

## INTRODUCTION

*Lenn E. Goodman and Robert B. Talisse*

A well-known philosopher who lived through almost all of the twentieth century used to remark on the penchant some philosophers have for announcing the death of their own discipline. That bad habit isn't confined to philosophers, of course. We've often seen premature obituaries about art in general or figural art in particular, or lyric poetry, or music, or melody, the novel, or religion. It was even thought, around the end of the nineteenth century, that physics was about finished and nothing was left but to fill in the last few decimal places in the key Newtonian constants. That was just on the eve of the Michaelson-Morely experiment, which paved the way for Einstein's work and opened the door to the expanding universe of quantum mechanics, the nuclear age, and string theory. Our philosopher, however, had lived long enough to see metaphysics, political philosophy, aesthetics, normative ethics and normative epistemology, among other branches of philosophical inquiry, revive more than once from the overhasty and sometimes overeager death announcements. His observation was that before it had even become trite to say that this or that variety of philosophy was washed up some young kid would start reading Aristotle, and everything began anew and fresh.

It was Aristotle who said that philosophy begins in wonder. He was too much a believer in cycles of history, too much Plato's student, and too ready to probe the views of the many and the wise to think that *he* had started anything from scratch. But he did lay out in plain terms, without the cloak of dialogue or a thick veil of poetic tropes, many of the lasting questions and inviting answers that have put philosophers to work from his time down to our own. Nowhere was that more true than in political philosophy. But is it true that Aristotle's thoughts on politics have any life left in them for today? What, we might ask, have *we* to learn about politics from an ancient thinker who wrote in Greek and lived at Athens but was not even an Athenian, let alone a committed democrat? What have we to learn in political philosophy from a man who could accept slavery as an institution, who did not see women as men's equals, who had a lively interest in historical and political traditions but nothing much to say about the politics of group identity?

A common answer, we suspect, is that Aristotle has little to teach us modern liberal democrats. Aren't Aristotle's views on the nature and purpose of the state, the meaning of citizenship, and the ordering of political institutions not only archaic, because they rest on an exploded metaphysics, but unacceptable, because they slight the modern staples of political legitimacy: formal equality, individual rights, negative liberty, moral neutrality, and democratic rule. For those who find these fundamentals of normative discourse about politics insufficient today, and who call for more robust commitments to differential equality, group rights, and identity claims, Aristotle's vision of a polity whose purpose is to promote virtue seems even more remote.

The chapters collected in this volume aim to challenge the commonplace perception of Aristotle as a thinker as planted firmly in the "liberty of the ancients"—and therefore irrelevant to those who seek to theorize the "liberty of the moderns," as Benjamin Constant framed the contrast. The chapters represent different methodological and conceptual foci. But they all endeavor to bring Aristotle into conversation with contemporary theorists. In most instances, they find that Aristotle indeed has much to say to us.

Consider the question of equality. Aristotle is a valuable companion in our discussions here, precisely for his openness. He does not share our familiar sayisms about equality. He does not assume that all humans are equal in talent, skill, intellect, or ability. He does not even assume that we are all moral equals. His views here jangle our sensibilities, schooled in the sacredness of human dignity and the rhetoric of democracy. And yet, Aristotle's freedom from the commitments we hold dear makes him a pluralist about the varieties of equality, as he is about so many other topics, from the marks of substantiality to the dimensions of human virtue. He can review the Pythagorean reduction of justice to reciprocity, dismiss the mechanical equation of justice with simply making "a man suffer what he did," and still extract from that crude tit-for-tat a subtler, highly diversified notion of requital. The more nuanced notion will be applicable in commerce; but it is also generalizable to themes of proportion where equality of various kinds preserves the sense of equity that Aristotle finds adumbrated in temples to the Graces. The multifaceted concept he extracts finds its articulation in context, from the law courts to the tennis courts, and from works of fiction and criticism to relations of intimacy and understanding. Passed through Aristotle's conceptual prism, equity is refracted into all its diverse colors and recombined into a single idea critical to the foundation of any sound polity or society. For the kernel of truth that Aristotle finds in the Pythagorean dictum, through his habitual practice of "saving the appearances," not only visually but in the outlooks of others, is that justice demands a kind of equity without which human beings "would think their position mere slavery" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1133a7).

The idea of slavery is a firm pivot point for much of Aristotle's political thinking, not because he assumes that slavery is always wrong but because he

knows that no one given the freedom to choose would opt to be a slave. Slavery, as Aristotle defines it, is the use of a human being as another's tool. It is, in that sense, the ultimate violation of the Kantian imperative never to subjugate another to the status of a mere means to an end. We human beings, for Aristotle, fulfill and exercise our human nature when we are choosers of our own ends. Slaves, as a condition of their servitude, cannot do that. They have uses, not ends of their own, and those uses are imposed.

That Aristotle failed to find a way of liberating humanity from the trammels of slavery without losing the opportunity for fulfillment that he held so precious for the free matters less today philosophically than does his ability to pinpoint just what it is that makes slavery repugnant and unacceptable. The standard he invokes but fails to apply reaches far beyond the bare demand for emancipation. For it articulates the basis for condemning and combating all forms of invidious exploitation and abuse, from human trafficking and sweat-shop labor to meretricious sexuality and environmental poisoning.

It's fashionable today to disparage the idea of human nature. The notion that one can derive moral standards or political norms from a study of the human species and human personhood is viewed with suspicion, if not alarm. Not only do such efforts breach Hume's barrier between *is* and *ought* but they seem to threaten the very fabric of diversity—ethnic, cultural, and moral—that is widely seen as the chief and ripest fruit of democracy, bursting with the seeds of a postliberal dispensation. Diversity, of course, is precious, and not least for what it brings to and draws from the idea of liberty. But human diversity does have limits, and if prescriptive judgments and practical imperatives do follow from the recognition that there are only certain things a human being can stand and only certain things that any human being should be asked to put up with (being ordered to the back of the bus or relegated to a racially segregated school never among them), then we must recognize a common core of humanness that deserves respect and demands dignity; and we must acknowledge that the legitimate distinction between facticity and rightness does not preclude the recognition that there are facts about values and that the human person, qua human, is a locus of inviolable deserts—and obligations.

Some of what Aristotle has to tell us about politics comes in the form of simple home truths that might sound like clichés when spelled out and might seem too obvious to need stating and yet, elementary as they are, have often been forgotten, quite often wilfully and with dangerous or tragic consequences. Sometimes an idea like Aristotle's claim that man is a *zoon politikon*—that is, a social animal, a civic being—sounds so familiar and looks so transparent on the page that we readily lose track of how richly filled with implications these seemingly simple words can be. Reading in Aristotle that habit is *second nature* or that a friend is a second self, one risks losing sight altogether of the full meaning of the words and slips unselfconsciously into the mode of the fellow who said "What's so great about Shakespeare? It's just

a bunch of famous sayings strung together!” Seeming familiarity breeds contempt. And one value of the chapters gathered here is that they cast fresh and bright light on thoughts that we might think we have fully explored when in fact we’ve given only cursory attention to the words in which trenchant and telling arguments have been clothed.

But many of Aristotle’s thoughts about politics are subtle and complex, not enshrined in reliquaries or camouflaged by familiar phrases and perhaps elusive of the well-worn pathways of our common language—yet worth snagging nonetheless. Among the home truths and commonplaces to be found in Aristotle is his recognition that even our most basic needs are not met without collaboration. We humans are not a solitary species. We need each other, and not just for mating. None of us would be able in isolation to find or produce adequate (let alone decent) food, shelter, or cover for our bodies.

The subtler truth to which Aristotle is committed is that to live fully human lives, to exercise any of our most distinctive human capacities and to realize any of our most distinctive human potentials, we need each other in quite a variety of ways that are themselves distinctively human: We need language and the opportunity to learn, to share and pass on what we have learned from others. For culture, the transmission of a nongenetic heritage, is both a distinctively human trait and a means by which our own humanity is brought to fruition. We need friendship too, and opportunities to discover and express ourselves in ways not even conceivable beyond a social context. And we need the opportunity to plan our own lives, build our own character, tell our own story, on the basis of our experience—to deliberate within ourselves about the next steps we might contemplate, and with one another about our common needs, projects, hopes, fears, opportunities, and challenges.

Aristotle sees the essences of all living things in dynamic, conative terms: All have aims and goals, ends, as he calls them. And the most distinctively human of our human goals—both those that we share with other members of our species and those that express our individuality—can be reached only through our complex web of interactions with one another in all sorts of formal and informal relationships and institutions whose adequacy and appropriateness, by Aristotle’s standards, are to be judged wholly in terms of their capacity to foster the winning of those aims and attainment of those goals—which he sums up under the name of *eudaimonia*, by which he means not just happiness but human fulfillment and active flourishing.

Like the tragic figures that are the focus of his thoughts about Greek drama, Aristotle finds his own greatest strength in the same characteristics that spawn his greatest weakness. His realism, his openness and pluralism, make him far more accepting of the social conditions he sees around him than, say, Plato was. Politically, Plato is a radical—not a democrat, of course, but a radical. When he asks the great question of political philosophy—*What legitimates authority?*—Plato looks around him and sees that de facto authority rests on wealth and military prowess (or the reputation or expectation of such

proWess), and on accidents of birth like gender, and lineage, and name. He knows that this is radically wrong, and he will argue that only sound judgment about the good legitimates authority. Indeed, Plato is ready not just to argue but (as his ill-fated Syracuse adventure clearly shows) to risk his life and the lives of many others in the effort to establish his ideal. Chastened by the failure of his efforts at Syracuse and by the blood that was shed in the name of his misguided effort (always a deep thinker but often a slow learner and much more dependent on years and experience than his innatist epistemology might have led us to expect), Plato comes to qualify his expectations. He turns more toward law in his late years and sets less hope in the search for some ideal ruler whose judgment might be trusted without question.

Aristotle too has learned from Plato's experiences. For Plato's tragedy at Syracuse was playing out when the young Aristotle first came to the Academy, and Aristotle's realism, his willingness to rationalize the status quo, an acceptance that might seem at times to border on complacency, arises perhaps as much from the chastening of experience as from the tenor of his own personality. But the weakness has a strength to it as well. Aristotle does not construct utopias or plan revolutions. Without doctrinaire preferences, he sees a better and a worse way to run a monarchy, a democracy, or an oligarchy. In each case, law is what legitimates—constitutional principles, to put it more precisely. If these help stabilize a regime, that stability is won not by arbitrary or violent exercises of authority or displays of force or undermining and corrupting the opposition, but by some form of fairness. And, again, it's characteristic of Aristotle's pluralism that he sees many forms of fairness.

Fairness is both the root and the fruit of the political stability Aristotle teaches. In that sense his realism about the varieties of polis functions much as his ethical teaching does, starting with what everyone knows or thinks he knows (about self-interest in the case of ethics, or about how precious peace and stability are, in the political case) and building outward, dialectically, to less familiar or less commonly acknowledged ground—the discovery of the virtues that foster our fulfillment, in the case of ethics, the recognition that those virtues always need a social theater for their realization; the discovery, in the case of politics, that the bare needs of peace, prosperity, and political stability rest on far broader foundations than may at first meet the eye: law and constitutionalism, measured deliberative openness and participation, social and cultural institutions that foster and affirm a sense of fellowship and belonging among the individuals who constitute a polity and that both foster and affirm the kind of character that will warrant the trust on which such a sense of fellowship depends. Aristotle is never in doubt that the legitimate aim of any polity (and the aim that legitimates its structures of authority) is *eudaimonia*, the flourishing of the individual. Nor is he ever in doubt that the only means ultimately effective in pursuit of that end is education, broadly construed (as Plato himself had taught)—that is, the formation of character, as influenced by all the formal and informal institutions that the society can

constitute in support of that goal. But Aristotle is not averse to arguing dialectically, building from a narrower aim like stability or prosperity to the broader and subtler goal of *eudaimonia*. The dialectic, again, is modeled on Plato, and on the Socratic plan of argument that Plato celebrates and canonizes in the *Republic*. But the detailed vision of the organic connection that links the higher goal with the narrower but more familiar one, by way of constitutionalism, fairness, participation, and the like, is distinctively Aristotle's. Its elucidation is the distinctive goal of political science, as he understands that critical and in a way magisterial branch of study, so closely parallel, in its own way, to the biological studies that Aristotle so loved, in which he sought to uncover the unseen linkages between the forms taken by the organs of living beings and the peculiar and distinctive goods that those organs serve in promoting the survival of living creatures and the continuance of their species.

Much of our political discourse and rhetoric today, still centered on the idea of rights as trumps and on the conception of liberty as noninterference, hangs in the air because so many of our philosophers and other thinkers have foresworn the idea of human nature. They predicate their talk of rights and liberties, entitlements and deserts, on the notion of a social contract—no longer mythic or historical, but virtual, the thought, that is, of an agreement that no one actually has made but that hypothetically rational choosers would or should have signed onto, had they been asked. The effect is to suspend rights, and duties along with them, from a skyhook. Political norms become conventional rather than universal. Human rights and obligations become contingent on social forms not just for their efficacy (as they must be) but for their prescriptivity. Once that move has been made, we fear, diversity has been pressed too far. We find ourselves (in the name of the respect we owe the *other*) willingly and even with relief accepting the exploitation and expropriation, oppression and, yes, enslavement of the other, as if we were let off the hook morally, simply because that other, conceived as other, does not seem to be subject to our particular conventions, is not a party to *our* contract, a player in our game, a member of our group.

If rights are products not of compacts or conventions but of our very being (even though convention and our tacit and emergent compacts with one another are necessary to their social and institutional implementation), if rights are demands of what we are, anchored in our common nature, not because we share it but because that nature makes us subjects, choosers, persons, beings capable of thought and reflection—beings, in short, whose very nature is denied when the avenues of choice are closed—then natural rights are firmly grounded in natural law. And persons, of course, is what we are. We are susceptible to pain, yes, but also to laughter and regret, sensibility and distaste. We are capable of intellectual honesty and self-deception. We are beings able to chart our own course individually, consultatively, and conjointly. We are able, in some measure, to define our own ends. Granted we do so fallibly and corrigibly. But we also do so responsibly, self-consciously,

even at times self-critically. It is here that the simplest demand of morals comes into play, the demand that we treat beings as what they are. This is the same broad demand that finds its special case in the imperative to acknowledge the truth when we see it. Rights, in that case, are no longer suspended from a skyhook, or hung out to dry in the winds of contingency.

A volume seeking to bring Aristotle into constructive conversation with political theory today could not hope to succeed without a focus on modern ideas of rights. So one of the themes that links the chapters in this symposium is attention to the place of the idea of rights in Aristotle's political philosophy. This focus may seem surprising, since Aristotle does not bathe in the rhetoric of rights, as do so many of our modern political practitioners and the theorists sensitive to their concerns. The dialectic of rights and responsibilities is not Aristotle's cynosure. He's far more interested in the moral basis of society, in ethos and history, statecraft, and the nexus we have mentioned between stability and legitimacy. Constitutionalism is perhaps his great theme—a theme not foreign to our own political discourse, especially if we bear in mind that often, in our rhetoric and casual talk, when we say 'democracy' we mean 'constitutional republic.' But it is precisely because Aristotle's *Politics* does dig for the moral roots of constitutionalism that the theme of rights emerges so insistently from its pages. It's here, as three of the chapters in this volume argue, that Aristotle's political philosophy can be most helpful to us.

As Edward Halper argues, *Aristotle* does not lack an explanation, a political motivation, or a metaphysical foundation for the idea of rights. What Aristotle calls to our attention is the fact that rights *are* nonsense without a philosophy of the human being. It's the lack of an adequate philosophical anthropology that would make absolute rights what Bentham branded them, "nonsense upon stilts." Halper argues that an Aristotelian politics affords a firmer ground for modern liberty than contemporary neutralist liberalism can offer. Pursuing a similar course, Fred D. Miller, Jr., extracts from Aristotle's conception of statecraft a workable set of prescriptions for contemporary politicians and policy makers. Adopting an Aristotelian critical perspective, Peter L. P. Simpson masterfully echoes Aristotle's analyses of constitutions, to bring into relief the ways in which Aristotle might find flaws and blindspots in the American Constitution.

Like so much of the rest of his philosophy, Aristotle's politics begins with observation—characteristically and appropriately biological in this case, the observation we have already reflected on, that man is a social animal. We live human lives by virtue of our ability to cooperate in groups, to differentiate our roles and coordinate our activities in pursuit of a common goal, not just of surviving but of living well, thus realizing our humanity. It is for this reason that all virtues of character are defined by Aristotle in their social context. Courage, liberality, proper pride—all the habits and dispositions that make us

effective, successful, and fulfilled as human beings are honed and exercised in interaction with our fellow humans. Friendship is listed among the virtues and anatomized in extenso along with them because friendship is the social bond (extending beyond mere mechanical reciprocity) that makes society possible and the polis effectual—whether its locus is in sheer exchange relations, or whether its practice broadens our relationships to bonds of fellowship and camaraderie, or security in its exercise allows us to rise to the plane of mutual trust, regard, respect, or love that would lead us to take risks and make sacrifices for one another, that is, to treat one another, indeed as “second selves.”

As Lenn E. Goodman argues, what Aristotle shows us by his analysis of sodality is that human society is founded not on our fear of nature or of one another but (as Plato had taught), on our capabilities of complementing one another’s strengths and building a life together that none of us could even approach on our own. The human virtues, Goodman contends, are not just nominal categories that capture in their verbal net the dispositions that we welcome in our neighbors. They are, like any virtues, strengths that make us more adequate in ourselves and more effective in our roles. And human roles, perforce, are social roles, since social beings is what we are, civic beings, if we are to consider the conditions needed for the fullness of our human life.

Only a god or a beast, Aristotle writes, could live alone—and a human being who lived alone would not long retain the character of humanity but would slip inexorably into the cyclopean mode that Homer had so brilliantly painted in the *Odyssey*. It is our interdependence that makes a human being a *zoon politikon*, but that interdependence is not just a matter of subsistence. It’s a matter of enhancing our lives with all the cultural and institutional amenities that a full description of human society would omit from mention only at the cost of the grossest misrepresentation.

The social setting, of course, is not the only basis for Aristotle’s grounding of political norms in human nature. If it were, those norms would not extend beyond the formal reciprocities of our conventions—be they vested in institutions like commercial exchange and promise keeping or in the more spiteful ethos of blood feuds and *talio*. There are concrete and, yes, universal material constituents to human nature, capabilities that can be realized only in a social setting but that no ant or bee or termite could exercise or develop, no matter how elaborately organized the social structure in which such creatures lived. The existential basis of human interdependence might start with our needs for food and water, shelter and mates, but it can hardly be confined to that level. It extends rapidly from the procreative urge and the desire to protect our offspring to the more intangible but hardly impalpable human needs for status, recognition, and control—the desire, in Aristotle’s terms, for active engagement in the concerns of the community, to deliberate not only as regards individual needs and familial wants but also in the larger,



public arena where human societies articulate themselves as states and not just clans or neighborhoods, to have our interests consulted and our voices heard. It is with this thought in mind that Robert B. Talisse's contribution brings Aristotelian themes of intellectual virtue into conversation with contemporary theories of deliberative democracy.

All human drives and wants are distinctively human in form, even those that have counterparts among the animals, even those that have counterparts among the plants. But part of what Aristotle finds most distinctively human is the use of reason in our deliberations, whether in a calculative way that seeks to discover and deploy means to our ends, or in a more reflective way, in the recursive examination of those ends themselves, comparing them with one another and with their alternatives. That reflective phase of the deliberative, which makes it not merely calculative and instrumental but open ended and philosophical, leads naturally from the practical to the speculative, as the work of Plato and the life of Socrates had clearly shown. It is when we think and engage in inquiry for its own sake, as Aristotle sees it, that we are most self-sufficient and godlike.

Reason in this sense fulfills and enacts our humanity. But, as Eugene Garver notes, it is when our deliberations about means and ends become public, when we seek to persuade or be persuaded by one another, that our natures as social beings and as reasoning beings intertwine. And here too our humanity is realized, as the fruits of our reflections about nature and the cosmos, divine wisdom and human happiness, are put to work, in shaping and preserving the institutions that will facilitate the humanization of human life and foster, in our offspring and in new generations, the kind of character that will find its way to lives worth living and not leave that question unexamined. Garver develops these themes strikingly against the contrastive backdrop of Aristotle's reflections on revolt, faction, stability, and change.

Education lies at the core of Aristotle's politics, as it does for Plato, and no doubt even for the historical Socrates as well. It is here, perhaps that Aristotle can be most informative to our political thinking. For we devote a great share of state revenues to educational enterprises and our political and social institutions remain, much as those of ancient Greece were, dependent on the intellectual outlook and moral dispositions of our citizenry. Yet our political theories insistently neglect the subject of education, frown on the very idea of moral education, and vehemently confuse education with indoctrination (or even operant conditioning) in ways that would have made Aristotle cringe. Our political philosophers are perhaps as much in denial about the centrality of education in the mission of the modern state as were those contemporaries of Socrates who wanted to hold *him* responsible for the character of Alcibiades and failed or refused to see that it was they and their institutions that had struck that counterfeit coin.

What Aristotle offers here is no political panacea, unless what we are after is the kind of self-validating argument that promises to end all political

and moral difficulties if only we could learn to train our youngsters soundly. That kind of formula rests on a promissory note. It assumes, without offering much support, that we can somehow discover and agree on, and indeed implement, just the right kind of education. It ignores the fact that education for the young and for adults as well begins with *us*. For our actions are the models that the young and others too most follow. Children learn swiftly to be as adept as we are in saying one thing, doing another, and believing a third. Where Aristotle is perhaps most helpful here is not in showing us just what behaviors we should model. Like Plato he is skeptical that any mere behavioral rule will capture the full texture of the life of virtue. He is not likely to think it possible that some behavioral formula or nostrum will spell out the true nature of the good life.

Experience, judgment, practical wisdom are never out of place in the thick reality of our daily lives, once we get beyond the bare minima of human decency that laws and moral systems seek to articulate. Given Socrates' teachings about the moral primacy of practice over precept and the need for habits of mind *and* action to be internally appropriated, to be made part of our character and identity and not merely heard or mouthed before we can call them our own, mere formulae are not something that we could hope would do us any good, even if Aristotle (or anyone else) were equipped to provide us or our children with the relevant instruction. Only sophists would profess to do that, whether they wear the garb of advocates or marketers, demagogues or preachers. But what Aristotle can give us is the recognition that education is not a matter of conditioning and still less of indoctrination, that the moral habits we acquire, by doing not by speaking, are in the first instance habits of the mind, habits of acting thoughtfully, with due consideration of who and where we are, what our aims and the consequences of our acts might be, how our choices affect others and ourselves, how they become expressions of who we are and of who we wish to be.

The good life, as Aristotle argues at some length, is not a collection of goods and services or even a body of passive experiences. Rather it is a hierarchy of actions, organized around our human capabilities for thought, deliberation, reflection, and self-governance. In thinking that thought and communicating it to us, Aristotle, like Plato, refuses to segregate the moral from the political or the political from the moral: Our individual choices are political, not only in the sense that they take place in a social context and have social antecedents and consequences, but also in the sense that they demand adjudication among potentially conflicting claims and in that sense presage and prepare us for our public and communal deliberative roles. Our public choices are moral too, not only in the sense that they portend value judgments and wreak their effects upon our fellow human beings—our neighbors to be sure, but also distant contemporaries, as we now know—and our successors, and even (as the people of traditional societies are not prone to forget) the good name and vanished hopes of our ancestors. They are moral

in another sense as well. For they call upon and express, expose and define our character and the character of the society that is the product of our interactions. In light of Aristotle's coupling of good politics with the human good, questions of global politics naturally arise. In his treatment of these issues, Lloyd P. Gerson develops an Aristotelian account of moral agency that he proposes belongs in contemporary theories of international relations.

Aristotle is sometimes blamed for the scholastic uses that were made of his philosophy. Nothing, we think, could be more unfair. Scholasticism, as we understand it is the marshaling of doctrines into schools rigidly attached to their own fixed methods, agendas, and assumptions. Typically, the reference is to the Christian schoolmen of the Middle Ages. But scholasticism is not confined to theology or to medieval authors and teachers. It is found wherever knowledge is limited, opinions are many, and access to the avenues of thought is controlled by a demand for prior commitment to premises safeguarded from inquiry. The balkanization of discourse is self-aggravating, as rival groups are insulated by refusal to criticize shared assumptions or to engage the insights of outsiders charitably. Gatekeepers and coded language often guard the boundaries and borderlands of discourse, making scholasticism inimical to philosophy and to all free inquiry. The chief symptom of scholasticism, in this regard, is a kind of fractal structure that is more than evident in much of contemporary philosophy and in other disciplines as well, especially where value judgments are in play and the players loathe or dread canons of judgment divergent from their own. By a fractal structure we mean an ever-narrowing dialectic, where the open universe is negated and denied by the arbitrary or dogmatic constriction of inquiry within the confines of accepted premises whose truth is not examined and whose alternatives are not even entertained. Each new turn of thought is not an opening but a narrowing, responding only to what preceded it and in a bizarre way mimicking and miniaturizing its insights as the demands of specialization and overspecialization constrain the scope of discourse to ever smaller domains, ignoring or finessing ever-larger bodies of concern and caricaturing the original broad interest that sparked an inquiry, by generating only commentaries upon commentaries and metadiscourse at ever-higher (but never loftier) degrees of abstraction.

The confinement of much current political discourse to a contractual paradigm is a case in point. John Rawls won plaudits for reinvigorating normative political philosophy in the last half of the last century, and much of the praise is well deserved. But, as Rawls freely admits, he did not *open* a new discourse or create a new framework of political analysis *ex nihilo*. He presented the familiar Lockean and Kantian contractual arguments in new imagery; and to the extent that political philosophy since that time has committed itself to commentaries, expositions, or even rebuttals to Rawls's ideas—hundreds have been written, including a handful by Rawls himself—the effect

of his work was not to liberate or renew political philosophy but to hem it in, to aggravate and exaggerate the trend toward scholasticism that is already at work in modern intellectual disciplines for a variety of reasons, mostly connected with the social structure of our academic institutions.

Here Aristotle's political philosophy, far from being scholastic in its potential, can have just the opposite effect. Because it does not presuppose a contractualist framework, it can work to open up the trammels of contemporary scholasticism in political philosophy. Like Asian philosophy or any unfamiliar outlook, ancient or modern, Aristotle's philosophy can stun by its foreignness. But, perhaps more importantly, it can enable triangulation, precisely because it stands outside the familiar nostrums and givens that hem in dogmatic thinking. In that sense, Aristotle's philosophy in general and his political philosophy in particular can be liberating. Picking up on this theme, May Sim explores the resources in Aristotle and Confucius for a new conceptualization of human rights and international justice.

Of course, this volume does not pretend to be the final word on the contemporary relevance of Aristotle's political theory. The chapters presented here represent at best suggestions for further work, sketches of future research programs. We hope that readers will find some of what they read here inviting of response and provocative of their own creative efforts in unlimbering their more independent thoughts. If our chapters prove stimulating in this way, this book will have achieved some of our best hopes for its impact.