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Book Review of *Aristotle on Truth*, by P. Crivelli

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P. Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xi + 340. ISBN 0-521-82328-5.

The philosophical problems with which ancient philosophers have been most preoccupied are not always those of current philosophical interest, and the standards by which scholars judge philosophical positions and arguments are not always the same standards used or recognized by the authors studied. So the philosophical study of ancient philosophers always runs some risk of anachronism. But this danger is less severe in the case of Aristotle's philosophy of language and the foundations of logic than it is for other aspects of Aristotle's thought. Aristotle's investigations of how exactly a unit of linguistic expression (a *logos*, or sentence) communicates some aspect of reality to another person are concerned with many of the same questions as those which have dominated English language philosophy during the last century. Recent work in the philosophy of language, logic, analytic metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind can shed great light on what Aristotle is up to in his arguments, but the reader of Aristotle must always be alert to the possibility that where Aristotle deviates from what contemporary philosophers would consider standard or acceptable answers to foundational questions, he may do so not because his views are primitive, but for good philosophical reasons, which pose a significant challenge to standard contemporary accounts. In *Aristotle on Truth*, a set of interrelated close analyses of the main passages in which Aristotle discusses truth, Crivelli displays the philosophical virtues that this sort of work requires: both expertise in the tools of contemporary analysis and the openness to the possibility that there is philosophical interest in arguments where Aristotle opens up possibilities unexplored by contemporary philosophers.

Some aspects of Crivelli's reconstruction of Aristotle's theory of truth are in line with standard interpretation; these are presented in a clear and comprehensive way, which will make this work a standard reference even when Crivelli's account is not original. Those of Crivelli's views that are controversial are always worth serious consideration, and gain cogency in the role they play in filling in gaps of a single integrated Aristotelian theory of truth.

The key points of Crivelli's account are as follows. Aristotle is a realist in regard to (apparently everlasting) universals, among which are all predicates. Propositions are true when the universal and subject that are signified by the parts of the sentence that expresses that state of affairs in fact exist as joined in reality. Such a state of affairs is called "true." Otherwise, the state of affairs exists, but is "false." The account of truth and falsity in thought is parallel to that of propositional truth and falsity.

Crivelli holds the standard view according to which Aristotle accepts a "correspondence theory of truth," and clarifies exactly what that means. Linguistic or mental truth requires an isomorphism of the elements of thought or language with the objects in the world by which the former "map" the latter. The Liar paradox (when someone utters "I am speaking falsely", is the utterance true or false?) presents a challenge to such a view of truth. Crivelli defends as at least plausible the interpretation of *SE* 25 180b2-7 as presenting a version of the Liar paradox. He takes Aristotle to

address the paradox by denying that neither speaking truly nor speaking falsely hold without qualification of the one who makes the utterance. Such a strategy, which focuses on whether or not a predicate holds of the speaker, falls short of being able to address the severe logical challenge presented by a more pointed version of the paradox (“this assertion is not true”). Another problem with Aristotle’s notion of truth as correspondence is posed by assertions with terms that do not refer. Crivelli argues that no predicative assertions can have non-referring subjects or predicates. Sentences that seem to express such assertions are to be disambiguated as conjunctions of proper predicative assertions.

A single assertion can change its truth value at different times, since truth, like a relative, holds of its subject on account of some state of affairs external to a subject.

The book closes with a distinguished addition to the many close logical and metaphysical analyses that philosophers and scholars have offered of *DI 9*, in which Crivelli discusses the famous “sea battle” puzzle. He argues that Aristotle accepted the principle of the excluded middle (for any proposition p : necessarily, either p or not- p) but denied bivalence (for any p , p must be either true or false). Crivelli’s account of *DI 9* is supplemented by Appendix 6, a logical tour de force. Here Crivelli proves that the solution of the sea battle puzzle that he attributes to Aristotle is not self-contradictory. Crivelli formalizes the elements of Aristotle’s semantic theory, specifying with great precision the circumstances in which a proposition is neither true nor false, as well as those in which it is. The consistency proof involves taking up all possible circumstances and proving that the principle of bivalence holds in each.

Crivelli’s logical expertise is without question. And it is of independent philosophical interest to show that Aristotle’s solution to a key problem in the philosophy of time and the philosophy of language is still a live option. But Crivelli’s approach here is especially problematic as history of philosophy, in part because Crivelli is giving an account of Aristotle’s thought in a language that far exceeds that of Aristotle himself in exactitude and the elimination of ambiguity. Moreover, use of the predicate calculus commits one to an ontology that runs contrary to Aristotle’s most basic metaphysical intuitions.

Crivelli introduces his formalization of Aristotle’s semantic theory concerning future contingents as follows: “The central ontological idea of the semantic theory outlined in these pages is that of a *tree*. A tree (which represents the totality of time) is based on the two-place relation $<$ (which represents the relation of preceding) holding between times... For each point of a tree, there is only one backwards route (towards the past). However, a point of the tree may have many alternative forward routes (towards the future)” (p. 270). The universe of discourse of this semantic theory, as Crivelli reconstructs it, includes assertions, which are found on trees, and are localized on these trees by times. A particular assertion, which is such as can bear a truth value, has a single time, and is on a single specified tree. But this reifies times, trees, and assertions, and thus runs counter to Aristotle’s insistence that the central ontological idea underlying his semantics is *substance*. Assertions are something that a certain kind of substance (human being) does; a time is a measure of the motion of a substance, and times are strung together, not by trees, but by the motions and changes that the substances undergo. In some ways,

Aristotle's ontology is not sparse at all; inherent within substances are potentialities without limit, posited to account for intuitions concerning possibility and continuity. But in other ways, it is as sparse as can be: there are no particulars other than the substances existing at present, a point which Crivelli implicitly recognizes in attributing to Aristotle the "realist" view according to which a predication involves the linkage between a universal and a particular subject (a substance). Talk of trees and independently existing times may be necessitated by the demands of formalizing Aristotelian semantics, but it does violence to Aristotle's key metaphysical insights. (Note that a similar problem crops up when, in order to fully work through Aristotle's account of truth in nonmodal contexts, Crivelli posits the notion of an existing, but false, state of affairs; in order to fully clarify certain truth conditions with a precision that is lacking in Aristotle's own exposition, Crivelli needs to expand Aristotelian ontology to include a number of shadow entities, entities without any causal connection to substantial reality. This is a move with which Aristotle himself would no doubt have taken issue.) It is not clear to me that Crivelli's proof could in principle be reformulated in terms that would not be problematic from an Aristotelian point of view; how could he dispense with the notions of branches and trees, as things or structures unto themselves? This does not mean that formalization of Aristotle's argument is a fruitless endeavor, only that an account of the metaphysical foundations of Aristotelian logic should be sensitive to how Aristotle's own ontology resists such formalization.

But all in all, Crivelli's account of Aristotelian metalogic and philosophy of language avoids anachronism, takes Aristotle's analyses on their own terms, and shows how, by and large, they are philosophically viable. *Aristotle on Truth* should become a standard reference for future philosophers and scholars tackling this aspect of Aristotle's thought.

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