CHAPTER 8
ARISTOTLE'S LOST WORKS FOR THE PUBLIC AND THE POLITICS OF ACADEMIC FORM

Edith Hall

> Nothing is easier than to write so that no one can understand; just as, contrarily, nothing is more difficult than to express deep things in such a way that everyone must necessarily grasp them.
>
> Schopenhauer[1]

Introduction: obscurity and obscurantism

On 23 February 2017, the then White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon announced to the Conservative Political Action Conference that Donald Trump's administration was intent upon 'deconstruction of the administrative state'.[2] Being a bookish person, Bannon knew that the word 'deconstruction' is associated by the public, even if they have not heard of Jacques Derrida, with their stereotype of the smug left-liberal intellectual snob. Bannon thus co-opted for the Alt-Right the term most emblematic of what Trump's supporters see as the 'irrelevant' privileged liberal intelligentsia, who spout metalinguistic jargon while moving seamlessly between elite universities, the hated media and the Washington political class.

Bannon, of course, is an arch-obscurantist himself. What Nietzsche called 'the black art of obscurantism',[3] as practised by ruling classes terrified of transparency, today obfuscates the workings of capitalism. The bank-created Special Purpose Vehicles which produced the 2008 financial crisis were instruments for obscuring the real financial situation by *hiding* debts.[4] Neoliberal financial institutions exploit confusion and jargon to get rich by mystification. But obscurantism as a charge is usually laid against the very intellectuals Bannon and his political allies have targeted as the enemies of 'ordinary' working people. Anti-intellectualism is a marker of the new Right; it 'abounds in order to mystify the world and in particular to support the project of neoliberal globalisation'.[5] This species of anti-intellectualism 'disparages theory because it secretly fears that theorists will uncover the truth about the big picture'.[6]

In a penetrating article, Ineke Sluiter explores the rich debate about obscurity within the ancient exegetical tradition. Commentators distinguished between unintentional and intentional obscurity, both of which can be either good or bad. Unintentional obscurity is defensible either when it is the result of words and concepts changing their meanings over time, or when the subject-matter is inherently opaque. Intentional

obscurity is deemed culpable if it is designed to impede refutation; both ancient and medieval scholars symbolised it as a cuttlefish discharging ink.[7] Intentional obscurity may be commended by ancient commentators, however, if it is deliberately chosen by an author (1) to avoid obscenity or blasphemy, (2) to produce an impressive 'sublime' effect', (3) to stimulate the reader into an effortful grappling with the text, or (4) to exclude outsiders or the uninitiated.[8] Intentional obscurity can have political applications, as well, either by protecting the safety of the author, or by leaving the meaning open to reinterpretation by readers, as the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens* (9.2) says that Solon intentionally passed obscurely worded legislation so that citizens could have some autonomy in interpreting it.[9]

On these ancient criteria, assuming that no academic today would want deliberately to exclude anyone else from a field of knowledge,[10] the only relevant justifiable category of *intentional* obscurity would be the one that stimulated readers to an interpretive effort. But the situation has changed. Given the hyper-specialization of academic research, much obscurity is the result of something neither completely unintentional nor actively premeditated: the tacit avoidance of extra effort. Controversial American pragmatic philosophy professor Terrance MacMullan argues in *The Daily Show and Philosophy*,

> Most intellectuals simply don't bother to try to engage the public . . . The isolation of intellectuals became more extreme when they started emulating European theorists . . . I suspect . . . that this isolation is largely self-imposed, since it's much easier and more comfortable to speak to someone who shares your assumptions and uses your terms than someone who might challenge your assumptions in unexpected ways or ask you to explain what you mean.[11]

If we write obscurely and make no effort to communicate our findings beyond academia, our error may be one of what Aristotle labelled omission rather than commission (*NE* 3.1113b2).

Alternatively, we may invoke the defensive arguments, unknown to ancient commentators, of the same twentieth-century Continental thinkers mistrusted by MacMullan. Theodor Adorno defended obscurity as a weapon against the pollution of societal analysis by positivist discourse; he believed this discourse naturalised the market and hierarchies.[12] Herbert Marcuse responded to the criticism that theory was remote from the 'ordinary' language of the 'commonsensical-person-in-the-street' by proposing that everyday speech perpetuated mindsets that prevent people from seeing beneath the societal surface to the invisible structures perpetuating the status quo.[13] Jacques Derrida wanted to liberate language from its oppressive and colonial past in order to escape from herd mentality and write the world in new ways.[14] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari think the problem is caused by our criteria of taste and class: we are hostile to the conflation of ideas we prefer to keep separate, such as popularity and intellectualism.[15] I take all these points, but tend to agree with Aristotle, who would have found such thinkers' attitudes to the views of 'the many' patronising and overly dismissive. He

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respected the 'wisdom of the crowd', believed in a democratic 'hive mind', and recommended launching any enquiry from *endoxa*, commonly held beliefs, even though these were to be subjected to the most vigorous examination and repudiation where necessary.[16]

Both old and new arguments are being used to wage the current Obscurantism Wars. It has never been more necessary for academics to reflect on the nature of their public communications. Some disciplines have been more proactive than others. Historians and philosophers of science have been discussing their writing forms since the early 1970s.[17] Sociologists have held whole conferences on how they write. One concludes that instead of writing 'as if we are member of a secret society whose manuscripts are intelligible only to fellow followers of social science esoterica', we need to be 'writers who struggle to find ways to join artful, clever, subtle and tasteful prose on the one hand, to life-like representations of real people and their lived experience on the other'.[18] The UK Academy of Medical Sciences now advocates the appending of 'lay summaries' to *all* publications of biomedical and health research results and supplies advice on how to write them accessibly.[19]

It is time for classicists to become similarly self-conscious, listen to Falstaff begging his grandiose-mouthed crony Pistol to deliver his news 'like a man of this world',[20] and think about the forms in which to communicate exciting, creative research publicly. In an incisive article, Siobhain Lyons suggests we use Aristotle's idea of the mean to mediate between healthy inventiveness and alienating obscurity.[21] Staying with Aristotle, my article proposes that we might find help in his lost addresses to the general public, his 'exoteric' dialogues, which differed from his surviving works. This is how Ammonius of Alexandria put it around AD 500, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* (6.25–7.4). In his works for his students,

> Aristotle is, as regards the thought, terse, compressed, and full of questions, and as regards the language quite ordinary, owing to his search for precise truth and clearness, he sometimes even invents words if necessary. In the dialogues, which he has written for the many, he aims at a certain fullness, a careful choice of diction and metaphor, and modifies the style of his diction to suit the speakers, and in short does everything that can beautify his style.

Routinely circulating our ideas in two published forms, a 'plain' academic one aiming above all at succinctness and precision, and fearless about introducing unfamiliar new terms, and the other at pleasurable readability, might be a constructive policy.

In an ideal society, research conducted at universities would be made systematically available to the public, enabling more people to join conversations about society, culture and science in informed and instrumental ways. The road to such a utopian dialogue between professional and lay intellectuals is littered with obstacles, some of which would require wholesale reform of the economic infrastructure of academia – the control of the dissemination of research by commercial publishers and the inflated cost of journal subscriptions, for example. But an obstacle easier to remove is public obliviousness to

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much scholarly discourse produced within academia and shared almost exclusively between academics.

Historically, although the 'objective' prose treatise has long been dominant, intellectual work was presented in diverse genres. Philosophers have been particularly adventurous, expounding their ideas in verse (Empedocles, Lucretius), dialogues (Plato, Augustine, Berkeley, Hume), introspective meditations (Augustine, Descartes), Exegetical Commentary (Neplatonists, Maimonides, the Arabic philosopher Averroes/Ibn Rushd) and aphoristic prose (Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius, Wittgenstein). Others have used the manual (Machiavelli), sermon (Joseph Butler), biography (the ancient *Life of Aesop*), autobiography (Augustine's *Confessions*), disputation (Aquinas), prayer (Parmenides, Anselm), compilation (Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*), polemic (Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*) and compendium (Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*). Rousseau published philosophy in the form of fiction, soliloquies and even an opera, *The Village Soothsayer*.[22]

Since the rise of the modern university and professionalization of academia in the nineteenth century, however, even in philosophy there has been a notable drift towards 'homogeneity'.[23] The form taken by academic works has become largely identical. It is similar to the surviving works of Aristotle. These needed, as Cicero wrote, application of great mental effort,[24] and were as dry as Petrarch complained when he read Aristotle on virtue. Petrarch conceded Aristotle's acumen, but it effected no moral change in him: 'Unchanged is the mind as it was, the desire is unchanged, unchanged am I.' Aristotle, according to Petrarch, succeeded in teaching what virtue is, but failed to win over one's heart because he lacked the diction needed to instil desire for the good and resentment of the bad he enjoyed in Cicero and Seneca.[25]

Like Aristotle, we write prose texts in an 'objective' third person in which the first-person voice of the scholar and an assumed collective readership denoted by the first-person plural, if it sounds cool and measured, may be used sparingly. Such treatises today generally take the form of essays or articles of between 5,000 and 12,000 words or books of upwards of 40,000. They systematically name and agree with, modify or repudiate other specialists in the field, as Aristotle often does with previous thinkers.[26] Such exchanges require complicated notes and bibliographies like the annotated reading-lists Aristotle sometimes supplies.

In most fields, moreover, there are canonical reference works alluded to via unexplained abbreviations. Our writing uses topic-specific terminology and vocabulary, the understanding of some of which is shared by other specialists in the same field across time: two experts in ancient philosophy, whether in the eighteenth or the twenty-first century, would for example not need to clarify what 'peripatetic' thought meant as a category. A lay person who wanted to explore ancient philosophy would need to learn this term, too. But many other types of academic language and vocabulary have less obvious meanings and shorter shelf lives. It is not at all clear that the self-educator needs to add examples of ephemeral jargon to their vocabulary. Derrida's term 'arche-writing', for example, was on many academic lips in the 1980s, including those of classicists, but is rarely to be encountered today.

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The example of Aristotle

In the history of Western scholarship, ancient treatises on every kind of subject-matter have exerted an incalculable influence on the form taken by scholarly discourse. The prose treatise of which our academic articles and books are direct descendants became the dominant form by the fifth century BC, although continuing to have rivals throughout antiquity. Brought to a high artistic level already in the historiography of Herodotus and Thucydides and the works of most of the sophists, the prose treatise had already won the argument by the time of Aristotle, whose own *extant* works used nothing else. And Aristotle matters because of his transdisciplinary status.[27] He founded logic and branches of natural science including zoology and meteorology, and authored the earliest surviving or foundational treatises in physics, philosophy of mind, sense-perception, rhetoric, poetics and both ethics and metaphysics as fields of enquiry distinct from politics.

Aristotle's acknowledged intellectual supremacy by the early fourteenth century, long before the invention of printing, was the reason why Dante put him first in the list of ancient intellectuals he saw residing in limbo (Plato, Socrates, Democritus, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, Thales, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Zeno, Dioscorides, Orpheus, Cicero, Linus, Seneca, Euclid, Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen); this 'philosophical family' is joined by just two medieval figures, both Aristotelians – the Persian polymath Avicenna (Abu Ali Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd). The latter, as Dante reminds us, 'wrote the vast commentary' on Aristotle. Aristotle sits supreme amongst them; 'they all gaze at him, all honour him' (*Inferno* 4.131–3).

His role as leader and unifier of all academic disciplines is similarly underscored in the painting 'Aristotle with a Bust of Homer', now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rembrandt painted it in 1653. Besides the standing philosopher and the bust, Rembrandt included a medallion suspended from the heavy gold chain. Aristotle's gaze suggests his distinctive term for intellectual contemplation and activity – *theoria*; the chain probably represents the interrelationship of all the arts and sciences. The chain which connects the knowledge of particulars in *all* fields is the chain of philosophy.[28]

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle repeatedly uses sculpture to illustrate what he means by his four causes. But the painting's conjunction of Homer with a golden chain would prompt any classically educated seventeenth-century viewer to think of the chain with which Zeus in the *Iliad* boasts he could drag earth, sea and all the other gods to Olympus, and bind them there to dangle (8.18–27). Zeus's golden chain was adopted by the Neoplatonists as an emblem of the mind of God or of divine order in the universe. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it became a familiar image of philosophy, dialectic and reason as well as cosmology. But in 1650, three years before Rembrandt painted the picture, renowned classicist and fellow Dutchman Vossius suggested the new interpretation which seems to underlie Rembrandt's conception: enquiry into all fields of knowledge is united by philosophy like the links in an unbreakable chain.[29]

The unrivalled place occupied by Aristotle in the transdisciplinary history of learned discourse means that the form of his treatises has had an exceptional impact on the forms of written discourse academics still use today. Few of us would consider expressing

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our ideas in poetry or dramatic dialogue form; if we did we would find it harder to find academic positions or secure tenure. Austere, humourless prose, multiple references to other scholars, and technical vocabulary incomprehensible to laypeople – the characteristics which have long been ascribed to Aristotle's treatises[30] – are the norm rather than the exception. In contemporary academic research, 'the results of its production also have been professionalized and rationalized, and, for that, diversity or nonconformity is a liability, not an advantage.'[31]

The Internet has brought new possibilities for extending the fruits of research and intellectual debate to a far wider audience (blogposts, online lectures, podcasts and websites). But such public-facing communication forms as these have not as yet counted towards increasing a scholar's employability in the way that an article published in an esteemed hard-copy peer-reviewed journal or a Harvard University Press monograph would count. The same can be said for writing in 'popular' magazines and periodicals or broadcasting on television or radio. Some academics have been engaged in this kind of work for decades, but have even so attracted opprobrium for 'dumbing down' their subject or 'popularizing' it in ways that more inward-looking scholars regard as vulgar or superficial.

But surely academics actually have a *duty* to the rest of society to share the fruits of even arduous thinking and recondite investigations with everyone else, especially (although not exclusively) where their own educations, salaries or research grants have been partially funded by the public? If so, then they are also under an obligation to maximize the accessibility of their public communications. Ideally, these would be inspiring and pleasurable to read as well.

Aristotle had a bifurcated approach to scholarship. One the one hand, he engaged in advanced seminars and discussion with his Lyceum students/colleagues on specialist topics, seeking to push forward the horizons of understanding and create new terminology where necessary for new concepts. On the other, he wrote treatises for general circulation, in simpler language, adorned with the arresting images and comparisons he recommends to any communicator in his *Rhetoric*. Several were in dialogue form.[32]

These works, known in antiquity as Aristotle's 'exoteric' or 'outward-facing' works, were designed, I believe, for the people he often mentions as all 'the others' (in addition to philosophers) who, he is convinced, can grasp complicated intellectual ideas, even if perhaps not quite so well as professional thinkers: a famous example occurs in his *Poetics* 1448b, where he asserts that learning about things gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but to 'the others' as well (ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις).

Aristotle's exoteric works

Aristotle is therefore both the founding father of the conventional form usually adopted by academics when disseminating their research and the first scholar of whom we know purposefully to produce a less esoteric type of work with a lay readership in mind. But

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the exoteric works disappeared at some point in the early Middle Ages. When he died in 322 BC at Euboean Chalcis, he left Theophrastus his entire library, doubtless including all the papyrus texts of both types of book, which he had either written himself or dictated to colleagues or slaves. They were presumably kept at the Lyceum until Theophrastus died in around 287 BC. But then Aristotle's works began a terrifying odyssey involving disappearance, damage, partial 'rescue' by Sulla, paraphrase, transformation through commentary by later philosophers with agendas and complete disappearance.

The fullest account of the textual history of Aristotle's *oeuvre* occurs in Strabo (13.1.54). Theophrastus left his own and Aristotle's works to their student Coriscus. Coriscus' son Neleus took it away to his hometown in Scepsis (Kurşuntepe), and bequeathed it to his heirs, 'ordinary people' (ἰδιώταις ἀνθρώποις). When they heard how zealously the Attalid kings to whom their city was subject were searching for books to equip the Pergamum library, they hid the Peripatetic works in a trench. Much later, when the books had been damaged by moisture and moths, their descendants sold them to Apellicon of Teos, a wealthy book-collector living in Athens in the early first century BC:

> But Apellicon was a bibliophile rather than a philosopher; and therefore, seeking a restoration of the parts that had been eaten through, he made new copies of the text, filling up the gaps incorrectly, and published the books full of errors. The result was that the earlier school of Peripatetics who came after Theophrastus had no books at all, with the exception of only a few, mostly exoteric works (οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὅλως τὰ βιβλία πλὴν ὀλίγων, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἐξωτερικῶν). They were therefore able to philosophise about nothing in a practical way, but only to recite propositions (μηδὲν ἔχειν φιλοσοφεῖν πραγματικῶς, ἀλλὰ θέσεις ληκυθίζειν), whereas the later school, from the time the books in question appeared, though better able to philosophise and Aristotelise, were forced to call most of their statements probabilities, because of the large number of errors (ἄμεινον μὲν ἐκείνων φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ ἀριστοτελίζειν, ἀναγκάζεσθαι μέντοι τὰ πολλὰ εἰκότα λέγειν διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν).

Apellicon's first recension of Aristotle was a disaster. It destabilized forever the trustworthiness of the transmitted texts.

The information Strabo supplies about the exoteric works, however, is important. They remained available to the Peripatetics of the third and second centuries BC, so they must have existed in more copies than the papyrus rolls which were taken to Scepsis. In content, they contained 'theses' which could be read out (the precise connotation of the verb *lēkuthizein* is obscure): the noun *thesis* can mean many things in Greek philosophical prose – hypothesis, thesis, assumed position, proposition, position requiring proof, general question or determination. But the Peripatetics' recital of these theses, whatever they were, is contrasted to the 'doing of philosophy practically' – that is, inductive or deductive reasoning from premises or evidence to reach new conclusions. They contained

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information or ideas but, at least according to Strabo, did not form the basis of new enquiries.

Apellicon's library, Strabo continues, was taken to Rome by Sulla when he took Athens in 84 BC during the Mithradatic Wars. The learned Pontic Greek grammarian Tyrannion succeeded in getting access to the collection, but so did 'certain booksellers who used bad copyists and would not collate the texts' (καὶ βιβλιοπῶλαί τινες γραφεῦσι φαύλοις χρώμενοι καὶ οὐκ ἀντιβάλλοντες). This is why that the small proportion of Aristotle's treatises which were transmitted subsequent to these hair-raising first few centuries, whether in Greek, Latin and/or Arabic, are in prose of uneven texture ranging from compressed 'lecture notes' and expanded spreadsheets[33] to polished prose which may have been performed in public since it avoids hiatus, such as the later books of the *Politics*.[34]

One of the few explicit references in Aristotle's own works to his exoteric treatises, occurs in the *Poetics*, although here he does not use the term *exoteric* (1454b): 'Keep, then, a careful eye on these rules and also on the *aisthēseis*, which are necessarily bound up with the poet's craft; for they offer many opportunities of going wrong. But this subject has been adequately discussed in the published treatises (ἐν τοῖς ἐκδεδομένοις λόγοις).' In the context, *aesthesis* probably signifies the last two of the six constituents of tragedy, which he has told us in 1450a-b, are, in order of importance, plot, characterization, thought, diction, song-making and spectacle. Aristotle seems to mean that he has written about the errors that a playwright can make with the musical and visual dimensions of tragedy in a book that has already been published (a standard meaning of ἐκδίδωμιin the passive voice; see Isocrates 5.11). Could it be that these dimensions of tragedy are the most noticeable ones, which the general public found easiest to discuss?

The other pertinent Aristotelian references, however, use the term *exoteric.* In the *Eudemian Ethics* (1.1217b20–25) he addresses the Platonic concept of the 'form' (ἰδέα) of the good and of forms in general:

> If we are to speak about it concisely, we say that in the first place to assert the existence of a form not only of the good but of anything else is a mere idle abstraction, but this has been considered in various ways in both the exoteric discourses (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις) and in those about philosophy (κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν).

Both exoteric treatises and treatises 'about philosophy' have already demonstrated that the concept of the forms is not useful. The distinction here implies that Aristotle regards the exoteric works as not philosophical in the strict sense. Nevertheless, people other than philosophers have been offered access to a discussion of the forms and why the concept is pointless (see further below, p. 000).

The distinction between different kinds of goods – those external to the self and those internal to the soul – was also made publicly available. Later in the *Eudemian Ethics*, we learn that 'all goods are either external or within the consciousness, and of these two kinds the latter are preferable, as we class them even [or 'and'] in the extraneous

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discourses (καθάπερ διαιρούμεθα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις, 2.1218b34). Much depends on the meaning of *kai* here. Is Aristotle implying that this classification is so elementary that 'even' the public can grasp it, or nudging his students to remember the comparison of internal and external goods which are 'also' discussed in the treatises that have been made widely available?

Two passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* also refer to previously existing discussions in the exoteric works. First, Aristotle reminds us that when it comes to the soul, 'some things are said about it, adequately enough, even [or 'also'] in the exoteric works too (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις ἀρκούντως ἔνια), and we must use these, for example, that one part of the soul is irrational, another part rational' (1.1102a26–8). This instance has caused problems because the division of the soul into rational and irrational parts is not Aristotle's own view in *On the Soul.* But the problem disappears when it is accepted that the division does form the basis of the current discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The implication is this: in order for a Lyceum student to understand a lecture delivered by Aristotle, Aristotle regards a knowledge of other, exoteric (i.e. previously published or circulated works) as a prerequisite. This is certainly the implication of the other reference to exoteric works in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (6.1140al–3), where Aristotle distinguishes between making objects (*poiesis*) and doing things (*praxis*), 'a distinction we may adopt also/even from the extraneous discourses' (πιστεύομεν δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις).

Finally, Aristotle says there has been an exploration in the exoteric treatises of 'the principles concerning household management and the control of slaves, that man is by nature a political animal; and so even when men have no need of assistance from each other they none the less desire to live together' (*Politic*s 3.1278b30). Now, this material is covered in detail in book I of the *Politics*. Had the first part of the *Politics* (which is some of Aristotle's most polished and lucid prose) already been made available 'exoterically'? This is not necessarily the correct inference. It is equally possible that Aristotle had published a simplified and accessible version of the argument in *Politics* I, fundamental to his entire system, about the household as the basis of the human community.

Aristotle, therefore, refers to exoteric treatises which addressed several branches of philosophy: aesthetics (the mistakes tragedians could make), ontology (the uselessness of the concept of the forms), philosophy of mind (the superiority of internal over external goods, the structure of the soul), ethics (the distinction between poiesis and praxis), and politics (the partnerships in the household as the primary building-blocks of the city-state which human animals gather together to construct). But most of the references concern propositions – perhaps *theses* – fundamental to his entire intellectual system, which could apparently be articulated in a way that could be understood by everyone. He seems to have assumed that his advanced students – those fledgling *philosophoi* who could grapple with the complexity of his treatises *kata philosophian* – would be familiar with these exoteric works. Perhaps it was through reading them that they had conceived their passion for philosophical enquiry and enrolled at the Lyceum in the first place.

Other evidence for Aristotle's exoteric works, often addressing their form, appears in ancient authors. The exoteric works even had short prefaces to entice the reader into

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opening the papyrus roll (Cic. *Att.* 4.16.2). Eschewing preambles, they plunged straight into the central argument (Basil, *Ep.* 135). They were a treat to read, even by 'the multitude', since they were 'full of light and translucent; their usefulness is not unmixed with enjoyment and pleasure; Aphrodite and the Graces blossom on them' (Themistius. *Or.* 319 c). They were often or customarily in dialogue form. In a letter to Quintus (33.5.1), Cicero says that Sallustius had read a draft of Cicero's work on the best state and citizen. Sallustius responded by suggesting that the discussion of these topics would be lent greater authority if Cicero spoke in his own persona. Sallustius then suggested that Aristotle could furnish a model for Cicero, because he 'presented himself as speaker, in the things he wrote about the state and the leading man' (*Aristotelem deinque, quae de re publica et praestanti viro scribat, ipsum loqui*). Since Aristotle appears as a speaker in no extant treatises, it was likely in exoteric works that he had presented an alternative, dialogue rendition of some of the political arguments which occur in both his *Politics* and his *Rhetoric*. As Plato knew well, argumentation is easier to follow when presented in the form of a playscript. It thus makes suitable introductory reading for a lay thinker.

Plutarch discusses the distinction between Aristotle's popular and advanced treatises, in his *Life of Alexander* (7.3–5): 'Alexander seems not only to have received [Aristotle's] ethical and political instruction but also to have had access to those secret and more profound doctrines which [philosophical] men privately label "acroamatic" and "epoptic" and do not extend to the masses'. 'Acroamatic' implies that Aristotle communicated some doctrines only orally, and 'epoptic' is a term usually connected with initiation rituals. But, apparently, these 'oral' communications were published after Alexander had left Greece, when Aristotle returned to Athens from Macedon and opened his Lyceum. Plutarch tells that Alexander became angry when he learned of their publication, and wrote to Aristotle asking how he could outclass other men if the works that he had studied 'shall become the common property of everyone' (πάντων ἔσονται κοινοί). Alexander was aware that the social elite needed to maintain the exclusivity of academic knowledge if the hierarchy between themselves and the rest of humanity were not to be eroded. Aristotle's reply as reported by Plutarch is humorous: the book in question seems to have been the *Metaphysics*: 'For the metaphysical treatises are unusable for tuition or study, since they were written as a memorandum for those who had already trained in their contents' (ἀληθῶς γὰρ ἡ μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ πραγματεία πρὸς διδασκαλίαν καὶ μάθησιν οὐδὲν ἔχουσα χρήσιμον ὑπόδειγμα τοῖς πεπαιδευμένοις ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς γέγραπται). Plutarch knows that Aristotle's metaphysical ideas had a reputation for being more challenging to the reader than those on ethics and politics.

Another light on the popular understanding of Aristotle's works is shed by a passage in Lucian's dialogue *Vitarum Auctio* (26–7). Zeus and Hermes organise an auction of personifications of philosophical schools, including Pythagoreanism, Cynicism, Platonism, Epicureanism and Stoicism. The final 'lot' for sale is Peripatetic Philosophy. Hermes, the auctioneer, recommends this school as 'the most intelligent and comprehensive', and also 'temperate, equitable and applicable in life' – the last three qualities using distinctively Aristotelian vocabulary. Even better, he is 'double' (διπλοῦς):

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> He has one appearance from the outside, and another from the inside. So, if you purchase him, remember that one of him is called exoteric and the other esoteric.

Lucian knows that his own readership can buy either exoteric or esoteric treatises by Aristotle, and may have coined the latter word here to provide a contrast with 'exoteric' in a context where Plutarch had have used 'acroamatic'.

This 'double' philosophical school emerges as the most attractive from Lucian's treatise. In the next interchange, Hermes offers a competent enough paraphrase of Aristotle's distinction between different kinds of good in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: there are three types, 'in the soul, in the body and external ones' (ἐν ψυχῇ, ἐν σώματι, ἐν τοῖς ἐκτός). The dealer's response is revealing: Peripatetic thought 'thinks appropriately for humans' or 'in a way that a human can understand' (ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖ). It can offer all kinds of information that is 'useful' as well as 'awesome'; here Lucian shows an amusing grasp of Aristotelian natural science, especially the colourful zoology of *History of Animals*: Hermes assures the book dealer that this school of philosophy will elucidate the lifespan of the mosquito, how deep sunlight can penetrate the sea, the nature of the oyster's soul, reproduction, birth, embryology, 'and how the human being can laugh, but the ass does not laugh nor do carpentry nor shipping'.

One lost exoteric work in dialogue form, probably entitled *Nerinthus*, was written to honour the type of individual whom Aristotle seems to have envisaged as the reader of such public-facing works. A Corinthian farmer read Plato's *Gorgias* and 'forthwith gave up his farm and his vines, put his soul under Plato's guidance, and made it a seed-bed and a planting ground for Plato's philosophy' (Themistius, *Or.* 295 c-d). In *On Pleasure* he derided epideictic speakers who looked silly when describing Black Sea marvels they had never personally seen to crowds including business people 'who have just returned from the Phasis or the Borysthenes' (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 6d). The association of Aristotle's dialogues for the public with the 'ordinary working man' also appears in an anecdote concerning his most famous exoteric work, indeed one of the most renowned philosophical treatises in antiquity, the *Protrepticus*, or *Encouragement to Philosophy*. The tale is preserved by Stobaeus (*Flor.* 4.32.21) via the Hellenistic Cynic philosopher Teles of Megara and Zeno, the founder of Stoicism.

Zeno's teacher, Crates of Thebes, 'as he sat in a shoemaker's workshop, read aloud the *Protrepticus*, which Aristotle had written to Themison king of Cyprus, saying that no one had greater advantages for becoming a philosopher; he had great wealth, so that he could afford to spend money on philosophy, and had reputation as well. 'As he read, the shoemaker listened while he went on with his stitching, and Crates said: "I think, Philiscus, that I shall inscribe a *Protrepticus* to you; for I see you have more advantages for the study of philosophy than were his for whom Aristotle wrote."' The dialogue was suitable for carrying around and reading while undertaking everyday errands, and comprehensible to a cobbler.

By pointing out that a humble craftsman like Philiscus may be better equipped to philosophise than King Themison, the anecdote also stresses the familiar Aristotelian

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theme that intrinsic goods are more valuable than external goods such as wealth and its trappings, the topic of another fragment:

> Happiness depends not on having many possessions but on the condition of the soul. For one would say that it is not the body which is decked with splendid clothing that is happy, but that which is healthy and in good condition, even if it has none of these things; and in the same way, if the soul has been disciplined, such a soul and such a man are to be called happy, not a man splendidly decked with outer things but himself worthless. It is not the horse which has a golden bit and costly harness, but is itself a poor creature, that we think worth anything; what we praise is the horse that is in good condition. Besides, when worthless men get abundant possessions, they come to value these more than the good of the soul; which is the basest of all conditions.[35]

To illustrate how external appearances are a poor guide to true goods, which are intrinsic to the soul, Aristotle used the myth of Lynceus, gifted with the superpower of X-ray vision. 'Strength, size, beauty are a laugh and nothing more, and beauty seems to be beauty only because we see nothing accurately. If one could have seen as clearly as they say Lynceus did, who saw through walls and trees, would one ever have thought any man endurable to look at, when one saw of what poor materials he is made?'[36] This passage comes from Iamblichus, who paraphrased and excerpted extensively from Aristotle's *Protrepticus* in his own *Encouragement to Philosophy* (early fourth century AD). Some passages are occasionally held to be direct quotations from Aristotle, such as this rousing pronouncement that philosophical enquiry is desirable for its own sake rather than because it confers a monetary advantage:

> For as we travel to Olympia for the sake of the spectacle itself, even if nothing were to follow from it (for the spectacle itself is worth more than much wealth), and as we view the Dionysia not in order to gain anything from the actors (indeed we spend money on them), and as there are many other spectacles we should prefer to much wealth, so too the contemplation of the universe is to be honoured above all the things that are thought useful. For surely it cannot be right that we should take great pains to go to see men imitating women and slaves, or fighting and running, just for the sake of the spectacle, and not think it right to view without payment the nature and reality of things.
>
> *Iamblichus*, Protr. *52. 16-54.5 Pistelli*

Some modern scholars have used Iamblichus in an attempt to reconstruct Aristotle's inspiring exhortation wholesale.[37] They have supplemented Iamblichus with other ancient commentators on Aristotle and the fragments of Cicero's lost *Hortensius*, a dialogue which was modelled on the *Protrepticus* (*Hist. Aug.* 2.97.20–2),[38] in which the figure of Cicero proposed to interlocutors that philosophy was a better leisure pursuit

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than fine art, literature or rhetoric. This implies that the main speaker in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* was Aristotle himself.

In my view a precise reconstruction of the *Protrepticus* is, sadly, too ambitious, but certain other themes were so renowned that several authorities mention them. Aristotle used the riddling, tricksy argument that even to refute the existence or usefulness of philosophy required using philosophical argumentation (Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, composed around AD 200, 149.9–17):

> Suppose someone said we ought not to pursue philosophy. Then, since even to inquire whether we ought to philosophize or not is (as Aristotle himself said in the *Protrepticus*) to philosophize, and since to pursue philosophical insight is also to philosophize, by showing that each of these two things is natural to man we shall on all counts refute the proposition proposed.

There are other surprises in the fragments of the *Protrepticus*. Aristotle cracked a joke for which there is no parallel in his surviving work: he said that Anacyndaraxes (the father of Sardanapalus) was 'even sillier than the name of his father would suggest' (Iamblichus, *Protrept*. 56. 13–59 Pistelli). He used catchy nicknames, such as 'old children' to describe unphilosophical grown men who, like unweaned infants, can't tell truth from falsehood or indeed draw any distinctions between any things whatsoever (Chalcidius, *In Tim.* 208–9, ed. Wrobel).

The Macedonian anthologist Stobaeus in the fifth century AD quotes an excerpt from Aristotle's *On Good Birth* which indicates that in it the figure of Aristotle reported, at a later date, a dialogue in which he had participated (Stob. 4.29 A 24). His interlocutor had said, 'With regard to good birth, I for my part am quite at a loss to say whom one should call well-born.' The reported dialogue continues, with Aristotle the narrator quoting Aristotle:

> 'Your difficulty', I said, 'is quite natural; for both among the many and even more among the wise there is division of opinion and obscurity of statement, particularly about the significance of good birth. What I mean is this: Is it a precious and good thing, or, as Lycophron the sophist wrote, something altogether trivial? Comparing it with other goods, he says the attractiveness of good birth is obscure, and its dignity a matter of words; i.e. that the preference for it is a matter of opinion, and in truth there is no difference between the low-born and the well-born.'

Stobaeus continues (4.29.A 25), showing that Aristotle referred to the ideas about good birth propounded by Socrates, Simonides, and Theognis, the last of whom he quoted directly. The easy style, with its allusions to the ideas of famous thinkers and poets, flows like the most accessible Platonic dialogue.

A sad loss amongst Aristotle's dialogues is his *On Philosophy*, which complemented his *Protrepticus* with a picture of how philosophy first developed. The fragments are lively and colourful: he discussed the provenance of the Delphic injunction 'know

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thyself', and decided that it was the Pythia herself rather than any male sage who had first invented it (Clem. *Strom.* 1.14.60.3). He discussed Zoroastrianism, its metaphysical dualism and high antiquity, claiming that Zoroaster lived six thousand years before the death of Plato (Pliny, *N.H.* 30.3). He appealed to the non-expert philosopher by discussing the importance of proverbs and sayings as concise expressions of primordial beliefs (Synesius, *Encomium of Calvitius* 22.85 c.0).

Aristotle's influential *Eudemus, or On the Soul* was also a dialogue. It was written to memorialise his friend Eudemus of Cyprus, to whom the *Eudemian Ethics* was dedicated. Eudemus was an alumnus of Plato's Academy who died fighting in Syracuse in about 354 BC (Cicero, *de Div.* 1.25.3; Plut. *Life of Dion* 22.3). One long fragment, which Plutarch says he is quoting verbatim (αὐτὰς τὰς τοῦ φιλοσόφου λέξεις παραθέσθαι), is preserved in Plutarch's consolatory letter to Apollonius (*Mor.* 115b-e). It features a passage in Aristotle's own voice in which he converses with a high-status listener:

> 'This is why, O mightiest and most blessed of men, we not only consider the dead to be blessed and happy, but also believe that it is impious to say anything untrue or slanderous about them because they are already better than us and our superiors. And this is such a primal and ancient belief of ours that nobody know when or by whom it was first stated, but it has been maintained as a conviction for all time. Additionally, reflect on the saying which is on everyone's lips and has been circulated in common parlance for many years.'
>
> 'Which one?' he said. And the other one [Aristotle] replied,
>
> 'That not to be born is the best of all, and to be dead is better than to be alive.'

At this point the figure of Aristotle introduces a fable, which requires him to bring the satyr Silenus to life in the dialogue by the use of *oratio recta*:

> 'So, for example, they say that Silenus, after the hunt when Midas captured him, when Midas kept putting questions to him, asking what is the best and most desirable of things for all people, at first refused to define it and kept an unbroken silence. But when eventually by using every stratagem Midas with difficulty coerced him into responding, Silenus, under pressure, said this: "Short-lived progeny of a spirit of travail and a harsh fate, why are you forcing me to say what it is better for you not to know? The least painful life is the one spent in ignorance of one's private sorrows. For humans it is completely impossible to have what is the best of all things, or even to have a share in its nature, so it is best for all men and all women not to be born. But the next best thing, and the best of those that are achievable by humans, but still only second best, is to die as soon as possible after being born." It is clear therefore that Silenus made this pronouncement in the belief that existence in death is superior to the time spent alive.'[39]

The use of the fable and the impersonation of the mythical satyr, unlike anything in Aristotle's surviving treatises, are reminiscent of Plato's liveliest narratives. The sonorous

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diction used by the sagacious satyr reminds us that Ammonius admired the way Aristotle's exoteric works modified 'the style of his diction to suit the speakers' (see above, p. 000). The reference to the Sicilian mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus alongside the Socratic dialogues in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1447b1) alerts us to his interest in the history of the form. In his own popular dialogue *On Poets* he expanded the discussion to include discussion of Plato's form and style (Diog. Laert. 3.37(25) and of other dialogists preceding Plato: Athenaeus (505 b-c) quotes him: 'Are we then to deny that the so-called mimes of Sophron, which aren't even in metre, are stories and imitations, or the dialogues of Alexamenos of Teos, written before the Socratic dialogues?'

Moreover, in ventriloquizing the wise Silenus, Aristotle plays into the association of the figure of the philosopher, especially Socrates, with the satyr.[40] The appeal to well-known sayings is consistent with Aristotle's respect for *endoxa*, or popularly held beliefs, in his extant treatises. It is intriguing that Aristotle does not say that he believes in life after death, which would run counter to his prevailing view as expressed in his surviving works. But we know that he was aware that this idea was challenging for general audiences, indeed it was literally 'unfriendly' (*aphilon*) for people to believe that the friendship bonds which held together Greek society were completely dissolved by death (*NE* 1.1101a22–4).[41]

Nor does he here use dialectical argument to arrive at the conclusion: Aristotle quotes a mythical figure, and concludes that he believed in the superiority of the existence enjoyed by the dead. This method is consistent with the ancient commentators' opinion that Aristotle freely used unexamined arguments from probability in his exoteric works.[42] But his most fundamental philosophical positions, especially his rejection of Plato's ideal world of eternal forms, were promulgated vigorously in the popular treatises. As Proclus put it, 'there was nothing in Plato that Aristotle rejected so firmly as the theory of Ideas', in his writings not only on logic but on ethics, physics and metaphysics, 'and in his dialogues, where he asseverates most clearly that he cannot agree with this doctrine, even if he lays himself open to the charge of opposing it from love of polemic'.[43]

Conclusion

I do not believe that most academics are premeditated obscurantists whose goal is to exclude either those not initiated into their esoteric discourse, Nor do I believe they deliberately want to alienate those whose capacity to read their scholarly publications is restricted by their price-tags or by intolerance of arcane articles and monographs bristling with metalanguage, bibliographical references and footnotes. I agree with Lyons that there are long-term political, social and economic reasons why the academic industry has forgotten its primordial obligation to extend knowledge to others outside its own circle.[44] But we can help to defuse the hostility against academic obscurantists that anti-intellectual populists whip up by ensuring that our ideas circulate in digestible form in the public sphere. This exercise could offer the additional benefit of practice in writing even specialised prose for our peers more clearly as well.

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Aristotle's example can help us with both tasks. He would never have advocated deliberate obscurity in scholarly discourse any more than in popular treatises. He objects to it in some detail in *Rhetoric* III.[45] But when he needed to express advanced ideas with maximum precision for his erudite colleagues, he did adopt terse and neologistic language and dense dialectical reasoning. And he also spent a considerable amount of time advocating the practice of philosophy by everyone and explaining his central ideas in shorter works designed to circulate widely. In these he made efforts to make philosophising attractive by the use of dialogue form involving colourful characterisation of the interlocutors as well as ornaments such as allusion to myth and fable, humour, vivid images and the avoidance of concentrated syllogistic or inductive method. This form won him high praise: Cicero spoke of the oratorical 'river of gold' which Aristotle poured forth (*flumen orationis aureum fundens Aristoteles*, *Lucullus* 38 par. 119), which implies that the dialogues worked splendidly in live delivery.

I am not proposing merely that we adopt dialogue form in our written work. Sir George Stock was inspired by the example of Aristotle's exoteric works when he wrote *Lectures in the Lyceum: Or, Aristotle's Ethics for English Readers* (1897). He introduced interlocutors into some chapters – Theophrastus, Nicomachus and Eudemus. But they are used so ineffectively that the book remains dry and unattractive. Much the same, sadly, can be said of Jonathan Barnes' attempt at dialogue form in *Coffee with Aristotle* (2008). But I *am* proposing that as a community we should discuss our relationship with the public more seriously. The digital age and Youtube have brought fine new media for communication, although the short book or pamphlet in accessible prose, preferably opening with a version of the argument in an even shorter preface, seems to me offer as much scope as it did when Crates read out Aristotle's *Protrepticus* to that cobbler. It is important, too, that the *Protrepticus* breathed confidence into its readers, arguing that intellectual labour could make everyone good citizens and was far from difficult (Iambl. *Protr.* b.37. 3–41). Most inspiring of all, Aristotle's motive in writing in two different forms was philanthropic: he did it, according to Elias, an Alexandrian commentator in the sixth century AD, simply because 'he wished to benefit *all* mankind' (*in Cat*. 114. 15).[46]

Notes

1. Schopenhauer 1965 [1891]: 608: 'Und doch ist nicht leichter, als so schrieben, das kein Mensch es versteht, wie hingegen nicht schwerer, als bedeutende Gedanken so auszudrücken, dass jeder sie verstehen muss.'
2. See e.g. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/top-wh-strategist-vows-a-daily-fight-for-deconstruction-of-the-administrative-state/2017/02/23/03f6b8da-f9ea-11e6-bf01-d47f8cf9b643_story.html accessed 21 May 2012. Thanks to Sara Monoson for pointing this out to me. See further http://edithorial.blogspot.co.uk/2017/02/.
3. Nietzsche 1879: 27.
4. See Tandon 2009.
5. Agger 2008: 424.

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6. Agger 2008: 424.
7. Atticus fr. 7, drawn from Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 15.9.13; Schmitt 1965.
8. A charge laid, by e.g. Card 1991: xix, against many writers today, who, he claims, 'have based their entire careers on the premise that anything that the general public can understand without mediation is worthless drivel'.
9. Sluiter 2016. I am very grateful to Professor Sluiter for discussing obscurity and obscurantism with me.
10. Lee 1912 and Kogan 1969 are rather more sceptical than I am here about some academics' conscious motives.
11. MacMullan 2007: 61. See also Billig 1995; Schechner 1995; Dutton 1999; Elster 2011.
12. Adorno 1973 [1964].
13. Marcuse 1964.
14. Derrida 1996.
15. Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108.
16. See Hall 2018: 54–5.
17. Stern 1970; Hacking 1992; Crombie 1994; Ritchie 2012.
18. Kroll-Smith 2008: 396.
19. https://acmedsci.ac.uk/more/news/10-tips-for-writing-a-lay-summary accessed 21 May 2012. Thanks to Richard Poynder for pointing this out to me.
20. *Henry IV Part 2*, Act 5, Scene 3.
21. Lyons 2014: 33–5.
22. Lavery and Groarke 2010: 13, 31–5.
23. Lang 2010: 220.
24. Quoted by Nonius Marcellus, *De compendiosa doctrina* 394.26–8 ed. Lindsay (1903).
25. *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (1367) p. 266 ed. Fenzi (1999).
26. For the references to other authors in the *Rhetoric*, *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* see Hinman (1935).
27. See in general Taub 2017.
28. Carroll 1984: 48; Hall 2017.
29. Vossius 1696: 38, 229.
30. Cicero is the primary ancient defender of Aristotle's style, describing it as the most 'sinewy' or 'vigorous' (*nervosus*) of philosophical prose, in contrast to the 'richness' of Plato and the 'sweetness' of Theophrastus (*Brutus* 31.121). When writing to his brother Quintus, Cicero's praise for the charm of Aristotle's language as well as his erudition, prolific productivity and originality, is copious (10.1.83). On the other hand, he acknowledges the difficulty, even obscurity, of some of Aristotle's writing (*Topica* 1.2).
31. Lang 2010: 221.
32. Ross 1952: viii.
33. Missiakoulis 2008.
34. Blass 1892: 140; Dirlmeier 1984: 114; Schütrumpf 1989.
35. *POxy* 666 = Stob. 3.3.25.
36. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 47.5–21 ed. Pistelli (1888); see also Boethius, *Consol.* 3.8.

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37. See Düring 1961; Chroust 1964; and especially the project led by Douglas S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson at the University of Toronto, http://www.protrepticus.info/.
38. Bernays 1863; see Moraux 1975.
39. On the 'better never to have been born' trope, which Aristotle's Silenus shares with the author of *Ecclesiastes* 4.1–2 and the chorus of Sophocles' *OC* 1224–35, see Hall 2010: 10–11.
40. See Tanner 2017.
41. See Hall 2018c: ch. 10.
42. See above p. 000 and e.g. Elias *In Cat.* 114. 25.
43. Proclus in Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 31.17 ed. Rabe (1899).
44. Lyons 2014: 34.
45. See Consigny 1987. Aristotle has however been accused of 'obscurantism' of a kind resembling that associated with the contemporary political right by MacIntyre 1996: 83, a charge from which he is defended by van Alstyne 1998.
46. This article has been much improved by the comments of my editor, Phiroze Vasunia, and of Paul Cartledge. I am very grateful to both of them. When I delivered the paper at the original conference in 2016, comments from Carol Atack and Tim Whitmarsh proved particularly useful, as did those of Sara Monoson when I delivered a slightly different version at Northwestern University, Illinois in January 2017.

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