

CRITICAL

AUGUST—

DECEMBER 2022

ANTIQUITIES

WORKSHOP

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NETWORK



The seminars will be held online on Zoom. All are welcome. For more information on the Critical Antiquities Network please email fass.can@sydney.edu.au. To register, please **sign up** for the Critical Antiquities Network mailing list and you will receive CAN announcements and Zoom links.

August
30/31

Book Launch:
Edgar Garcia,
Emergency: Reading the
Popol Vuh in a Time of Crisis

Discussants:

Ignacio Carvajal (UC San Diego)
Robin Rodd (Duke Kunshan University)
Tues, August 30: 20:00–21:30 (Chicago)
Wed, August 31: 11–12:30 (Sydney)

Written during the lockdown in Chicago in the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, these essays consider the Popol Vuh as a work that was also written during a time of feverish social, political, and epidemiological crisis as Spanish missionaries and colonial military deepened their conquest of indigenous peoples and cultures in Mesoamerica. What separates the Popol Vuh from many other creation texts is the disposition of the gods engaged in creation. Whereas the book of Genesis is declarative in telling the story of the world's creation, the Popol Vuh is interrogative and analytical: the gods, for example, question whether people actually need to be created, given the many perfect animals they have already placed on earth.

Emergency uses the historical emergency of the Popol Vuh to frame the ongoing emergencies of colonialism that have surfaced all too clearly in the global health crisis of COVID-19. In doing so, these essays reveal how the authors of the Popol Vuh—while implicated in deep social crisis—nonetheless insisted on transforming emergency into scenes of social, political, and intellectual emergence, translating crisis into creativity and world creation.

September
20/21

Book Launch:
Marguerite Deslauriers,
Aristotle on Sexual
Difference: Metaphysics,
Biology, Politics

Discussants:

Sara Brill (Fairfield University)
Tristan Bradshaw (Univ. Wollongong)
Tues, Sept 20: 20–21:30 (New York)
Wed, Sept 21: 10–11:30 (Sydney)

Aristotle's remarks about the differences between the sexes have become infamous for their implications for the social status of women. In his observations on female biology, Aristotle claims that "the female nature is, as it were, a deformity." In describing women's role in the public sphere, he claims that women are naturally subordinate because, while they possess a deliberative faculty, that capacity is "without authority." While both claims express the "inferiority" of female bodies/women relative to male bodies/men, it is not self-evident that the defects Aristotle identifies in female biology have cognitive or moral manifestations that would justify the rule of men over women in political life. Marguerite Deslauriers here aims to construct a coherent picture of Aristotle's views on sexual and gender-based difference from these remarks and to show the extent to which his views on female biology and women's role in politics are causally connected.

Without exculpating Aristotle from charges of misogyny, Deslauriers contextualizes his explanations of the role and origin of female animals in his biology and the role of women in his political philosophy; she shows how Aristotle developed these views and the importance they hold for his wider philosophical commitments. She then explores how Aristotle might have seen the link between the physiology of sex and the bearing it has on political life. She ultimately argues that in Aristotle's conception of sexual difference in biology and politics, there is a tension between his view of the inferiority of female bodies and women and his commitment to the idea that females and women are valuable both for generation and for the political life characteristic of human beings. In this tension she finds a difference between Aristotle and his

predecessors: while previous accounts associate sexual difference with affliction, Aristotle sees sexual difference as a benefit, both to a species and a political community. This volume will be of interest to philosophers and students interested in ancient philosophy, feminist philosophy, as well as those studying moral and political philosophy.

October
12

Leo Strauss and Kelsen on Aristotle and the Question of Natural Right.

Miguel Vatter (Deakin University)
Wed, October 12: 10–11:30 (Sydney)

Strauss's thought is notoriously complicated to decipher. One of the best guiding threads to his thinking is provided by the way in which he understands the role of Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* within "Platonic political philosophy." The latter is a technical term of art coined by Strauss which covers what he also calls "classical natural right" and in other places refers to as the problem of the difference between "legality and legitimacy". It is now widely assumed that Strauss, around the time of his emigration to the United States, came to believe that the works of Xenophon grant the best approximation to what is at stake in the problem of Platonic political philosophy. Despite the importance of Xenophon for Strauss, in this talk I try to show that Aristotle's political thought plays a crucial supporting role throughout the development of Strauss's discourse on Platonic political philosophy; and, perhaps, Strauss's reading of Aristotle is ultimately more telling about the meaning of this discourse than his readings of Xenophon. The central issue here is Strauss's discussion of the relation between justice and law in Aristotle's political and ethical thought. This is an extremely complicated and controversial topic, and Strauss's treatment remains elusive, in part because he never explicitly acknowledges the tradition of scholarship on this very issue, and in part because his pronouncements on this topic do not directly refer to any Aristotelian texts. In my talk I shall try to fill in some of the gaps on both accounts, and in particular by contextualizing Strauss's reading of Aristotle on justice in reference to Kelsen's own interpretations of Aristotelian natural right.

November
8/9

Aristotle and Moneymaking: The Roads Not Taken

Jonny Thakkar (Swarthmore College)
Tues, November 8: 20–21:30 (New York)
Wed, November 9: 10–11:30 (Sydney)

The primary goal of this paper is to consider the relationship between the critique of moneymaking that Aristotle develops in Book I of the *Politics* and the rest of his social and political theory. I argue that there are several places where Aristotle ought to have drawn out the consequences of the former for the latter, and that his failure to do so reveals something about the deep structure of his way of thinking about political life. In short, Aristotle's account of economic life is constrained by his political ontology, according to which a polity consists in a particular arrangement and distribution of offices. But the stakes are not limited to the interpretation of Aristotle. First, moneymaking is now so integral to social and political life that it is salutary to recover the perspective of a great thinker for whom it appeared strange and foreign in important ways. Second, the paper demonstrates the abiding importance of political ontology—an understanding of what counts as a political structure, activity or phenomenon—for political science, whether empirical or normative.

December
1

Philosophers and the machine: French philosophy of slavery from Espinas to Kojève

Arthur Bradley (University of Lancaster)

Thurs, December 1: 06:00–07:30 (London)

Thurs, December 1: 18–19:30 (Sydney)

In the final volume of his long-running *Homo Sacer* project, *The Use of Bodies* (2015), Giorgio Agamben offers a controversial defence of Aristotle's notorious theory of natural slavery. To be sure, Agamben's own archaeology of slavery in this text is typically eclectic (suturing together the early Church Fathers, Marquis de Sade, Karl Marx, and Martin Heidegger amongst many other sources) but I want to propose in the following paper that this idiosyncratic reading of the slave also emerges out of and responds to a—now largely obscure—set of late-19th and early 20th century French philosophical debates about the precise relationship between slave labour, technology and the human being itself. In the work of such diverse intellectual figures as Alfred Espinas, Paul Louis, Pierre-Maxim Schuhl, Alexandre Koyré and, most prominently, Alexandre Kojève on something that gradually comes to be thematized under the signifier of the “machine,” I want to argue that we enter a historical archive which is not only a precursor for Agamben's philosophy of slavery but part of the conceptual pre-history of modern French philosophy more widely. What is the story of the encounter between French philosophy and the machine?

December
13/14

Staging the Agon: Sophocles, Gorgias, and the Theatricality of Politics

Valentina Moro (University of Verona / DePaul University)

Tues, December 13: 16:00-17:30 (Chicago)

Tues, December 13: 23:00-00:30 (Italy)

Wed, December 14: 09:00–10:30 (Sydney)

The notion of tragic agonism is pivotal in the monograph on Sophocles on which I am working. The book's claim is that the way in which the poet stages the agonistic exchanges between characters in his dramas is key not only to understand his notion of politics, but more importantly the political relationality within the polis itself. Hannah Arendt has framed a crucial interpretation of the theatricality of politics, namely the idea that the truly democratic mode of interaction and action depends on a plural space of appearance in which everyone expresses their own self. The ancient Greek polis is, for Arendt, the crucial reference to understand the theatricality of politics.

In the first part of the presentation, I will discuss the idea of tragic agonism. In the polis, the theatre had in common with the other institutional spaces the political feature of people gathering in assembly and speaking in public. Indeed, public visibility, accountability of the speakers, and rituality characterized the theatrical connotation of all of these gatherings. Tragic agonism expresses precisely the way in which the Attic tragedy staged the political relationality of the polis. In order to explain my definition of tragic agonism, I will refer to a crucial intuition by Nicole Loraux, namely the idea that the agon is the constitutive trait of the political in the polis; e.g. agonistic is the link between the citizens and the metics, between different social categories, between men and women, and so on.

In the second part of the presentation, I will use the notion of tragic agonism in order to read Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* and Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes*. I will highlight the way in which both the poet's and the sophist's texts show the reciprocal influences between the theatre and the judiciary in classical Athens. In both texts the interpretation of responsibility and judgement is not immediately stated; instead, it is a controversial matter and both authors interpret it by staging an agon. Indeed, even in Gorgias' case – although we only read Palamedes' words – we do in fact witness and even participate in an agon.