapter, I turn to the fourth and last major meaning of *logos*, namely “speech.” It is in this sense that Aristotle famously says: “the human being alone among animals has *logos*” (Pol. I, 1, 1253a10–11). Yet, in the Aristotelian corpus, we do not find a unitary account of speech, any more than a unitary account of *logos*; instead we find scattered remarks that remain to be gathered and unified. It is this Aristotelian account of speech that I shall try to bring together here.

To do this, in section 1, I shall turn to animal communication, especially the modes of animal hearing directed at three different objects: noise, voice, and buzz. This will allow me, in section 2, to propose three fundamental features of speech as specifically human communication: mediation, articulation, ambiguity. By means of these three features, I shall analyze the first articulation of human speech, that is, very roughly speaking, the articulation of “letters” into “words.” Then, in section 3, I shall analyze the second articulation of human speech, that is, again very roughly speaking, the articulation of “words” into “sentences.” This analysis will show that, while the moods of animal communication are comparable to the imperative and subjunctive, there are two moods of specifically human communication: the indicative and the optative. Here I will draw the conclusion that *logos* as speech is the specifically human capacity for both understanding and relaying non-firsthand experience as well as firsthand experience. In section 4, I shall test this interpretation of *logos*, and draw its implications, by confronting it with three major Aristotelian texts: *Categories*, 1, *Metaphysics*, I, 1, and indeed the famous opening of the *Politics*.
Such an interpretation of *logos* is indispensable for accounting for human predication, human experience, human community, and major aspects of the specifically human condition such as mythology, history, science, utopian fiction, philosophy, and sophistry. Even further, this final sense of *logos* as “speech” also refers to the fundamental meaning of *logos* we encountered throughout this book: specifically human communication involves apparently contradictory terms (experiences that are made firsthand, and ones that are not, will not, or even cannot be made firsthand) without reducing one to the other, or letting them remain indifferent to one another. Only then will we see that the very question of the “*logos* of being” that initiated this book (e.g., “What is it *for an ox* to be?”) can actually only be asked by a being equipped with *logos* as the capacity of understanding and relaying non-firsthand experience as well as firsthand experience. The question of the “*logos* of being” presents itself only to a being having *logos*.

1. Animal Communication

Are bees capable of hearing according to Aristotle? This is a seemingly innocent question concerning quite a local phenomenon in “second philosophy.” But, in fact, it already calls for witness the famous opening of Aristotle’s “first philosophy,” the *Metaphysics*, according to which the answer seems no:

The [animals] that cannot hear *psophoi* are intelligent but cannot learn, such as a bee or any other kind of animal that might be such. (*Metaph. I, 1, 980b23*)

Yet at least two passages in the *History of Animals*, IX, suggest otherwise. The first one implies that bees do hear:

When a swarm is about to take flight, a monotonous and peculiar voice happens [*phônê monôtis kai idios*]\(^3\) for some days, and two or three days beforehand some fly around the hive; whether the king is among these has not yet been observed because it is not easy. (*HA IX, 40, 625b9–10; Balme’s translation slightly modified*)

A couple of pages later, another passage is more straightforwardly affirmative:

At daybreak [bees] are silent until one bee arouses them by buzzing [*bombêasa*] two or three times. Then they all fly out together to work, and on returning they are noisy [*thorybousi*] at first but
gradually become less so until a single bee flies around buzzing [bombēseī] as though making a sign [hōsper sēmainousa] for sleep; then suddenly they are silent. *(HA IX, 40, 627a24–28; Balme’s translation)*

Here we seem to face an inconsistency between Aristotle’s negative position on the subject of bee hearing in the *Metaphysics* and his affirmative stance in the *History of Animals*, IX. As the so-called principle of the “excluded middle,” famously first formulated by Aristotle besides the “principle of non-contradiction,” forbids bees from being neither deaf nor not deaf, Balme attempted to settle the problem by assigning the two conflicting texts to different periods of Aristotle’s career, claiming that he changed his mind between them. This philological solution as such brings about three problems: first, generally, anyone’s conflicting views can be reconciled once we assign them to different times; secondly, this solution does not answer why the author changed his mind and in what direction; and finally, in this context, such an isolation of the two conflicting claims does not help anyway, since skepticism about bees’ ability to hear shows up in the following passage from the very *HA*, IX, 40, which seemed to defend it:

Bees seem to like the rattle, and so people say they collect them into the hive by rattling pots and counters. It is not clear, however, if they hear it at all, and whether they act thus through pleasure or through fear. *(HA IX, 40, 627a15–19; Balme’s translation slightly modified)*

So, assigning the *Metaphysics* and the *History of Animals* passages to two different periods does not help us know whether or not Aristotle believed bees to be capable of hearing. Then, without venturing to philologically date conflicting claims to different periods of Aristotle’s career, let us attempt to philosophically interpret his seemingly ambiguous remarks in a way that makes them compatible, even mutually supportive and philosophically interesting.

**Noise**

For perhaps the ambiguity does not lie in Aristotle’s position to begin with. Besides being the first to formulate the two “principles” mentioned above, he also famously and typically appeals to a disambiguation of our apparently univocal everyday words. So in this case, the ambiguity may lie in the Ancient Greek verb *akouein*, “to hear,” itself. Grammatically, this verb is
often followed either by a genitive or by an accusative, mostly meaning “to listen to, to learn from”\textsuperscript{13} or “to hear something, not listen to” respectively.\textsuperscript{14} More interesting, perhaps, is the variation of the verb’s meaning according to what the object is heard as. These distinctions may help us solve the apparent contradiction about Aristotle’s position on bee hearing, not by appealing to chronological or philological emendations, but by recognizing the ambiguity of the verb as such and disentangling it.

Let us start with the *Metaphysics* passage. Here the verb takes the genitive and its object is *psophoi*, and almost all English and French translations of the *Metaphysics* translate *psophos* as “sound”.\textsuperscript{15} “The [animals] that cannot hear sounds [\textit{hosa mê dynatai tôn psophôn akouein}] are intelligent but cannot learn, such as a bee or any other kind of animal that might be such” (\textit{Metaph. I, 1, 980b23}). According to the distinctions above, Aristotle is claiming not that bees are simply deaf, but that they cannot listen to, or learn from, *psophoi*. What does *psophos* mean? What is the process of its production and reception? What does it mean to say that bees are unable to listen to or learn from it, as opposed to other unnamed species? And how does this align with the two passages from the *History of Animals*?

In Aristotle as well as in Ancient Greek, *psophos* is defined generically as the acoustic effect of one thing striking another. “Sound [\textit{psophos}] comes to be in actuality always from something against something and in something, for it is the striking that produces it. Therefore if there is one [thing only], sound is impossible” (\textit{DA II, 8, 419b9–12}). Sound results from the shock of a body against another unable to yield immediately, “for the motion of the thing striking must outrun the yielding of the air” (\textit{DA II, 8, 419b22–24}).\textsuperscript{16} Solid, smooth, and hollow things sound best, “because they produce many blows after the first one by bouncing back and forth, while what is moved is unable to get out” and sound expands as long as the medium is continuous and one (\textit{DA II, 8, 419b16–18, 34–35}).\textsuperscript{17}

One way of reacting to sound would be to reverberate or reflect it. If reverberation and reflection are not emissions of sound, they certainly are transmissions. However, as we know from chapter 4, to perceive a sound is a phenomenon fundamentally different from transmitting it. This is trivially clear from the fact that the lyre or the bell, when struck, does not hear, any more than a loudspeaker or a recorder, whereas the ear of an animal does hear. As we saw, “sensation is \textit{logos}” (\textit{DA III, 2, 426b7; II, 12}), but in a different way than the strings of lyre stand in a certain ratio or proportion in the eyes of the lyrist. Sensation requires the simultaneous grasp of the state of the sense organ and of the state of the object without letting one yield to the other. To let the organ yield to the medium would not be sensation,
but reverberation; and, as we saw, to have the organ overpower the medium would amount not to sensation either, but to sound production.

In hearing, “when the [air] outside is moved, the [air] inside is moved too” (DA II, 8, 420a5–6; PA II, 10, 656b16). But the actually hearing ear does not simply yield to or overpower the motion of the incoming air: “the [air] in the ear has been walled in so as to be unmoved in order that there might be an accurate sensation of all differences of motion” (DA II, 8, 420a9–12).\(^{18}\)

To say that sensation is *logos* means nothing other than that all sensation is sensation of difference and thus requires a way of holding together the terms that are being differentiated. All sensation is sensation of a *between*, a stretch *between*: “Hearing is of the differences of sound.”\(^{19}\) For Aristotle, sensation is not only an undergoing or doing, but a kind of “discrimination,” *krisis*.\(^{20}\)

By simultaneously holding together and discriminating the motions of air inside and outside the sense organ,\(^{21}\) hearing reveals to the animal the vast realm of relatively smooth, solid, hollow, and relatively quick-moving objects. But since we saw that hearing as a kind of distant perception implies locomotion for Aristotle in chapter 4, we may also infer that the animal that is the *subject* of hearing also becomes its probable *object* precisely because of its ability to move. Theoretically, all that can hear can also be heard, but indeed not the other way around. As more unimpeded and less oriented than the eyes in most animals, hearing is less restricted by the distinction between the back and the front, the left and the right, the up and down. Hearing in this sense is less focused than circumspective, opens less a point of view or a perspective than a surrounding, an environment, a horizon of hearing and being heard. To return to bees, if the *Metaphysics* is claiming that bees are incapable of hearing *psophos* in this generic sense of “sound,” any acoustic phenomenon, then they should be simply deaf, and in that case the text conflicts with the passages from the *History of Animals*.

But, in fact, Liddell, Scott, and Jones’s *Ancient Greek Lexicon* renders *psophos* not generically with “sound,” but specifically with “noise.”\(^{22}\) It even opposes this specific sense to other acoustic phenomena exemplified in Aristotle’s biology.\(^{23}\) That Aristotle doubts that bees hear noise is corroborated by his skepticism about their hearing the rattling pots and counters in a passage quoted above. If *psophos* means not “sound” in its generic sense, but specifically “noise,” then the *Metaphysics* passage might be claiming that bees are somehow deaf to noise only, and this passage might be brought in line with the passages in *HA*, IX, 40, that assume that bees are capable of hearing.

Yet what, if anything, would it mean to say that bees are deaf to noise, but not to all sound? What are the animal species capable of hearing noise that
remained unnamed in the *Metaphysics*?\(^{24}\) And further, why does the passage associate the hearing of noises with the capacity for learning (*manthanein*)? We may gather an answer from Aristotle’s description of animal species that are capable of hearing *psophoi*:

Among the small birds, some when singing send forth a different voice [*phasis*] from their parents, if they have been reared away from the nest and have listened to other birds singing [*ornithôn aidontôn*]. A hen nightingale has before now been observed teaching [*prodidaskousa*] her chick to sing, which suggests that the “song” does not come naturally in the same way as *dialekto*\(^{25}\) and voice [*phasis*], but is capable of being shaped [*plattesthai*]. *(HA IV, 9, 536b14–18; Peck’s translation modified)*

So some small bird species, for example, nightingales, do hear “noise,” that is, acoustic phenomena regardless of its origin and meaning. The kind of learning they are capable of, unlike bees, results from *akoueus* followed by the genitive, that is, from the listening to and learning from an external acoustic stimulus, with the consequence that the animal reproduces it mimetically.\(^ {26}\) “Song” does not “come naturally,” but rather can be “shaped.” Then, according to the *Metaphysics* passage, bees are not deaf of sound as such, but to noise, unlike some small bird species; more specifically, they are incapable of receiving the acoustic effect or a shock as such, and of relaying it without understanding it.

**Voice**

But deaf as they are to noise according to the *Metaphysics*, what are bees capable of hearing in the passages of the *History of Animals*? We saw that “when a swarm is about to take flight, a monotonous and peculiar voice [*monôthôn kai idios*] happens for some days” *(HA IX, 40, 625b9–10)*. This suggests that bees are capable of hearing voice: *phasis*.\(^ {27}\) If so, our apparent contradiction may be solved by stating that bees are sensitive to voice only, and not to noise, as some imitating bird species are.

Yet this is impossible. Aristotle insistently and clearly denies that insects can utter “voice” in the strict sense of the word. “Now the only part of the body with which an animal can utter a voice [*phasis*] is the pharynx” *(HA IV, 9, 535a29–31; DA II, 8, 420b10)*. In general voice is a sound produced by an animal, “but not by any random part” *(DA II, 8, 420b14)*; technically speaking, it is “the striking of inhaled air against the part called the ‘windpipe’ by the action of the soul in these parts” *(DA II, 8, 420b27–29, 14–17)*.
production of voice requires that the animal neither inhale nor exhale, but withhold air, “for the one who withholds [air] moves it” (DA II, 8, 421a2–4). Unlike the continuous alteration of inhaling and exhaling in respiration, voice has a discontinuous character. And unlike the immediate mimetic relay of sound by some bird species, voice presents a certain reflexivity or middle state in the animal body. Furthermore, in voice production, the respiratory functions of the lungs, the windpipe, the tongue, and of the air within and without are all reorganized. Thus, voice production entails reorganization in the organic body as well as in the animal’s relation to its environment. This reorganization is made in such a way that voice is reducible neither to the effect of a motion against another motion where the striking object is external to the object struck, nor simply to a sound coming from within the animal body.

Buzz

Bees match none of these physiological requirements for uttering voice. Since the “monotonous and peculiar voice” mentioned above is nevertheless uttered by a bee, could bees be capable of producing a counterpart (analogon) of voice?

This counterpart to voice is bombos, the “buzz.” The parallelism between voice and buzz can be found in their respective physiology. The “striking of inhaled air against the ‘windpipe’” in breathing animals is clearly paralleled in the “friction of the internal pneuma” in some insects, such that the buzzing bee presents a reflexivity and reorganization analogous to the ones with which we previously characterized the uttering of voice:

Thus insects produce neither voice nor speech [oute phônei oute dialegetai], though they produce a sound [psophei] by their internal pneuma (not externally emitted pneuma, for none of them breathes), but some of them buzz [bombei], for instance the bee and other winged insects, and some ‘sing’ as the saying is, e.g., the cicada. All these insects produce a sound [psophei] by means of the membrane which is under the hypozoma [the division between thorax and abdomen] (this of course refers to those whose bodies are divided at this point), e.g., a certain kind of cicada, which makes the sound by friction of the pneuma [against the membrane]; and so do flies and bees and all the others, as by their flying they produce the lifting and contracting movement: the noise [psophos] is actually the friction of the internal pneuma. (HA IV, 9, 535b3–12; Peck’s translation)
So Aristotle has an account of buzzing, although unfortunately he has pretty much nothing to tell us about the physiology of bees’ hearing. There are two texts that support the parallelism between breathing animals and insects such as bees: *On Sleep and Waking* 2, 456a11ff., and *On Respiration* 9, 474b31ff. In these, the external *pneuma* inhaled by breathing animals is correlated with the internal *pneuma* of insects; the second text correlates the lung motion of breathing animals, the movement of fishes’ gills, and the friction against the membrane in insects.

However, the parallel drawn here is not between voice and buzz, but between the motion of respiration in breathing animals and the motion of buzzing in some insects. In other words, if there is a kind of buzzing among bees that is a counterpart to voice production, it must be not a constant sound (*psophos*) comparable to the heartbeat, but a different buzz that is discontinuous and occasional. This character of the buzzing becomes manifest when we mark the temporal qualifications in our second passage from the *HA* IX, 40:

At *daybreak* they are silent until one bee arouses them by buzzing [*bombêasa*] two or three times. Then they all fly out together to work, and on returning they are noisy [*thorybei*] at first but gradually become less so until a single bee flies around buzzing [*bombêsêi*] as though making a sign [*hôsper sêmainousa*] for sleep; then suddenly they are silent. (*HA* IX, 40, 627a24–28; Balme’s translation, our emphases)

It is clear that Aristotle distinguishes the “making noise” (in this case, *thorybein*) and the “buzzing” (*bombein*). Hence, this passage brings us to the most crucial aspect of the parallelism between voice and the buzz, and to what distinguishes both from noise. Whereas it was unclear above whether bees acted “through pleasure or through fear” upon hearing the rattle, here the buzz is explicitly said to be heard *as though meaningful* (*hôsper sêmainousa*). In voice, unlike noise, “the striking object must be ensouled and have some imagination [with it], for in fact voice is a signifying sound, but not [signifying] the inhaled air as a cough” (*DA* II, 8, 420b31–421a1). While sound as such is simply of something against something, “voice is a sound of an ensouled being” (*DA* II, 8, 420b6). Even further, “voice is a sound of an animal” (*DA* II, 8, 420b13–14). Voice production is always coupled with the animal’s capacity for sensation and, probably, for locomotion. Thus, a voice is a quite explicit demand for “attention” coming from, and addressed to, an animal. Whereas sound means friction or excess of *touch*, voice is of an animal making *contact*. 
The primary phenomenon of voice, and of the discontinuous buzz in bees, is thus a demand for attention, a call, even a kind of claim.

For, most importantly, “voice is a sign [sēmeion] of the painful and pleasant” (Pol. I, 1, 1253a11–14). Regardless of whether it is reflex or deliberately encoded, an “effect” or a “message” of pleasure and pain, voice seems thus infused with desire just as locomotion. Like voice, locomotion is an embodiment of pleasure and pain in the forms of flight from, and pursuit of, particular objects. And yet, the structure of voice cannot be reduced to the “practical syllogism” of locomotion, because voice is precisely not flight or pursuit, but rather a “sign.” In light of this, the animal making such a “sign” may be doing so precisely because the object of interest is not attainable by the motion of the individual animal. One obvious example of this is reproduction which mostly necessitates a cooperation between male and female (Pol. I, 1, 1252a). This also ties in with the animals’ use of voice for calling their lost babies. Voice conveys a “particular premise” (“this is pleasant” or “this is painful”) to another animal in order that they move together. Subjoining a “particular premise” to desire for a possible cooperation, voice is inherently “tactical,” assuming the mood of a subjunctive or hypotaktikê in later Greek grammar.

If so, whereas the mechanical reproduction of a sound or noise never becomes a premise, being meaningless and disinterested in itself, the “practical syllogism” of voice and buzzing operates in an environment of common interest and desire, in a minimal possible community through which individuals are not only formed out of organs, but themselves become part of a possible “organization” or taxis for fleeing danger and pursuing common pleasure. An animal that emits a voice in order to mark its territory, to mate, to threat, to find its babies, or to warn another animal is in each case an animal that perceives the means of its desire beyond its own immediate motion or rest and thus convokes another for cooperation. Uttering voice or buzzing implies the significance of other animals and, to some degree, of their perspective, their interests, their evaluation. Voice and the buzz thus are not marked by the immediacy of the individual animal’s flight or pursuit that resulted in the “practical syllogism,” since they demand immediate cooperation from another. They constitute a motion withheld in the individual animal’s body in order to be translated into the language of common interest, an outer organ used to reorder the world with and also for others. For Aristotle, it is precisely this common work that characterizes political animals such as human beings, wasps, ants, and bees (HA I, 1, 488a7–10).

So, we are back to bees. Now that we have seen that voice, or its counterpart “buzz,” is essentially infused with a meaningful and interested project
of cooperation, we can accept Aristotle’s position in the *Metaphysics* while also making more sense of our two passages from the *History of Animals*: in the first passage in the *History of Animals*, the bees’ hearing the “monotonous and peculiar voice” was immediately followed by their preparation to take flight; in the second passage, they clearly go to sleep and wake up upon hearing the buzz. In both cases, the bees seem to immediately move cooperatively in reaction to the buzz of another bee, and probably not to the sound of the rattle. While, as the *Metaphysics* suggests, some bird species are able to perceive and relay noise regardless of its meaning, of its source, or of the interests involved by the sender, the passages in the *History of Animals* show that bees immediately receive voice, or more specifically, buzz, as a meaningful and interested call to cooperation or synergy.\(^{39}\)

This brings us to the third meaning of the verb *akouein*, again typically followed by the genitive: “to obey.”\(^{40}\) The Homeric examples denote obedience to a king (*Iliad*, XIX, 256) or a people’s hearkening to a king as to a god (*Odyssey*, VII, 11). This converges with the idea that bees have a “king”\(^{41}\) whose voice they “listen” to, not in order to imitate and thus relay the sound heard, but in order to execute his orders. In fact Aristotle says that “it is commonly agreed that [bees] follow [*epakolouthein*] the kings because their birth depends on these bees (for if there were no such dependence, the facts concerning their hegemony [*ta symbainonta peri tên hêgemonian autôn*] would have no reason)” (*GA* III, 10, 760b15–18).\(^{42}\) This detail may explain why, in an earlier passage, we saw Aristotle expecting the “king” to be among the bees that alert the others for the approaching flight, saying “whether the king is among these has not yet been observed because it is not easy” (*HA* IX, 40, 625b9–10). Unlike noise hearing, immediately relayed by imitation regardless of its content or source without any particular mood, the cooperation implied in voice is injunctive and imperial (“hegemonic”) in character, and its mood is the imperative (prostaktikê). In hearing noise, some bird species relay without understanding; in hearing voice, bees do not relay, but understand and obey.\(^{43}\)

So are bees capable of hearing according to Aristotle after all? We saw that the answer is yes. But more importantly, we saw that this question was flawed, for it assumes a false dilemma that may lead one to “solve” it by dating the “contradictory” texts to different periods of Aristotle’s career. A better formulation of the question is the following: what exactly, if anything, are bees capable of hearing according to Aristotle? The exact answer is the following: not *psophos* in the generic sense of “sound,” nor *psophos* in the specific sense of “noise,” nor voice as such, but a counterpart of voice, namely the buzz, or to be as exact as possible, not the continuous buzz, but the discontinuous and occasional buzz. This disambiguation solves the apparent contradiction
between the texts: the *Metaphysics* passage emphasizes that bees are incapable of hearing noises in the sense of meaningless acoustic objects to be relayed, and hence of learning in the sense of imitating, reproducing, and relaying them; whereas the two *HA* passages point out that they are capable of hearing, if not voice per se, at least its counterpart, the discontinuous and occasional buzz, acoustic objects as meaningful and interested calls for cooperation. Some bird species are capable of relaying without understanding, while bees understand but do not relay.

2. Human Speech: From “Letters” to “Words”

As we just saw, some bird species are capable of relaying non-firsthand experiences without understanding their content. Honeybees, on the other hand, show themselves able to understand the content of non-firsthand experiences, but they do not relay them to yet another honeybee. In this section and in the following one, I shall propose and develop the following claim: the ability to both understand and relay non-firsthand experience as well as firsthand experience is precisely what Aristotle means by *logos* in the exclusively human sense of “speech.” As in the other three major senses of *logos*, namely “standard,” “ratio,” and “reason,” the meaning of *logos* as “speech” is thus again a kind of relation, of gathering, of inclusiveness between terms that previously may have seemed mutually exclusive or indifferent: contents of firsthand experience, and contents that are not, may not be, or even cannot be, experienced firsthand.

Previously, we distinguished three senses of the Ancient Greek verb *akouein*: sound hearing, voice hearing, and listening in the sense of obeying. Yet there is a fourth sense of *akouein*: “understand, [to] take in a certain sense.” This definition suggests that what is heard here may be taken in another sense. Then what is heard is somehow not straightforward, but fundamentally opaque, unlike voice which, as we saw, “comes naturally” and cannot be “shaped” (*HA* IV, 9, 536b14–18). The message here is not just taken in naturally and entirely, but remains open to interpretation and indeed misinterpretation, leaving a gap between sound and meaning. In this kind of *akouein*, we then move from the fact of having sense to the task of making sense. In short, according to the definition, the object of this kind of hearing is characterized by three features: mediation, articulation, and ambiguity.

**Mediation**

So indeed is *logos* in the sense of “speech,” as I shall now try to demonstrate by bringing together Aristotle’s scattered remarks on the matter.
Mediation is clearly found in Aristotelian remarks concerning human speech. As speech, \textit{logos} is never immediate, just as it never is in any sense in Aristotle. More specifically, even the material of speech is not immediate as voice is. There are passages in Aristotle which suggest that the material of speech is voice.\textsuperscript{48} And yet other passages stress that the voices to be used as material of speech are modified: “Now speech is signifying not with voice, but with its modifications [\textit{pathê}], and not because [the one who utters speech] takes pleasure or suffers” (\textit{Prob.} 10, 895a4–14).\textsuperscript{49} The rest of this passage names the unit through which \textit{logos} is articulated out of voices: “Letters [\textit{grammata}] are modifications of voice.” Then the specific material of \textit{logos} is “letters”.\textsuperscript{50} “Speech is composed of letters through voice” (\textit{PA} II, 16, 660a3–4). The mediation that makes \textit{logos} possible and distinguishes it from other acoustic phenomena involves the production of letters, and this production differs from voice production both physiologically and semantically.

First, the physiology of the production of letters differs from that of voice production. We saw that the production of voice involves the pharynx and lungs, and also a special use of the windpipe.\textsuperscript{51} Speech, however, is produced by means of the mouth, the teeth, the larynx, the pitch of the voice, tongue, and the lips.\textsuperscript{52} “The voice and the larynx send forth the vowels, and the tongue and the lips the consonants, of which language [\textit{dialektos}] is constituted” (\textit{HA} IV, 9, 535a29–b1). Thus letters are not only a selection of voices, they are distinguished among themselves into two interrelated groups. While vowels have an audible voice, some letters have a voice only in conjunction with vowels: “A consonant is that which has no voice by itself with \textit{prosbolê}, but becomes audible with one that has voice” (\textit{Po.} 20, 1456b28–29). The production of consonants involves a new physiological aspect, \textit{prosbolê} and \textit{symbolê}: “Speech is composed of letters through voice; but if the tongue was not this way, or if the lips were not wet, most of the letters could not be uttered; for some are impacts [\textit{prosbolê}] of the tongue, some are closings [\textit{symbolê}] of the lips” (\textit{PA} II, 16, 660a4–7). Thus, just as the production of vowels brought into play the larynx, now consonants engage the lips and the tongue:

Voice and sound are different, and language [\textit{dialektos}] is a third. No part ever emits voice apart from the pharynx; thus, those that have no lungs, never utter; but language is the articulation [\textit{diarthrōsis}] of voice by means of the tongue: the voice and the larynx send forth the vowels, the tongue and the lips [send forth] the consonants, of which language is constituted. Therefore those that have no tongue or no loose tongue do not use language [\textit{dialegetai}]. But sounding belongs to other parts as well. Thus, insects neither emit voice, nor
use language, but emit sound to the interior of their lungs, not outside. (*HA IV*, 9, 535a27-b5; 536a32–536b4)

Thus Aristotle distinguishes a letter from sounds, from voices, from vowels if the letter is a consonant, or from consonants if it is a vowel, and finally from other vowels if it is a vowel, and from other consonants if it is a consonant. For instance, the “letter” /u/ heard or produced as a letter is determined in a fourfold way: it is not a wuthering (not only a sound); it is not a howl (not only a voice); it is neither /b/ nor /t/ nor /s/, and so on (not a consonant); it is neither /a/ nor /e/ nor /i/, and so on (not any vowel).

Hence, learning a new language requires not only that one widens the range of one’s phonatory equipment quantitatively, but also that one modifies it qualitatively. For uttering new letters requires a new cooperation between the larynx, the lungs, or the lips and tongue. Even at the apparently rudimentary level of sound production, the acquisition of a new language demands an extensive rehabituation of the body. Thus the mediated character of speech can be seen in the physiological aspect of its production through letters.

Just as the basic material of speech involves a meticulous process of production, the reception of a letter as a letter also involves a quite sharp perception or intricate discrimination of acoustic differences. This is reminiscent of Aristotle’s wonder in front of the distinct perception (*diaisthanesthai*) that some bird species are capable of (*HA IX*, 1, 608a17–21). One may claim that, for Aristotle, languages differ from one another not only in their syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, but all the way down to their letters. Thus, the ear tended toward letters is tended toward something that is not simply a sound, because letters are not reducible to physical shocks and strokes; not simply voice, because letters are not *any* voice, but a selection of voices; not simply a voice from within a selection, because letters are also modified physiologically and acoustically by the distinction between consonants and vowels; and not simply a preselected acoustic unit that has a voice either independently or dependently, because consonants are finally differentiated from the other consonants, and vowels from the other vowels.

Yet the crucial aspect of the mediated character of speech is not physiological, but semantic. Because letters are meaningless. While voice is itself meaningful and composed out of meaningful parts, *logos* is meaningful, but composed out of meaningless parts. Beyond a merely physiological modification of voice, letters involves a fundamental semantic modification of voice, of one’s relation to desire, to meaning, and to others. To learn to speak is not to add cries and shouts in various combinations, it is to recharge voice at its natural roots. Even to supply the material which speech will further
articulate, one must not only learn to reorchestrate one’s respiration, larynx, tongue, and lips, but, most importantly, one must be able to “redefine,” as it were, one’s most elemental pleasures and pains. Just as animal voice was possible only by refraining from both inhalation and exhalation, from both flight and pursuit, here the basic material of speech requires that one not emit a voice, that one go beyond the dilemma of invoking or threatening others. To learn letters is to fundamentally modify one’s behavior in order to learn to commit the voice and silence of one’s body to others.

There is textual evidence in Aristotle for the psychological significance and ethical exemplariness of learning letters. The *Nicomachean Ethics* uses *grammatikê*, “literacy,” as a paradigmatic kind of knowledge, and as an example of a positive state: it is by performing literacy that one becomes literate (*NE II*, 3, 1105a20). Yet literacy is not merely a matter of imitation:

One may in fact write letters by chance or with the support of another. One will then become literate only when, while writing letters, one does in a literate way, that is, according to the literacy in oneself. (*NE II*, 3, 1105a22–24)

Hence literacy is defined not only by knowing how to write, but also by knowing how to read (*Topics* VI, 5, 142b31). It is this crucial aspect of literacy, its being “in oneself,” that distinguishes it from all kinds of imitation, however perfect, as the ones we saw some bird species to be capable of. Hence language for Aristotle is psychological, ethical, and political all the way down to its material. No wonder listening to speech, or reading, contributes most to learning and prudence:

Hearing conveys the differences of sounds, but in some animals it also conveys the differences of voice. Incidentally hearing makes the largest contribution to prudence, for speech is the cause of learning by being audible, but it is audible not in itself but incidentally, for speech is composed of nouns and each noun is a symbol. (*De Sensu* 1, 437a10–15)

As we saw, voice is meaningful through and through. It is a natural outer “organ” intended to “organize” others by means of orders (the imperative mood) and threats or promises (the subjunctive mood). Letters, however, precisely evacuate meaning from voice, revert the natural reorganization of voice, and stop invoking others for the sake of its desire. It is on the foundation of such negation that speech can be mediated in a strong sense by means of
“letters,” that speech can be “taken in a certain sense,” and that a letter can have a function without having a meaning.

Articulation
My use of the word “articulation” here may remind the reader of a concept introduced in twentieth-century linguistics: “double articulation” (Martinet) or “duality of patterning” (Hockett)—the articulation of meaningless units (“phonemes”) into meaningful units (“morphemes”), and the articulation of these meaningful units into syntactic wholes. This is not a coincidence. For, when talking about the formation of words, Aristotle explicitly and insistently uses a word that means the process of organic differentiation in the embryo, *diarthrōsis*, “articulation.”

Voice and sound are different, and language [*dialektos*] is a third. No part ever emits voice apart from the pharynx; thus, those that have no lungs, never utter; but language is the *diarthrōsis* of voice by means of the tongue. (*HA* IV, 9, 535a27–b1; 536a32–b4)

So is there a parallel between the articulation of speech and the formation of the embryo? On a lower level, voice is comparable to elements constitutive of organic bodies: both voice and elements lack *logos*. We saw in chapter 3 that fire was ever too complete to be proportioned into the growth of an organism (“fire grows without any limit or *logos*”), similarly, the voice of a crying baby is already too meaningful to be integrated into a meaningful whole. On the higher level too, *logos* is comparable to the organic body: just as the organic body is not reducible to an agglomerate of elements, but rather needs an intermediate level of articulation into nonuniform parts, similarly *logos* is irreducible to a series of natural “uniform voices” and requires the intermediate level of articulation into highly determined, “modified,” and meaningless units, namely letters. So, just as elements cannot account for *diarthrōsis* in the sense of organic formation, voice cannot account for *diarthrōsis* in the sense of the articulation of speech. In both cases, *diarthrōsis* names a process which goes beyond mere uniform units.

The word Aristotle uses for “uniform unit” in these contexts is *stoikheion*, meaning alternatively “natural element” or “uniform voice.” Aristotle’s uses of this word support the parallelism above. *Stoikheia* account for voice, as it is “like water is part of water”: “The elements of a voice are that out of which voice is composed, and that into which it is ultimately divided, and these are not divided into other voices different from them with respect to their form”
Yet, unlike voice, speech, even a syllable, is not an agglomerate of elemental sounds, but rather an articulation of letters:

The syllable is not its elements \([\text{stoikheia}]\), nor is BA the same as B and A, nor is flesh fire and earth; because after dissolution they no longer exist, neither flesh nor the syllable, whereas the elements and both fire and earth do exist. Thus the syllable is something, yet not only its elements, vowels and consonants, but something else; and the flesh is not only fire and earth, or hot and cold, but something else. (Metaph. VII, 17, 1041b11–19)

Thus, the parallelism between organ formation and the formation of \(\text{logos}\) can be established: neither body parts nor speech parts are agglomerations of raw elements or \(\text{stoikheia}\), since both require the articulation of a preformed material that has no meaning or life on its own, but only a function.

What is this function? What are letters articulated into? “\(\text{Logos}\) is a signifying voice, one of whose parts is signifying separately, not as an affirmation \([\text{kataphasis}]\), but as an expression \([\text{phasis}]\)” (On Int. 4, 16b26–28). Then letters, meaningless as such, are articulated into an expression that is separately meaningful. Whatever the vague word \(\text{phasis}\) exactly means, Aristotle says: “Let noun and verb be the only expressions” (On Int. 5, 17a17–18). So letters are ultimately articulated into nouns and verbs, the result of the first level of the articulation of \(\text{logos}\).

Nouns, the products of the first articulation of speech, introduce three aspects that define speech: its conventional \((\text{kata synthêkên})\), composite \((\text{synthêtê})\), and symbolic character \((\text{symbolê})\). So firstly, with regard to the conventional character of nouns, we saw that speech is irreducible to a series of natural voices. Since letters were already conventional, it is not surprising to see that a noun, and a fortiori full-fledged speech, signify “according to a convention” and not as an “organ” (On Int. 2, 16a20–21; 4, 16b33–17a2). Aristotle explains: “According to a convention, because no noun is by nature, but when a symbol comes to be; letterless \([\text{agrammatai}]\) sounds, for instance those of wild beasts, do make something manifest, but none of them is a noun” (On Int. 2, 16a26–29). In Ancient Greek, \(\text{synthêtê}\) means “a compound,” but also “convention,” especially in Aristotle and Plato, and it is usually contrasted to the “natural.” A voice as such is never a noun any more than it is a letter, because voice does not signify by means of a convention. One never hears a voice \textit{as voice} in a noun, nor a noun \textit{as noun} in a voice.

Secondly, as to the composite character of nouns, this should not be surprising to us either. For we already saw that a noun uses a certain kind of
voice as material. The sound /u/ may well happen to correspond to the English second-person pronoun ("you"), or the name of the letter u, or a voice (an expression of surprise), or even a sound (the wuthering of the wind). Yet such an ambiguity does not disprove the existence of differences, but proves it: /u/ may be one of all four because there is a fourfold distinction to begin with. To take the wuthering of the wind for a dog howling, or a dog howling for the pronoun "you," is precisely a case of confusion between distinct registers. Because languages are conventionally determined all the way down to their basic constituents, we can hear nouns or verbs as mere voices or sounds only by forcefully abstracting their meaning, particular situation, or context.\footnote{69}

The third characteristic of nouns, their symbolic character, is new to us. For, while letters are no more symbolic than voice, nouns come to be "when a symbolon comes to be" (On Int. 2, 16a28). In fact, On Interpretation opens with this idea: "Those in the voice are symbols of the affections in the soul" (On Int. 1, 16a3–4). Then, the composite and conventional character of a noun goes together with its being a symbolon. But what does symbolon mean? Closely related to symbolê which appeared above as the "closing of lips" in our discussion of the physiology of voice production (PA II, 16, 660a7), Aristotle uses the word symbolon in meanings that are pretty much unrelated to the English word "symbol": it means a "complementary factor" in the context of Empedocles’s understanding of the relation between male and female (GA I, 18, 722b12); it appears in the context of air’s being composed out of the wet and the hot "as from symbola" (Mete. II, 4, 360a26); and it is used in the context of the generation of a constitutional government “taking a symbolon” from both oligarchy and democracy (Pol. IV, 7, 1294a35).

Most concretely symbolon means a “tally, i.e., each of two halves or corresponding pieces of an astragalos or other object, which two xenoi, or any two contracting parties, broke between them, each party keeping one piece, in order to have proof of the identity of the presenter of the other.”\footnote{70} This last and most concrete sense of symbolon best designates the conventionally and compositely significant character of nouns or verbs. For, whereas the hot and the wet, male and female, democracy and oligarchy have a certain existence apart from the other, a tally by itself means nothing at all. If it means at all, it does so only potentially.\footnote{71} For, before broken into two tallies or symbola, the astragalos is a bone, thus a natural organ. But once broken in two, it can no longer fulfill its natural function. When two strangers break an astragalos among them and deprive it from its first function, they instill the two pieces with a fundamentally new interdependent meaning: each tally designates its unique counterpart in distinction from
all other tallies. Thereby the two holders of the tallies mutually identify themselves on the basis of the very moment of the unique breakage of the *astragalos*.

This sense of *symbolon* also sheds light on the kind of people the tally holders may be, and prefigures the fundamental role of speech in the founding of the polis. An *astragalos* taken as a bone may roughly match another bone: two relatives may have similar bone structures, and they may identify one another just by looking at such similarities. As a bone with a certain form (*eidos*), the *astragalos* may bring together relatives. Yet, once broken into two tallies, an *astragalos* may bring together any two people. This is why even strangers or guests can break *astragaloi*. Hence Aristotle uses *symbolon* in this sense of a “tally” being a “friend” to its counterpart and “stretching out” toward it to form a whole:

But in a way the friendship of the opposite is also friendship of the good, for [opposites] stretch out [*oregetai*] toward one another through the middle. For they stretch out to one another as tallies do, because that way one middle thing results from both. (*EE* VII, 5, 1239b30–33)

This “one middle thing” resulting from both seems to be exactly the *symbolon*, an essential feature of nouns and hence of speech. Identification and *mis*identification do not become an issue in a context involving no strangers or guests, in the context of a household, a village, or an isolated city. This is certainly not neglected by the fifth- and fourth-century ancient Greek culture developing into cities with a background of their alliance against the Persians. Thus, Oedipus *misidentifies* himself and his parents only because both he is cast out of his fatherland Thebes and returns there afterwards. His mother fails to recognize his face and natural bone structure only because she is led astray by his conventional identity as the son of the king of Corinth or as the witty stranger that saved Thebes from the Sphinx. As we shall see better in our conclusion, the tragedy of *King Oedipus* pivots around human immersion in the conventional and symbolic character of *logos* and the open environment provided by the polis. For all characters, except Teiresias, are fixated on the ambiguity of the oracles and overinterpret them. Oedipus solves the Sphinx’s riddle thanks to his dexterity in the face of this ambiguity. The tragedy is made possible because, as citizens, everybody in the play is thinking merely in terms of the conventional symbolism and compositeness of *logos*. On the contrary, again as we shall see in our conclusion, village life as such is fixated, not on ambiguity or homonymy, but on synonymy or
literality. It is too closed to such conventional misidentification, because it is closed to conventional and symbolic identification.

So how does a noun work as a tally? What are the two tallies in our context? Arguably, one is the “sounds” uttered, and the other is the “affections of the soul.” A tally is able to fulfill its function whether the bone is broken this way or that way as long as both parties have one piece; similarly, the affections of the soul may well be expressed by these sounds or those ones. It is precisely this contingency that we do not find in voice or natural organs. Considered as mere voice, a noun is as useless as a broken bone. It is precisely an inconsistent, unintelligible sequence of vocalized demands. But once one envisages a noun as a noun, as a meaningful unit that is conventionally combined out of meaningless units, then one embarks on a process of finding a matching tally—the meaning.72

This explains why for Aristotle a noun is quite a strong threshold for meaning. For he insists that the parts of a noun are meaningless. According to him, even a noun such as Kallippos, which is obviously a compound of kalos (“beautiful”) and hippos (“horse”), is not composed out of meaningful parts (On Int. 2, 16a21–22; Po. 20, 1457a12–14). Hippos is indeed a noun on its own, but not as part of Kallippos. Just as the wind does not utter the voice /w/, and just as /a/ in “apple” is not a noun, /kalli/ is not meaningful in Kallippos. The meaning of a noun is not to be found in the meaning of its parts. Further, just as hippos in Kallippos does not count as a noun, neither does “not-human” (which is an “indefinite noun”) nor “Philon’s” (which is a declension), “because it is not true or false with ‘is’, ‘was’ or ‘will be’” (On Int. 2, 16a29–16b3). So if for Aristotle a noun is a strong threshold of meaning, it is because a noun depends on whether it will contribute to a truth or falsity when it is coupled with the verb “to be.” This is the first clue of the meaning of “meaning”: the possibility of truth or falsity when coupled with the verb “to be.” Presumably this is why the noun, and not the verb, constitutes the first articulation of speech.

As to verbs, Aristotle has similar strong restrictions: compound verbs are not composed out of nouns and verbs that by themselves have meaning (Po. 20, 1457a15); a form like “isn’t recovering” does not count as a verb, it is only an “indefinite verb”; forms such as “will recover” and “recovered” do not count as verbs either, they are declensions of verbs: “they differ from the verb in that the verb designates [prosémainei] the present time, whereas the others denote that which is around [the present time]” (On Int. 3, 16b17–18). A verb “is always a sign of that to which it belongs, for instance, of the underlying things” (On Int. 3, 16b9–10), so much so that a logos need not contain a verb: the definition of “human being” is a logos that does not contain a verb.
(Po. 20, 1457a24–27). “[Logos] is composed of nouns each of which is a symbol” (De Sensu 1, 437a13–15). Meaning is the possibility of truth and falsity when coupled with the verb “to be.” “Cleon” means something because “Cleon is” is either true or false. And further, “Cleon walks” signifies something, and it is a logos, it contains a part that by itself signifies something: “Cleon” (Po. 20, 1457a27–28). But “walks” or even “is” does not mean anything on their own, that is, they are meaningful as something said of an implicit “Cleon” (On Int. 3, 16b22–23).

Aristotle’s positing of the noun as the first level of articulation of logos is implicitly an argument against infinite regress in meaning: as conventional, composite, and symbolic, a noun, the basic meaningful unit of logos, is and should be able to refrain from referring back to more elementary meaningful parts, and to precisely mark the beginning of a realm of meaning to which no voice can access. Voice, on the contrary, is composed out of meaningful parts all the way down—a long cry may indeed be composed out of short cries that do not mean the same thing, but do mean something, a slight emphasis in the pain or pleasure, a minor nuance of threat or invitation.

What is entailed in hearing a noun? To my knowledge, there is only one passage, an obscure one, where Aristotle seems to address the issue of understanding a noun instead of hearing mere voice:

Verbs said by themselves are nouns, and they signify something—for the speaker puts the thought, and the hearer remained at rest [èremèsen]—but in no way does it signify whether it is or not. For “to be” or “not to be” are not signs of a thing, not even if you said “the being” [to on] on its own. For it itself is nothing, but designates some synthesis which cannot be thought without the components.

Aristotle here spells out both the productive and receptive side of the expression of nouns: “the speaker puts the thought, and the hearer remained at rest.” To hear and understand a noun involves rest. What kind of rest?

The nature of this “rest” in hearing a noun may become clearer if we recall the essentially moving or motivating characteristic of voice. As we saw, voices “move,” they “invite” or “threaten.” They are imperatives or conditionals: they imply order, threat, or promise. If the hearer of a voice as voice is neither impelled nor repelled away, it is simply because it is insensitive to the threat or invitation. Rest as a response to voice is thus contempt or indifference. Listening and understanding a noun as a noun, however, is precisely to “remain at rest” at least for a “moment” of understanding, that is, of receiving the meaning by remaining open to its possibility of truth and falsity. “Rest”
here is not at the expense of a relation to one’s interlocutor. The “rest” of understanding is not due to insensitivity, but due to the consideration of possibilities at least momentarily considered as options. The first articulation of speech is then received by a being capable of holding the possibility of truth and that of falsity without letting one yield to the other. 75

This structure of “momentary rest” in front of two contraries matches the structure of the “potentialities with logos” we saw in chapter 2: understanding a noun as a meaningful unit necessitates that the listener stay open to both of contrary possibilities, just as the “potentiality with logos” implies a “moment” where Socrates must “stand still” and weigh the option of fleeing together with the possibility of not-fleeing. 76 “There must be some other dominant factor [to kurion], I mean desire or choice” (Metaph. IX, 5, 1048a10–11). Desire or choice—but which one holds both possibilities open? The faculty that holds them open may be imagination. But Aristotle argues that the imagination combining perceptions, and therefore pleasures and pains, must be distinguished from an imagination involving the work of logos—a deliberative, “logistic” imagination:

So a sensory imagination, as was said, belongs to other animals as well, whereas the deliberative one belongs to those that are logos: for, whether one shall do this or that is already a work for logismos, has to be measured by one [criterion], since one is looking for the better. Thus one is able to make one thing out of many images. This is the reason why [other animals] do not seem to have opinion, because they do not have opinion that comes from a syllogismos, while others do have it. Desire does not have the power of deliberating, but at one time this desire wins out and knocks away that one, and at another time that one wins out and knocks away this one, like a ball, when there is lack of self-restraint. But by nature the higher is more governing [arkhikôtera] and moves. (DA III, 11, 434a6–16)

Here we see that deliberative imagination is the realm of logismos, that realm belonging only to the logistikos, where motion is not produced by the stronger desire’s knocking away the others, but by a “momentary rest” of the immediate provocation of desires in consideration: “desires come to be contrary to one another, which happens whenever logos and appetite are contrary to one another, and comes about in beings that have perception of time” (DA III, 10, 433b5–8). In other words, the ability to foresee the future as possibilities, to grasp and make a decision about one’s life as a whole, and not as an
agglomeration of atomic moments, decisions, and motions, requires having logos as “reason” and acting according to it. Since the motion dominated by logismos does not conquer desire, it cannot be insensitive or repressive toward it. This motion is action.

To return to logos as speech, to hear a noun as a noun is to be open to a kind of meaning that is irreducible to the massive meaningfulness of voice, to be open to a certain field of possible truth and falsity beyond the field of immediate pleasure and pain. Sensation of proper sensibles, and the pleasure and pain accompanying them, are so revealing that their truth is not an issue.77 Speech, however, is such that it always entails truth as an issue. The “rest” that constitutes the completion of the first articulation of speech for Aristotle then is a paradoxical rest in hesitation—not the hesitation between two almost equal pleasures or pains, but that between the possible truth and falsity that the noun may instantiate, a minimal patience for interpretation, one might say “hermeneutical patience.”

In general a sign of the one who knows and the one who does not know is being able to teach, and for this reason we regard art, more than experience, to be knowledge, since the one can, but the others cannot teach. (Metaph. I, 1, 981b7–10)

Just as a sign of knowing is here the ability to reformulate the content of knowledge to others in other particular circumstances instead of merely repeating it, a sign of the one who has understood a noun is his ability to reformulate the same thing with other words, to paraphrase it, to make variations on it while preserving the exact same “truth values.” A sign that one has understood the word “Socrates” is one’s ability to paraphrase it with “a philosopher,” “a meddlesome busybody,” or “a Brazilian soccer player,” without changing the “truth values” it may have when coupled with “is” or “is not.”

A symptom of the understanding of a noun then is the listener’s readiness to proceed from the first level of articulation of logos to the level of its full, second, articulation. To understand the word “Socrates” is tantamount to fall in a preliminary aporia, to assume “hermeneutical patience,” and to be provoked to ask: “So what about Socrates?”

Ambiguity
Ambiguity is the third central feature of human speech, after mediation and articulation. It follows from the symbolic character of nouns. For, precisely because nouns necessarily open up a distance between the sounds uttered and the meaning, the same things are said in many ways not only in different
languages, but even within one language, and the same nouns can refer to fundamentally different things. In a word, the first level of articulation of speech is what opens the possibility of ambiguity, equivocation, *homonymia*. It is because there is homonymy that even the hearing of the most common noun may require a search for the exact meaning. Even the most elementary words, such as “man,” “stone,” “bird,” or “hit” necessarily partake in ambiguity, as we saw in the riddle at the very beginning of chapter 1.

Yet now we can see why the “flaw” of ambiguity or homonymy, inherent to nouns, precisely goes hand in hand with their convenience. Ambiguity is a necessary consequence of the infinite economy of language: “Nouns and the quantity of *logoi* are finite, whereas things are infinite in number; thus it is necessary that the same *logos* and noun signify a number of things” (*SE* 1, 165a11–14). This enables Sophocles to skilfully show how erroneous Oedipus is in promising his citizens to *either* kill whoever killed Laius *or* die himself—without ever imagining that this is not an either-or situation, since the two options are synonymous (*King Oedipus*, ll. 132–46). Speech articulates a potentially unlimited number of nouns out of a limited number of basic conventional units, and stands for an infinite number of particular affections of the soul, but this economy is at the price of possible tragic ambiguities.

The necessarily ambiguous character of what is “heard” in the last sense of *akouein* (after hearing sound, hearing voice, and obeying) also shows up especially in the opening lines of the Aristotelian corpus which distinguish homonyms and synonyms (*Cat.* 1, 1a1–12). The human condition, that is, the condition of an animal having *logos*, situates us in an unavoidable gap between names and beings. For synonymy entails the commonality of both names and “*logos* of being,” while, as seen in chapter 1, we can always address beings homonymously, that is, with respect to their name only, since language is conventional. The mediation of speech through meaningless parts frees or detaches meanings from voices, and makes synonymy not a given, but a continual task. No wonder languages change. This is because of homonymy, the unavoidable ambiguity of language. It is very telling that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are all extremely aware of ambiguity and view disambiguation as a major philosophical task, while none of them seem to have ever hoped to eradicate ambiguity from natural language. Quite in opposition to much later aspirations and attempts for a perfect, unambiguous language in Descartes, Leibniz, Enlightenment philosophers, and most notably John Wilkins, it seems as if Aristotle, a pioneer in axiomatic science and formal logic, believes that language is *necessarily* ambiguous because he seems to think, like Wilhelm von Humboldt, that language is “the infinite use of finite media.” Only a dead language can be a perfect one.
Since specifically human hearing is understanding, that is, “taking in a certain sense,” and since the bond between meaning and sound is detached in human speech, it is possible to interpret the same letters (say, l, o, g, o and s) in different meanings, as “standard,” “ratio,” “reason,” “speech,” or as my spell-check does in interpreting logos as the plural of “logo.” For the same reason, it is possible to rephrase one same meaning in different letters, one same idea in other words. As we saw earlier in this chapter of the book, to hear a voice was to be moved by its meaning, even if in the form of indifference. The semantics of human speech, however, is fundamentally exposed to paraphrase, interpretation, and translation by a mediator, a translator, an interpreter, a Hermes, or a hermēneus.

3. Human Speech: From “Words to Sentences”

Finally, after our survey of animal communication, and our analysis of the first articulation of speech, from “letters” to “words,” through mediation, articulation, and ambiguity, we now come to the full articulation of speech. In this section, we shall see that, unlike voice which was bound by imperative or subjunctive moods, speech can be construed in two other moods as well: the indicative and the optative. We already saw how, by means of imitation, some bird species relay non-firsthand experiences without understanding them, while, in their obedience and cooperation, bees understand them, but do not relay them. The elaboration of the indicative and optative moods will put us in a position to argue that logos in the sense of “speech” names the specifically human capacity for both understanding and relaying non-firsthand experiences along with firsthand experiences.

The Indicative

Just as speech first articulates voiced and unvoiced units (vowels and consonants) for the sake of meaning, the meaningful unit itself is determined in terms of a second articulation: namely, the articulation of that which has meaning on its own (a noun) and that which has meaning only when coupled with a noun (a verb) for the sake of possible truth or falsity. The possibility of truth and falsity appears as the central factor of speech. Thus, the “final cause” of the first articulation of speech points to the second level of articulation. “Letters,” however functional, were not meaningful in themselves; nouns, in turn, however meaningful, are not ends in themselves.

Thus we come to the most common meaning of logos as speech: logos apophantikos or “declarative sentence.” We saw Aristotle’s definition: “Logos is a signifying voice, one of whose parts is signifying separately, not as an
affirmation, but as an expression.” Logos has a meaningful part, but this second level of articulation also relates that independently meaningful part to that which applies and does not apply to it (hyparkhein) with temporal specification. In the first case, indeed, the declarative sentence is affirmation (kataphasis), in the second, it is negation (apophasis): “Affirmation is a declaration of something concerning something [kata tinos], whereas negation is a declaration of something against something [apo tinos].”

The duality of affirmation and negation is explained by the duality of truth and falsity, and this latter by the truth of the principle of non-contradiction: concerning the very same subject matter, a declarative sentence is necessarily open to both truth and falsity. Therefore any such sentence can be negated. Here we see that truth or falsity, the radical breakthrough out of voice into speech, puts at work that which was potential in expression: “Socrates is executed” is not simply an expression of something (“Socrates”), but an expression of something about it. But what? The declarative sentence enjoys a “freedom” that is almost as unlimited, a “freedom” that extends far beyond the unique “correct” match, and is entangled in the myriads of ways of being “incorrect.”

This is why such correctness is not a fact, but an issue. For structural and necessary reasons, speech is certainly not a perfect means to truth as correspondence. For humans, truth as correspondence is almost a nostalgia for the strictly animal condition, for the full experience of sensation: for presence, for pure experience, for apperception, for sheer firsthand experience, for the apodictic certainty, for seeing everything from one’s own eyes, or at least for the self-evidence of imagining that one sees everything from one’s own eyes. For humans, firsthand experience and direct perception are, more often than not, a task, if not an impossible one.

There is an Ancient Greek word that perfectly corresponds to this ideal of apperception: autopsia, “seeing from one’s own eyes,” “firsthand experience,” “witnessing.” Aristotle uses autoptês, “eye witness,” exactly in the sense of firsthand knowledge as opposed to mere legein: “As we said, the largest rivers flow indeed from the highest mountains. To those who look at maps of the earth this is clear, for they have been drawn by means of in situ investigation or, if not seen firsthand [autoptas], then by means of those who speak” (Mete. I, 13, 350a14–18).

So having logos is particularly ill-suited to the ideal of autopsia. There may well be an ancient Greek epistemic ideal of autopsia. But if autopsia can become a concern at all for the ancient Greeks, but also for Descartes or for human beings in general, this is because the human condition is not confined to it. The human condition, but also perhaps ancient Greek philosophy, are understandable less by asserting the preeminence of sight or hearing or
language as such, or by noticing the quantitative complexity of human life and communication, than by emphasizing the irreversible human detachment from, and occasional yearning for, autopsia. It is the forms of “not seeing with one’s own eyes,” but indeed also of “not hearing with one’s own ears,” that characterize the human condition.  

Unlike imperatives and the subjunctive conditions implied by them in animal communication, declarative speech corresponds to the indicative mood. Not that it indicates the truth. On the contrary, because what it can indicate drives the human condition away from autopsia toward a vast and confusing realm where unjustified, unjustifiable, and unfalsifiable sentences proliferate.

The Optative
We have already seen how animal communication was mostly governed by the imperative (prostaktikê) and the subjunctive (hypotaktikê) moods. Besides these two moods, we just saw the second articulation of human speech in the sense of “declarative sentence” in a third mood: the indicative (horistikê). And yet there is another mood specific to logos: this is the optative mood (euktikê). Aristotle is sharply aware of this mood. For, according to him, all declarative sentences are indeed logoi, but not the other way around. Despite what his critics claim, Aristotle does not reduce speech to declarative sentences: “Not all logos is declarative, but the logoi to which truth or falsity belong. For instance, a eukhê [“prayer” or “wish”] is a logos, but it is neither true nor false.”

In order to develop this marginalized or totally neglected aspect of human speech, let us first trace out the Aristotelian concept of eukhê as a kind of logos in its own right, then analyze the state of the soul that is expressed by it, and finally differentiate the optative mood from the other three moods.

In Ancient Greek, eukhê means “prayer,” “vow,” “wish,” “aspiration,” “curse.” Despite being a logos, “prayer” is not susceptible of truth or falsity. Although the human being is distinguished by logos, not all logos is declarative. Beside the declarative, propositional, or indicative mood of logos, grounded by the principle of non-contradiction and constitutive of logic and science, eukhê is this other kind of logos, somehow detached from truth and falsity, a logos that is not predicative, but rather precative. Yet, as Aristotle adds, the analysis of this kind of logos must be relegated, for its proper place is not in On Interpretation, which is reserved to declarative logos, but in the rhetoric and the poetics. Thus one would expect a satisfying account of eukhê in the Rhetoric and in the Poetics.

In the Rhetoric, unfortunately eukhê appears only twice in the same sentence, and this in its verbal form of eukhesthai in the discussion of the
“deprecative metaphor.”

According to this passage, although praying (eukhesthai) is honorable and begging is dishonorable, both belong to the same genus: demand (aitēsis). This point confirms that eukhē is not a declarative logos, but it remains too generic since we have seen that animal voice (phônê) was also precisely a kind of demand. How does eukhē, as a demand, differ from the kind of demand we found in animal voice?

The promised analysis of eukhē is to be found no more in the Poetics than in the Rhetoric. In the Poetics, eukhē is briefly mentioned as a form of expression (skhēma tês lexēs) among others: “What is a command [entolê]? What is a prayer [eukhē]? and a narration [diēgēsis], a threat [apeítê], a question [erôtēsis], an answer [apokrisis], etc.? Then eukhē is to be distinguished from “narration” and “answer.” But also, while probably belonging to the genus “demand,” eukhē is distinguished from “question.” Although both are neither true nor false, the act of questioning may still seem like a “quest,” thus a readiness to move and investigate, while eukhē lacks these characteristics. Finally, this passage suggests that eukhē differs from the kind of demand we saw in our analysis of animal voice: whereas the demand expressed in animal voice took the form of a threat or a promise made to another animal in a “subjunctive” (hypotaktikê) mood, this passage clearly distinguishes eukhē from “threat.” Whereas animal voice was “imperative” (prostaktikê), Aristotle’s list of forms of expression implies that eukhē is semantically, if not grammatically, also distinct from “command.”

The same distinction between command and eukhē is found in the next lines of the Poetics. Here Aristotle objects to Protagoras’s criticism of Homer, and while doing so underlines the semantic, if not grammatical, distinction between the imperative and the optative:

Why would one agree with Protagoras in criticizing [Homer] because, while supposedly praying [eukhesthai] [the Goddess], he commands [epitattai] her by saying: “Sing goddess the wrath . . .”? Apparently Protagoras criticized Homer for addressing the Goddess in the imperative mood instead of the precative/optative mood. Aristotle finds this criticism irrelevant: poetic license tolerates the use of the imperative for expressing what is clearly a prayer to the goddess. Either way, the texts referred to in Aristotle’s remark concerning eukhē in On Interpretation were the Rhetoric and the Poetics; we have seen that, although these two texts do not supply the promised analysis of eukhē, the Rhetoric determines the genus of eukhē as “demand” (aitēsis), and the Poetics distinguishes eukhē from other kinds of demands such as “threats” and “questions.”
To recapitulate, then, eukhê is a *logos* that is not declarative or “indicative” of a present, past, or future state of affairs, as a narration or an answer may be. As a form of expression, it belongs to the genus “demand” (*aitêsıs*). It is distinguished from other species of demand: it differs from “question” in that it is not a demand for a verbal response; more importantly, it is different from the subjunctive mood of threats and from the imperative mood of command which both characterized animal voice. Eukhê does not suggest potential harm or profit as threats and promises do; it does not expect a verbal response as a question does. In this sense, eukhê is an unaccountable *logos*, a *logos* exempt from truth and falsity, confirmation and falsification: since it does not *indicate* or *propose* an actual or even potential state of affairs, it cannot be held accountable for a commitment it does not make; but since it is not a question, it is also unanswerable; finally, since it is not a promise, a threat, or a command, it offers nothing to be broken, nothing to be obeyed or disobeyed.

The optative mood of prayer is then to be strictly distinguished from the imperative and subjunctive moods. Yet these grammatical terms may be misleading, for, as we saw in Aristotle’s dismissal of Protagoras’s criticism of Homer, a verb that is grammatically in the imperative mood may well have an optative meaning as when one says “Help me, God!” or even “Good morning!” The semantically optative sentence “Good morning!” does not express the *desire* one feels for the other’s having a good morning in the sense that one has thus committed oneself to making the other’s morning a good one.

But what is the state of the soul that is expressed by the optative? A desire, to be sure. But how is eukhê as an expression of desire any different from animal voice, equally an expression of desire? What are the kinds of desire and what kind does the optative express? We may find a hint not in *On Interpretation*, in the *Rhetoric*, or in the *Poetics*, but in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 2 and the parallel text in *Eudemian Ethics*, II, 10. In this passage, Aristotle distinguishes “choice” (*proairesis*) from “desire” (*orexis*) by showing that choice corresponds to neither of the three kinds of desire: neither to “appetite” (*epithymia*), nor to “spiritedness” (*thymos*), nor to “wishing” (*boulêsis*):

But [choice] is surely not wishing either, even though that appears a close approximation to it, since there can be no choice of impossible things, and if anyone were to claim to choose something impossible, that person would seem to be foolish; but there is wishing even for impossible things, such as deathlessness. And there is also wishing for things that can in no way be done by oneself, such as for a certain actor to win an award, or for an athlete to win a contest, but no
one chooses such things, but only those things one believes could come about by one’s own act. Also, wishing is rather for an end, while choice is of things that are related to the end; for example, we wish to be healthy, but we choose those things by means of which we will become healthy, and we wish to be happy and say so, while it would not fit the meaning to say we choose to be happy, since, universally, choice seems to be concerned with things that are up to us.\textsuperscript{95}  

\textit{Eukhē} seems to express just this state of the human soul: wish, \textit{boulēsis}.\textsuperscript{96}  

From the verbal expression, we have thus moved to the psychic state, and from there we are led to the object of that state. What kind of desire is wish? Wish is a kind of desire distinguished by its objects: (1) impossible objects (such as immortality) beyond plans for any possible ones; (2) objects that are not realizable or attainable by ourselves (like the victory of a team in a match); (3) the ultimate objects of our decisions and choices (such as health or happiness). Just as \textit{eukhē} was reserved to human beings as an instance of speech, here the wish expressed by it may well be an exclusively human desire. In fact, Aristotle clearly says in \textit{On the Soul} that \textit{“boulēsis comes to be in the logistikē part [of the soul].”}\textsuperscript{97} Similarly, in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle says that beings deprived of \textit{logos} (alogoi) have “appetite” and “passion,” but do not partake in “choice,”\textsuperscript{98} which is a “close approximation” to wish. Just as \textit{eukhē} was an atypical \textit{logos} for not being susceptible of truth and falsity, wish belongs to the \textit{logistikē} part of the human soul in a problematic way: wish is a peculiar kind of desire that does not move the being that expresses it. But neither does it move the being that is addressed, as does animal voice. For the object of wish is envisaged precisely as simply unattainable by the individual animal as well by an alliance with others.  

In order to sketch out the “wishful attitude,” let us then bring together the main features of \textit{eukhē} with wish, this atypical, nonmoving, kind of desire:  

First, the difference between \textit{eukhē} and declarative \textit{logos}. The optative is not the indicative. Unlike declarative sentences, \textit{eukhē} is a \textit{logos} that somehow has access beyond past, present, and futures states of affairs; it opens up the realm of impossibility that is not susceptible of truth and falsity. The desire behind \textit{eukhē} is susceptible of “extending” or “stretching” into mere unreality, infinitely beyond the actual and even all potentials. Hence wish and prayer are immune to the control of verification and falsification, of corroboration and elenchus, regardless of whether they \textit{happen} to come to pass. For it is not exact to say that a wish \textit{becomes true} in the sense that a bet \textit{turns out to be true}, since that which becomes true is not the wish, but a future state of affairs.
extracted from the content of wish (namely, a bet); yet, as we saw, wish is not reducible to its content since it belongs to a specific mood, the optative. For instance, when one wishes the execution of Socrates and he is executed, what becomes true is not the wish (the desire) itself, but the declarative or indicative proposition: “Socrates will be executed.” Further, reaching beyond the realm of truth as correspondence to reality, the fundamental dimension of unreality in the optative mood penetrates the past as profoundly as the future. For, having logos, being thus capable of wishing without regard to any limit, reality, and likelihood, human beings are precisely capable of desiring a counterfactual, saying, for instance, “If only we had not executed Socrates!” Indeed, in English, the semantically optative “if only” here is to be distinguished from the subjunctive or imperative phrase “only if” of commands and demands. While offering humans access to truth and to correspondence with reality by means of logic and science, logos also exposes humans to the realm of unreality. Unlike other desires that are geared toward the future, the wishful attitude is particularly important in understanding the relationship to the past in human experience. Having logos, human beings are exposed to regret, guilt, and bad conscience.

Secondly, euchê is distinct from conditionals. In other words, the optative is not the subjunctive. The object of wish is not limited by the realm of reality, of possibility, and of conditions. The wish for Socrates to be executed is modally different from a conditional sentence expressing that he will be executed if he does not stop doing philosophy. In the same way, curses differ from threats, as blessings do from promises. Phrases such as “God willing,” “Deo volente,” or “Inshallah” cannot be literally meant as conditional clauses if they are to take part in euchê, in the optative mood. Literally, the sentence “God willing, we shall succeed” is not an euchê, unless what is meant by the sentence is: “May God will that we succeed.” Again, wishes cannot be literally expressed with expressions like “please” or “if you will.” For euchê must be beyond the imperative of “pleasing” and the eventuality of one’s willing to please. For, oxymoronically, euchê is a disengaged promise. It is not “tactic,” “prostactic,” or contractual. My wishing somebody a happy birthday in no way binds me at the level of action; in no way am I thereby obligated to make plans and predictions and to take responsibility. We have seen that animal voice necessarily implies a threat or a promise made to the other animal; we have come to see why wish is neither. Being unconditional, wish is not subject to conditions, eventualities, justifications, refutations, confirmations, or denials. As we just saw in our lengthy quotation from the Nicomachean Ethics, one then may wish an impossibility, beyond actual or even possible experience. One may wish that one had not undergone a trauma, that the Trojan War
had not happened, that Socrates had not been executed. All kinds and senses of *eukhê* (with the important exception of “vow”) are expressions of an intention without any regard for its realization and for a trial of its correspondence with reality. So among the forms of *eukhê* and expressions of wish are salutations, best wishes, congratulations, prayers, blessings, swears, and curses.

Thirdly, *eukhê* differs from commands which may appear equally unconditional or categorical—the optative is not the imperative. In the *Poetics*, we saw Protagoras criticizing Homer for using an imperative for addressing the Goddess; yet, for Aristotle, this criticism was not valid since it wrongly assumes that semantics is determined by grammatical tense. For a prayer may well be expressed by an imperative without signifying a command. A wish is precisely not a frustrated desire “translated” to another as a call for cooperation by means of animal voice. Wish differs from other kinds of desire in that it does not “immediately” (*euthus*) spill into any action or even into any call for action. “Save Socrates!” is a linguistic expression of a desire that is intended to move its listener, a desire that would put the subject himself in motion had he possessed or perceived the means for satisfying it. The wish to save Socrates, however, although a desire, is a “universal premise” fundamentally detached from any “particular premise” susceptible of triggering motion. Other desires move the animal, wish does not. Voice is a call for cooperation and project for action, *eukhê* is not.

This optative mood subordinates not only wishful thinking and prayer, but also regret, guilt, even certain kinds of dreams and reveries. Indeed, wishing does not imply wishing well, and not all prayers are for the good of someone. Curses are *eukhais* as well. Thus, the wishful attitude is found not only in the form of gratitude and hope, but also in the form of resentment. The human soul, having *logos*, thus capable of wishing, exposes itself to passions that would seem utterly absurd and irrelevant to other animals, since *eukhê* is a desire that moves nothing. Wish gives access, or supposes access, to a vast domain of detachment and abstraction from facts, possible alliances, and conceivable individual or common projects. Thus, by definition, wish is exempt from invoking others; it remains isolated and absolutely “verbal.” Although situated outside the domain of logic, *eukhê* is in a sense *logos* par excellence, for it remains strictly *logikôs*.100

One cannot fail to notice that the four exemplary objects of wish in the above passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are of the utmost importance in human life according to Aristotle: Immortality, success, health, and happiness. There even the central concept of “choice” in Aristotelian ethics is said to be subsumed under such objects of wish. For Aristotle, then, wish seems to be our psychological relationship to our highest aspirations which exceed our
knowledge and planning, and they find their expression in *eukhê*: faring well (*eu prattein*), long life, prosperity, rejoicing (*khaire!*), success, good luck. In short, *eukhê* is a *logos* that acknowledges the vulnerability of *logos* itself at the face of contingency, when things are *not* “up to us.” In this respect, the wishful attitude may be seen as a corrective of hubristic claims of rationality for self-sufficiency. In this sense, the wishful attitude maintains a constant reserve for gratitude and for the recognition of our limitations, as well as our constant possibility for hope. So in this respect, for the wishful attitude, the world is fundamentally open, undetermined by history, rational planning, or human understanding.

Hence, there is a political implication of this wishful attitude. Being the only animal capable of *logos* and thus of *eukhê*, the human political animal is capable of transcending all realpolitik and of finding refuge in a strictly *logikos* discourse: utopianism. It is not surprising that the word *eukhê* occurs regularly in Plato’s *Republic*. There it designates the “ideal” city, which, although impossible, is eminently worthy of wish—a city that has no place in reality, but can always be envisaged precisely through *logos*, a city constituted in *logos* alone.101 Similarly, the major Aristotelian text in which *eukhê* most occurs is neither the logical nor the psychological works, but the *Politics*, where it appears in the phrase *kat’ eukhên* qualifying a constitution that is most wishable.102

Let us then conclude our elaboration of the optative mood. The wishful attitude is not only possible, it is a perpetual possibility for animals having *logos*, since it is ultimately irrefutable by demonstration. As having *logos*, human beings are uniquely capable of interpreting the world as mere happenstance, of denying their own agency and responsibilities, and of relating to unreality and to contradictions at the risk of claiming to become “similar to a plant.”103 Being the “precative” animals we are, human beings are capable of desiring that which is refused even to gods themselves, according to Aristotle’s quotation of Agathon: namely “to make undone whatever has been done.”104 The human soul, by having *logos*, and by being able to simply wish things, is exposed to hopes and fears that would indeed have seemed odd, fantastic, or simply irrelevant in the animal realm, because the *logos* of wish is the expression of some interest that does not move the subject. Most importantly, being irreducible to voice which simply *indicates* the desire of the animal’s soul, wish as *logos* is the expression of something one has not experienced, may never experience, and may know well that one will never experience. If wish is a *logos*, and if wish implies that one transcend all actuality and even all possibility, then *logos* must offer an access specifically beyond any firsthand experience.
Logos as Access beyond Firsthand Experience

We have now come to the end of our elaboration of specifically human logos as speech in this chapter of the book. Let us recapitulate the major steps we made in our previous three sections.

In section 1, we explored animal communication. We noted that animal voice was fundamentally geared to move another animal in a way comparable to the subjunctive mood (threats, promises) and imperative mood (orders). We saw that bees were capable of understanding a non-firsthand experience expressed to them by another bee (since they seemed to obey the order given), but also that bees did not relay the non-firsthand experience to others; conversely, we saw that, in imitating the sounds they hear, some bird species were capable of relaying what they heard, but without understanding it.

In section 2, we proposed the hypothesis that logos as human speech for Aristotle is this ability to both understand and relay non-firsthand experiences as well as firsthand experiences. To substantiate this hypothesis, we analyzed human speech in its three major features: its mediated, articulated, and necessarily ambiguous character. Being mediated, articulated, and ambiguous, logos enables and destines humans to understand and communicate experiences neither the sender nor the receivers have had or may ever have. This is why logos is properly received neither by a memorization and repetition of its form, as we saw some bird species to be capable of in hearing sound, nor by obedience to its content, as we saw in bee communication.

In section 3, we moved from the level of “words” to “sentences,” and showed that, besides the subjunctive and imperative moods governing animal communication, human speech has two other moods: the indicative mood, and the often neglected optative mood. As an expression of pain and pleasure, voice always signifies a firsthand experience (autopsia), and it is fundamentally oriented toward moving its hearer, even if the hearer ends up remaining unmoved; the indicative mood of human speech, however, is capable of refraining from trying to move its hearer, and of indicating, of making her “believe,” “agree,” or “understand.” This means not that logos is necessarily indicative of the truth or of the true essence of things, but that it exposes humans to claims to truth, to the issue of truth. As it is mediated through meaningless units, as it is conventional and thus necessarily ambiguous, logos removes us from any felicitous match between voices and meanings, homonymy and synonymy, belief and truth. As Aristotle quotes from Euripides, “if there are persuasive false designations among mortals, you should also admit the contrary, that disbelieving the true befalls mortals.” 105 The optative mood, specific to human speech, governs expressions of desire for things
beyond the realms of actual firsthand experience and even of possible firsthand experience.\textsuperscript{106}

This is then the wonder of logos: that we can even claim to understand things we have never experienced or or may never experienced firsthand—say, about bee communication or about the “essence” of an ox, about “what it is to be for an ox”; and further, “even worse,” that we can relay our claims to still others. Because logos is mediated by convention, that is, it is detached from the immediate meaningfulness of pleasure and pain, and because logos is articulated through letters, that is, it is detached from the natural vocal expression of pleasure and pain, we can understand non-firsthand experiences, when we hear a logos, without having to experience them firsthand, and we can relay meaning without even having to reproduce the same words. In comparison to sound and voice, logos as human speech is the ability to understand non-firsthand experiences (just as voice hearing, but unlike sound hearing) as well as to relay them along with firsthand experiences (just as sound hearing, but unlike voice hearing). This ability to understand and relay both firsthand experiences and contents never experienced firsthand sheds light on the specifically human character of historiography, of oracles, of mythology, of the necessary accumulation of information in science, of sophistry and philosophy.\textsuperscript{107}

\section*{4. Logoi: Definition, Account, and Law}

In order to offer textual support for this claim concerning human logos, and to draw its implications, let us turn to three major Aristotelian texts in which this sense of logos is used. We shall see that Aristotle’s accounts of the role of logos in human claims to definition, to causal accounts, and to law presuppose exactly such an ability to understand and relay non-firsthand experience as well as firsthand experience.

\textbf{Human Predication (Categories, 1)}

Human beings are capable of claiming to define beings other than themselves. This claim to make essential predications, to formulate “essences,” to access “forms” or “inherent standards” of beings other than themselves, clearly presupposes human logos as the ability to understand and relay non-firsthand experiences. This is how humans can even claim to understand and to formulate not only the pleasant or painful aspects of, say, an ox, but \textit{what it is to be} an ox—an idea that, by definition, no human can gather from firsthand experience. It is in this sense that the “logos of being” only shows itself to a “being having logos.”
This seems confirmed in the opening of the *Categories* where synonyms are distinguished from homonyms as sharing not only a conventional name but also the *logos* of their being. Aristotle is clear that “*logos* of being” here refers not to what, say, an ox may be *for us*, but “what it is *for it* to be an animal”:

> Those whose names only are common, but whose *logos* of being according to this name is different, are called homonyms, such as “*animal*” for both the human being and the representation; for if one supplies what is it for each of them to be animal, one will supply a particular *logos* for each. Those whose names are common and whose *logos* of being according to this name are also common are called synonyms, such as “*animal*” for both the human being and the ox; for each of these are addressed with the common name “*animal*” and their *logos* of being is the same. For if one supplies the *logos* of what it is for each to be animal, one will supply the same *logos*. (Cat. 1, 1a1–13)\(^{108}\)

Having *logos*, we are such that we are able to claim to address other beings not only from our own perspective as determined perceptually or practically (“this is black [to me],” “this is powerful [for me],” “it is time to sleep [for me],” “this is dangerous [to me],” etc.), but from their own perspective: “this is a living being.” In other words, if we had no *logos* and thus no claim to access the “essence” of beings from a third-person perspective, we could not but admit that all our predications are subjective accidental, momentary aspects and that all our addresses are homonymous, and there would be neither any sense of *ousia* nor any appeal to the principle of non-contradiction.

> In general those who say this [those who deny the principle of non-contradiction] do away with being and what it is for something to be. For it is necessary for them to say that all things are incidental [symbebêkenai] and that there is no such thing as the very thing it is to be human or animal. (Metaph. IV, 4, 1007a20–23)\(^{109}\)

Even assuming that relativism was somehow the truth, which is paradoxical in itself, we would need to explain the illusion of nonrelativistic claims, and these would require an ability to somehow suppose an access to a “measure” that is not ourselves. In other words, if we did not have *logos*, if we had no access beyond firsthand experience at all, we all could not but be followers of Protagoras (and thus actually his refuters).
Human Experience (*Metaphysics*, I, 1)

This brings us back to the famous passage from the *Metaphysics* we quoted at the beginning of this chapter. This passage also warrants our use of the word “experience” in claiming that *logos* names our ability to claim to access non-firsthand experience. For here Aristotle claims that, unlike sound and voice, human experience mediated through *logos* includes the ability to understand and relay causal accounts beyond “impressions and memories.” Once we read the rest of the passage with occasional paraphrases using what we have learned so far, we see that human experience proper is distinguished by *logos*:

Animals are by nature born having sensation [and “that which has sensation also has pleasure and pain”]\(^{110}\) . . . The [animals] that cannot hear noise are intelligent but cannot learn, such as a bee or any other kind of animal that might be such. Those that have this sensation [i.e., the capacity to hear noise] besides memory learn [e.g., some bird species]. Thus the others live by impressions and memories, and have but a small share of experience [*empeirias de metekhei mikron*]. But the human kind [lives] also by art and reasoning [*logismos*] . . . Indeed, we see people of experience succeeding more than those having a *logos* without experience; the reason is that experience is familiarity [*gnosis*] with the particulars, but art, of universals. . . . Nevertheless we consider that knowing and acquaintance [*to ge eidensai kai to epaiein*] belong to art rather than to experience and take the artisans to be wiser than people of experience in that wisdom rather follows knowing in all cases. For the former know the cause while the latter do not. (*Metaph. I, 1, 980a27–981a28*)

Aristotle recognizes the wonders of *logos* as well as its limits: while it transcends the experience of particulars and looks more like wisdom to people, *logos* is not necessarily more successful in practice. First, people may well be, and often are, more successful even if they do not have a *logos* and do not know causes or the universals; secondly, by giving us access beyond our firsthand experience, human *logos* exposes us to the possibility of being mistaken about causes in a way other animals do not seem susceptible. Similarly, *logos* makes it possible that, of two people who lack experience and are unsuccessful with particulars, one be wise and the other simply unwise. Finally, the rest of the passage claims that, unlike mere experience of fact, *logos* includes both the understanding of a causal account, which was not confined to firsthand experience, and the ability to relay it—that is, to teach it:
Thus [master craftsmen] are wiser not because they are practical, but because they have a logos and know the causes. As a whole, a sign of knowing and not knowing is the ability to teach [didasklein], and hence we think that art rather than experience is scientific knowledge; for [artists] can teach while the others cannot. Further, we do not consider any of the senses to be wisdom. They are indeed our chief sources of acquaintance with particulars, but they do not tell the reason [to dia ti] for anything, as for instance why fire is hot, but only that it is hot. (Metaph. I, 1, 981b5–13)

As opposed to the way some small bird species “learned” whatever sounds they heard, in the sense of becoming capable of relaying them without understanding them, here we see that logos enables us to both understand and relay our accounts of non-firsthand experience. Without logos, we may well know, remember, and even predict that fire is hot, yet logos enables us to claim to understand why it is so, and to teach this to others. Being disconnected from sensation, thus from pleasure and pain, and from the particular practical necessities of life, logos connects humans with disinterested wonder and innovation, and with the leisurely satisfaction of their natural desire for knowledge, that is, with philosophia.

Then, just like the Categories passage, this opening chapter of the Metaphysics seems to confirm that, for better or for worse, logos enables us to understand and relay even that which is beyond the possibility of firsthand experience. This ability to claim to disengage from firsthand experiences also sheds light on Aristotle’s typical methodological procedure from what is clear and known to us toward what is clear and known “simply or by nature.”

Human Community (Politics, I, 1)

Finally, let us turn to the most famous Aristotelian passage on human logos:

It is clear why the human being is a political animal in a greater degree [mallon] than any bee or any gregarious animal. For nature, as we say, does nothing in vain, and among animals the human being alone has logos. Voice is indeed a sign [sêmeion] of the painful and of the pleasurable, and so is possessed by other animals as well (for their nature has developed so far as to have sensation of the painful and pleasant, and to signify [sêmainein] these to others), yet logos is for showing [dêloun] the advantageous and the harmful, and thus the just and the unjust; for it is peculiar to
humans in distinction from the other animals to have the perception of the just, the unjust and other qualities, and it is community \( \textit{koimònia} \) in these that makes a household and a city. (\textit{Pol. I, I, 1253a10–18})

Indicating the advantageous or the harmful by means of \textit{logos} is then crucially different from signifying pain and pleasure by means of voice—\textit{logos} is the ability to understand and relay advantages and harms never experienced firsthand, to even indicate justice and injustice. Thus even in practical matters, \textit{logos} does not simply demand obedient cooperation by means of a “prostactic” (imperative) order, or by a hypothetical or “hypotactic” (subjunctive) threat. In the “horistic” (indicative) mood, \textit{logos} is able to delimit and define an ethical-political realm. In the “euctic” or “precative” (optative) mood, \textit{logos} is able to project justice against all odds.

Human presence is shot through with \textit{logos}: being able to detach themselves from that which is standing right in front of them, human beings stand in front of, and interact with, things in a specific way. Since humans are able to somehow “witness” that which they have not witnessed firsthand, the following question is more telling in this context than its answer: “—Yourself, were you with Socrates yourself the day he drank the poison in prison or did you hear it from someone else?—Myself, I was there myself Echecrates” (Plato, \textit{Phaedo}, 57a). This is a paradigmatic situation that characterizes human dialogues: the speaker may well be relaying his firsthand experiences, his \textit{autopsia}, but not necessarily so:

Since it is impossible to discuss by bringing in the things themselves, but we make use of symbols in the place of things, we think that what happens with names also happens in the case of things, just as people who count pebbles \( \textit{psèphôn tois logizomenois} \). (SE 1, 165a6–10)

Once we are dealing with human \textit{logos}, we are no longer simply dealing with “things themselves”; the awareness of “things themselves” becomes a task to fulfill, a goal to attain, or, as it so often happens, a target to irrevocably miss. It is this hermeneutical task that is implicit to Aristotle’s \textit{logikê} in general, but also to the ambiguous Platonic strategy of \textit{writing dialogues}. As the human speaker is capable of relating both her experience and that which she has not experienced, the human listener is able to consider that which she hears as either of the two. Echecrates \textit{can} believe that Phaedo is relaying his firsthand experience, but he does not have to; it is human \textit{logos} that necessarily brings
along trust and distrust as open options. We *can* believe what Phaedo or the *Phaedo* says, but the point is that we can do so only as irredeemably exposed to do otherwise.

Aristotle employs above the expression “counting pebbles” in its literal sense of counting on an abacus—and precisely *not* with abstract symbols and numbers. But indeed the ancient Greeks’ usage of pebbles goes far beyond counting pebbles as pebbles. They are also used for representing something. Most notably pebbles are used as votes, that is, as representing people’s opinions.\(^1\) And it is true that for Aristotle there is something fundamentally inadequate to the human condition in simply *counting votes* for and against a proposal in decision-making: simply voting for and against is in fact a regression into expressions of pleasure and pain. Hence the exclusive options of protesting and applauding, of calling *aye* and *no*, are often expressed by the word “voice” in English, for instance, in expressions like “to collect the voices” or “voice vote.” On the contrary, for Aristotle, what gives life to laws, contracts, or decisions, what establishes the very options to be subsequently voted for, is the excellence of *deliberation*: “law has a compulsory force because it is a *logos* emanating from some prudence and intelligence” (*NE* X, 9, 1180a22–23). But again, this is the foundation of sophistry and demagogy as much as that of genuine political participation. Sophists and demagogues are able to manipulate their audience in ways a tyrant may not be able to, because, exercising *logos*, the sophist accesses the experiences of others, and because, having *logos*, the demagogue is able to view the world not only in terms of his own agenda, but also from the standpoint of the people.

In short, as an access beyond firsthand experience, *logos* enables us to assume not only a third-person perspective on nature and on ourselves, but also to take on the point of view of other people. Hence, when Aristotle distinguishes four kinds of *logoi* or “arguments” in discussion ("didactic arguments, dialectical arguments, examination arguments and contentious arguments"),\(^2\) all four are explained in a short sentence which each time implies the assumption of somebody else’s point of view: “Didactic arguments are those which reason from the principles appropriate to each branch of learning and not from the opinions of the answerer, for he who is learning must take things on trust.”\(^3\) With respect to the first kind of argument, didactic argument, this is exactly what we meant by saying that science requires an accumulation of knowledge that is obviously impossible without the capacity for understanding and relaying that which one has not experienced firsthand. Secondly, Aristotle continues: “Dialectical arguments are those which, starting from widespread opinions, reason concerning a contradiction.”\(^4\) We dealt with the importance of dialectical method in our introduction, so here
let us only note how it requires human logos as being specifically oriented to that which is not clear to us, but is clear by nature. The starting point of dialectic already requires that the questioner assume what is for him a non-firsthand stance: the stance of the answerer. But further, the dialectic refutation also necessitates that both parties come to recognize something that exceeds both of their firsthand experiences: a contradiction. Thirdly, in examination arguments, the questioner must again tune into the mindset of the answerer. Finally, contentious arguments “are those which reason or seem to reason from opinions which appear to be, but are not generally accepted.”

This last sense, like the previous ones, is inconceivable so long as we interpret logos merely as “reason,” “statement,” “sentence,” “inference,” or “argument”: logos means “argument” not in the sense of a private reasoning, but in the sense of a reasoning from or towards somebody else.

The community that logos makes possible is not only any political community. It is the polis. Although there are many nonhuman “political” animals, there is no nonhuman polis according to Aristotle. We have seen that political animals such as human beings, wasps, ants, and bees are characterized by common work. The implication seems to be that, properly speaking, a city is fundamentally irreducible to a “household,” a “family,” a “beehive,” a “workshop,” a “corporation,” an “alliance,” or a “body politic”:

Yet it is clear that if one goes further in unifying the city, it will not be a city at all. For in its nature, the city is a multiplicity [plêthos]; if further unified it will become a household, and further it will become a single human being. And a city consists not only of many people, but also of people differing in kind [eider]. Because a city does not come to be from similar people; for a city and an alliance [symmakhia] are different things. An alliance is of value by its quantity (since the alliance is naturally for the sake of military strength [boêtheia]), just as a weight would be worth more if it weighed more, whereas the parts which are to make up a unity must differ in kind. (Pol. II, 1, 1261a18–25)

This implies that the city, founded on logos, is fundamentally unexplainable by the imperative or subjunctive moods of, say, bee cooperation, let alone by bird imitation. Then logos must be irreducible to strategic contracts for mutual aid (boêtheia), and might even be an expression of a content that cannot or may never be experienced firsthand. The specific form of logos in this function may well be, not a particular command, but law or a general rule, designed precisely to apply to an infinite number of instances: “Paternal authority does
not have the force of necessity, neither does an individual in general, unless he is a king or the like; law has compulsory force because it is a logos emanating from some prudence and intelligence” (NE X, 9, 1180a19–29). Not being confined to firsthand experience, logos is capable of defining (horistikê) a level of generality and universality irreducible to any tactical cooperation (hypo-taktikê or prostaktikê). Detached from firsthand experiences, in its indicative (horistikê) mood, logos is thus able to lie at the basis of all sorts of myths, narratives of creation, of afterlife, of apocalypse; and in its optative (euktikê) mood, logos makes possible the human experiences of wishful thinking, of utopian fiction, of greeting and blessing, as well as of cursing and remorse.

Recapitulation
This chapter of the book was focused on the full phenomenon of human logos as “speech.”

In section 1 we turned to animal communication and distinguished two kinds of hearing in animal life in the context of a discussion of bee communication in Aristotle: “noise” appeared as an acoustic object stripped from the interests and meanings invested by the transmitter, as some bird species hear and reproduce with astonishing accuracy the sounds they hear regardless of its origin. On the other hand, “voice” and its counterpart in bees, the discontinuous and occasional “buzz,” manifested themselves as coming from an animal in the form of an essentially meaningful and interested claim for attention and call for cooperation, as we observe bees hearing commands to wake up, to go to sleep, and to prepare for flight. We drew two conclusions from this discussion. First, bee communication suggested two moods in animal communication: the imperative of commands, and the subjunctive of threats and promises. Secondly, we noted that bees understand the non-firsthand contents they “hear,” since they obey the orders given, but do not relay it further to other bees, while some bird species, in imitating the sounds they hear, do relay them, but without understanding their possible content.

In section 2, we formulated the hypothesis that logos as specifically human speech names precisely the capacity for both understanding non-firsthand experiences (like the bees, but unlike the imitating birds), and relaying them (like the birds, but unlike bees). To unpack this hypothesis, we turned toward the kind of hearing specifically oriented toward speech, and not to sounds, voices, or commands. We saw that this kind of hearing meant “understanding or taking in a certain sense.” We unpacked this definition by noting that it implies speech to be mediated, articulated, and necessarily ambiguous. These implications enabled us to mark out the true material of speech (“letters”), and to describe the first level of its articulation (“words”).
Then, in section 3, we moved from the level of “words” to the level of “sentences,” that is, from the first articulation of speech to the second. We noted that *logos* as “sentence” introduces two moods besides the imperative and subjunctive moods of human communication: first, the indicative mood whereby affirmations and negations necessarily transcend expressions of firsthand experiences, and expose humans to understanding and conveying non-firsthand experiences; secondly, the optative mood by which humans understand and convey sentences that are not susceptible of truth and falsity, that express desires beyond any actuality and even any possibility.

Finally, in section 4, we tested our hypothesis about human speech on three major Aristotelian passages on human *logos*. We saw that the hypothesis sheds light on the human ability to claim to access anything like the essence of other beings in the *Categories*, causes in the *Metaphysics*, and laws in the *Politics*, while also suggesting the necessary function of *logos* in historiography, in news media, in utopian fictions, in remorse, in mythology, in science and philosophy.

All Aristotle’s texts are indeed *logoi*. And if we are correct in explaining human *logos* as the ability to understand and relay firsthand and non-firsthand experiences, we must be able to illustrate this in the case of Aristotle’s works themselves. In fact, on the one hand, Aristotle’s works contain the amazing wealth of observation found in his philosophy of nature or “second philosophy,” for example, the observation of the honeybees’ waggle, or his report on the phenomenon of what would come to be named “Halley’s comet.”

But, on the other hand, they also incorporate extremely general claims that are not and cannot be based on firsthand experience, for example, the “principle of non-contradiction” or the universal claim that “all humans by nature desire to know” at the opening of his “first philosophy,” such that we can hear, through the relay of innumerable hands of disciples and detractors, copyists, translators, editors, companions, and commentators, the “monotonous and peculiar voice” of Aristotle today.

So, after the three senses of *logos* we elaborated in the previous chapters of this book, namely, “standard,” “ratio,” and “reason,” this is the fourth and last major meaning of *logos* in Aristotle: the specifically human ability to understand and relay firsthand experience as well as non-firsthand experiences. Although further extended into “sentence,” “discourse,” “oration,” “book,” and so on, this last meaning still refers back to the basic meaning of *logos*: just as “standard,” “ratio,” and “reason,” *logos* as speech is, once again, a relation that holds on to its terms without collapsing or isolating them. Specifically, human speech holds on to one’s own experience not at the expense of that which extends beyond it into the “wonders” that Sophocles says humans may...
be, and even into that which a human being will never be, such as the standard of being of an ox, “what it is for it to be,” its “logos of being.”

The question of the “logos of being” shows itself only to a “being with logos.”