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Aristotle on the Senses of Nature and the Naturalness of the City

A Metaphysical Reading of Pol. 1252a24-1253a3

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Abstract

This article defends Aristotle's core argument for the naturalness of the city by offering a reconstruction of the connection and a demonstration of the consistency between this argument and its metaphysical foundation. The author argues that the city is natural in a strictly Aristotelian sense since its moving and final causes are intertwined in man's evolving desire for good life and its historical satisfaction.

Keywords

Aristotle – nature – city – politics – metaphysics

1 The Naturalness Thesis and the Development Argument

In the second chapter of *Politics*, Aristotle famously claims that the city is natural (hereafter, 'the Naturalness Thesis'). The significance of this claim for Aristotle's moral anthropology and political philosophy is obvious. Since the city exists by nature, man must be a political animal by nature. In other words, human nature contains the potential towards a political life. A good political life, then, should be viewed as the natural perfection of the human species and

the essential manifestation of the human way of living.¹ Aristotle's core argument for the naturalness of the city goes as follows:

- (i) Consequently, every city exists by nature, if the first communities also do. (ii) For it is the end of them, and nature is an end, since we say that each thing's nature is the kind of thing it is when its coming-to-be has been completed, as in the case of a human being, a horse, or a house. Further, 'that for the sake of which', i.e. the end, is best, and self-sufficiency is both end and best. (*Pol.* 1252b30-1253a1)²

Hereafter I shall call this argument 'the Development Argument', since it relies on Aristotle's account of the development of the human community. The full version of this argument extends to the very beginning of *Politics* 1.2, where Aristotle claims that: 'If then one were to see how things grow from the beginning, just as in other matters, in these matters one would also contemplate them in the finest way' (*Pol.* 1252a24-26). Then there follows what appears to be a historical narrative of the genesis of the city as a process prompted by the natural impulses of man: male and female couple together for the sake of reproduction; natural master and natural slave, for the sake of preservation (*Pol.* 1252a26-34). From these two natural unions the household comes to be, which is 'by nature a community set up for [the needs of] every day' (*Pol.* 1252b9-14). And then, the expansion of the household gives rise to the village, which comes to be for the sake of more than just daily needs (*Pol.* 1252b14-16). Finally, the city comes to be as the community composed of several villages, and it 'possesses the limit of every self-sufficiency, practically speaking; and although it comes to be for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well' (*Pol.* 1252b27-30).

1 Concerning the debate about whether Aristotle's conception of good life is political or contemplative, I can offer only a brief discussion here. The tension between political and contemplative life, in my opinion, reveals not so much an inconsistency in Aristotle's theory of man as a certain inconsistency in the human existence itself. For Aristotle, man is a passage towards something higher, and as such, he lives in the tension between what is most peculiar to him as a definite substance and what is the best he can achieve through assimilating himself to the highest substance. Nonetheless, the highest good for man can be pursued only within the context of the life peculiar to man—contemplation presupposes politics, not vice versa.

2 All translations of Greek texts are mine. Aristotle's works are cited by Bekker number.

Based on this genetic narrative,³ Aristotle in fact gives two arguments, as two parts of the Development Argument, for the naturalness of the city: (i) the city exists by nature because the first communities from which it comes to be exist by nature (*Pol.* 1252b30-31); (ii) the city is the end of those earlier communities and the end of a thing is its nature (*Pol.* 1252b31-34). I shall call the first argument ‘the Genetic Argument’ and the second ‘the Telic Argument’.

It is widely agreed that there are some metaphysical assumptions behind the Development Argument, as it is noticed by the commentators that when Aristotle claims that the city exists by nature and is the nature of earlier and lesser communities, he is using the notions of ‘nature’ and ‘by nature’ in a specifically Aristotelian sense. This connection between political and metaphysical thoughts is perceived by some to be a source of confusion and inconsistency. Keyt, for example, claims that “there is a blunder at the very root of Aristotle’s political philosophy”, because (among other reasons not dealt with in this article): (i) Aristotle maintains that the city comes to be by nature; (ii) Aristotle also maintains that the city comes to be by the legislative art; (iii) according to Aristotle’s metaphysical theory of genesis, to the extent that an object is a product of art it is not a product of nature.⁴ As Keyt points out, there are places in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* that indicate an emphasis on the crucial role of the legislator in the genesis of the city and the awareness of the productive and even technical character of the legislative act, and also places in *Physics* and *Metaphysics* that show a strict distinction between nature and art as two mutually exclusive ways in which an object can come into being. Therefore, the conclusion must be that the Naturalness Thesis is inconsistent with Aristotle’s own metaphysical theory of genesis.

Since Keyt’s attack, many commentators have made efforts to reconcile the naturalness of the city with the role of the legislator.⁵ The task of this article is to provide a new defense of the Naturalness Thesis by reconstructing the connection and demonstrating the consistency between the Development Argument and its metaphysical basis. The metaphysical basis of the Development Argument, in my view, is Aristotle’s hylomorphic theory of natural genesis. Genesis in general is the process in which matter takes on form, and natural genesis is the process in which some matter, moved by its own *inner* origin, takes on the form that fixes the generated natural being’s

3 Not every commentator takes Aristotle’s account here to be genetic and historical, see e.g. Newman 1887, 36ff.; Kullmann 1991, 105; Oakeshott 2006, 107; cf. Barker 1906, 273-274; Simpson 1998, 17 n. 7.

4 Keyt 1987, 54-79; 1991, 118-141.

5 See e.g. Chan 1992, 189-202; Cherry and Goerner 2006, 563-585; Reeve 2009, 512-525; Trott 2013.

essential function, the performance of which constitutes its *own* end. Artificial genesis, on the other hand, is the process in which some matter, moved by an *external* origin, takes on the form that fixes the generated artifact's essential function, the performance of which serves the end of *something else*. In other words, in the case of natural genesis, both the moving and the final causes are *internal* to the process of genesis, whereas for artificial genesis, both the moving and the final causes are *external* to the process of genesis. Keyt is right to insist that for Aristotle, nature and art are two mutually exclusive ways in which an object can come into being (*Metaph.* 1032a25-27), but he fails to consider the most important distinction between nature and art made by Aristotle in *Physics* and *Metaphysics*: in a non-incidental way, nature is an *internal* origin that seeks its own perfection, whereas art is an *external* origin that serves an alien purpose (*Ph.* 192b21-23; *Metaph.* 1048a10-13).⁶ Insofar as the act of legislation is internal to the genesis of the city, it is not an act of art in an Aristotelian sense. And insofar as the regime as the political form established by legislation serves no other end external to the political community itself, the city is not an Aristotelian artifact. Both legislation and its outcome are natural because they are internal. The Development Argument and the Naturalness Thesis are, therefore, consistent with Aristotle's metaphysical theory of genesis.

In order to prove the internalness and naturalness of legislation and its outcome, I shall offer a reconstruction of the theoretical connection between *Pol.* 1252a24-1253a3 and *Physics* 2.1. My overall view is that, in order to establish the Naturalness Thesis, the Development Argument explicitly invokes Aristotle's teleological conception of nature, and less explicitly, his theory of the four causes as different senses of nature. To be more specific: the Genetic Argument invokes the sense of nature as the moving cause, and the Telic Argument invokes the sense of nature as the final cause, of natural genesis.

Based on the theoretical connection between *Pol.* 1252a24-1253a3 and *Physics* 2.1, I shall also argue that the operations of the moving and the final

6 For the same reason, Reeve's solution is inadequate. He suggests that although it is legislative art that creates the city, the city is still natural because not every natural thing "realizes or perfects its nature *by nature*", appealing to *Ph.* 199a15-16 where it is said that 'art ... completes that which nature is unable to bring to completion'. See Reeve 2009, 513; cf. Miller 1995, 42. Reeve and Miller make too much compromise to the anti-Aristotelian view that political community is a work of art, and thus fail to note the force of Keyt's point (iii) listed above. Their solution is more applicable to such cases as when a doctor helps a patient to recover. Here nature (the patient's immune system) and art (the doctor's prescription) cooperate to bring about health. However, at least for the first historical city, legislation functions not like the doctor's prescription but like the patient's immune system, because it is the internal origin of the city's genesis.

causes of the genesis of the city are intertwined in man's evolving desire for good life. This natural desire and its satisfaction are the ultimate basis of the city, which makes the genesis of the city a matter of natural practice (*πρᾶξις*), not artificial production (*ποίησις*). For Aristotle, the characteristically human activity (the human *ἔργον*) that expresses human nature is practice, the moving cause of which is choice (which is the combination of practical reason and desire) and the final cause of which is happiness (which is simply living well and acting well) (*EN* 1095a18-20, 1098a3-4, 1139a31-32). As we shall see, men use practical reason to satisfy their desire for life and good life throughout the development of the human community which culminates in the city, the only community that provides the highest stage for the operation of practical reason and satisfies fully man's desire for life and good life. The genesis of the city is therefore a practical process, not a productive one, since for the latter both the desire for the product and the desired product are external. Insofar as the effort and outcome of the legislator internally derive from and supremely manifest man's practical nature and its historical expression, they are natural, and therefore the city is natural.

2 Nature as Form

The concept of nature (*φύσις*) is defined by Aristotle in *Physics* 2.1 as 'a kind of origin and cause of change and remaining static in that to which it belongs primarily according to itself, that is, not incidentally' (*Ph.* 192b21-23). Consequently, things that exist by nature (*φύσει*) are whatever has such an origin and cause in itself, i.e. not incidentally (*Ph.* 192b13-15).⁷ Since *Physics* 1.5-7 has already demonstrated that form (*εἶδος*) and matter (*ὑλη*) are the origins of change generally speaking (*Ph.* 190b17-20), nature, which is the inner origin of natural change, must be a kind of form or a kind of matter, or both. It turns out

7 The qualification 'not incidentally' is important, since on the one hand, an artifact does have an inner origin of change incidentally, that is, insofar as it is made from natural things (a wooden bed naturally moves downwards, if nothing prevents, as wood does); on the other, art seems like nature when the agent and patient of art are the same substance incidentally (a patient seems to have the art of medicine in himself when he happens to be a doctor who is healing himself). However, a bed *as such* does not have an inner origin of moving downwards (*Ph.* 192b16-20), and a doctor *as such* does not heal himself (*Ph.* 192b23-27). In fact, for Aristotle, every product of art *as such* comes to be and functions through an external origin, and every art *as such* either produces things external to itself or has external things to act upon (*Ph.* 192b27-32). This is perhaps less obviously true for us who live in a world with automatic tools.

that it is *both*: as Aristotle says, one way of using the word φύσις is ‘the primary underlying matter in each case, of the things which have in themselves an origin of their movements and changes’; but φύσις is also used to mean ‘the shape and the form that accords with [a thing’s] definition’ (*Ph.* 193a28-31). The latter use is evidently more important, and in order to justify it, Aristotle presents the following analogy:

Just as that which is in accordance with art and artificial is called art, so that which is in accordance with nature and natural is [called] nature. And as in the former case we would not yet say that a thing has anything in accordance with art, or that it is art, if it is a bed only potentially, and not yet has the form of a bed, so with things constituted naturally. (*Ph.* 193a31-36)

Aristotle then gives us an example, which is supposed to be parallel to the example of the bed: that which is flesh or bone potentially, before it acquires the form of flesh or bone which accords with the account by which we define what flesh or bone is, ‘does not yet have its own nature ... and is not by nature’ (*Ph.* 193a36-b3). This example is puzzling, since whatever flesh or bone is made of, it is surely some *natural* material, and as such it has its own nature which is independent of the nature of flesh or bone. Why, then, is this natural material said to be *not* in accordance with nature, as unworked wood is not in accordance with art?

Aristotle’s point must be this: when the natural material that flesh or bone is made of is viewed *as the unformed matter* of flesh or bone,⁸ it is viewed as something indeterminate *in itself* and must receive determination from the form of flesh or bone; and the principle of determination that defines a thing’s essence is what Aristotle means by φύσις (as revealed by his tacit identification between φύσις and οὐσία at *Ph.* 193a9-10). Likewise, unworked wood is not in accordance with art *not* because it is something that exists by nature, *but* because it has not yet received the form of the bed. Even if the immediate matter of some artifact is itself artificial, this artificial matter will not be in accordance with art until it receives its corresponding form, the form that defines it as a kind of artificial *matter*. This means that the notions of matter and form, and therefore the notion of nature, are *contextually relative*,⁹ especially when there is more than one developmental phase involved in the production

8 We take on this point of view when we call the natural material in question ‘that which is flesh or bone *potentially*’, instead of whatever it is *actually*, see esp. *Ph.* 201a27-34.

9 Cf. *Ph.* 194b8-9; Salkever 1990, 41-42.

or generation of an artifact or a natural substance: the form as the end of one phase can be the matter for the next phase. Aristotle's own example makes this clear: fully developed flesh and bone are in turn the matter for an animal's body, whose form and nature is its soul. For a complex animal, there can be multiple phases and layers of hylomorphic relationship within its genetic history and ontological structure, which can be extended to the genesis and structure of the community of that animal, if it has a community at all (cf. *HA* 487b33-488a14). As we shall see, it is this train of thought that provides Aristotle with the conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between the human being and the city: the regime of the city is the *form*, and therefore the nature, of the political community of which the human beings who make up the city's population constitute the *matter*; and the act of legislation is the internal origin that establishes this hylomorphic composite.¹⁰

Aristotle finishes his discussion of the two senses of nature with the conclusion that 'nature is more this [i.e. form] than it is matter, for each thing is called so when it is [that so-called thing] actually (*ἐντελεχία*), rather than potentially (*δυναμει*)' (*Ph.* 193b6-8). Aristotle's choice of word here is informative: he uses *ἐντελεχία*, instead of *ἐνεργεία*. An alternative and more literal translation for the phrase *ὅταν ἐντελεχία ᾗ* would be 'when it reaches its end' or 'when its end is fulfilled'. In this sense, a thing's form has a better claim than its matter to be its nature, because it is the form, as the end of the thing's genesis, that marks its fulfillment and determines its essential function and identity.

3 Nature as Moving Cause and Final Cause

In *Physics* 2.3 and 7, Aristotle elaborates his theory of the four causes, which is based on the distinction drawn in previous discussions between matter and form (see *Ph.* 194b23-195a3, 195a15-26, 198a21-26): material cause, or 'that out of which as a constituent a thing comes to be', is a thing's matter (cf. *APo.* 94a20-24), whereas formal cause, or a thing's 'form and pattern' and 'the definition of what it is and what kind of thing it is', is evidently identical with form, being (*οὐσία*) and essence. Formal cause is then extended in two different directions into moving cause, which is 'the primary origin of a thing's change or rest'; and final cause, which is a thing's 'end' and 'that for the sake of which' it comes to be and exists. As Aristotle says, formal, moving and final causes often coincide, 'for on the one hand, what a thing is and what it is for are one; on

¹⁰ See Chen 2016.

the other, that from which the change first originates is the same in form as these' (*Ph.* 198a25-26).¹¹

With these distinctions in mind, we can now move on to consider the following two arguments in *Physics* 2.1, which immediately follow the conclusion at *Ph.* 193b6-8 discussed at the end of the preceding section, and the common task of which is to defend the priority of form over matter as the nature of natural things:

(i) Further, man comes to be from man, but not bed from bed. That is why people also say that the nature [of a bed] is not the shape but the wood, since if it sprouts, it would generate not a bed but wood. But then if this [i.e. the wood] is nature, nature is form too; for man comes to be from man. (ii) Again, nature in the sense of 'the process of growth' is a path towards nature. It is not like the process of medical healing, which is a path not towards the art of medicine but towards health. The process of medical healing must proceed from and not towards the art of medicine, but nature does not stand in this relation to nature: that which is growing, as such, is proceeding from something to something. What, then, is growing? Not the thing it is growing from but the thing it is growing into. So the form is nature. (*Ph.* 193b8-18)

These two arguments are compressed and elliptical; therefore, a proper interpretation needs to fill in their logical gaps. In my opinion, the logic of argument (i) runs as follows: the point of the Buried-Bed Argument, which is proposed by Antiphon the sophist,¹² is that since the buried bed will grow into wood,

11 Strictly speaking, this remark is not accurate, since formal cause is at the metaphysical level of *first* grade actuality (capacity), whereas final cause is of *second* grade actuality (the exercise of capacity). Here Aristotle is discussing the four causes in the context of genesis, and is considering final cause not as the performance of function, but as the completion of an artifact or a natural substance.

12 Earlier at *Ph.* 193a9-17, Aristotle reports and criticizes an argument from Antiphon the sophist, which I call 'the Buried-Bed Argument' and which goes as follows: 'Some people think that the nature and the being (ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ οὐσία) of the things which exist by nature (τῶν φύσει ὄντων) is the primary constituent present in each of them (τὸ πρῶτον ἐνυπάρχον ἐκάστῳ), [which is something] unarranged according to itself (ἀρρυθμιστον καθ' ἑαυτό). For instance, wood is the nature of the bed (κλίνης φύσις τὸ ξύλον), and bronze of the statue. It is an indication (σημείον) of this, says Antiphon, that if one were to bury a bed so that its decomposition were to get the capacity (δύναμιν) of sending up a shoot, it would generate not be a bed but wood: so, the arrangement in accordance with custom and art (τὴν κατὰ νόμον διάθεσιν καὶ τὴν τέχνην) belongs only incidentally, while the being

not a bed, the natural substance in a bed is not the customary and artificial appearance or arrangement that we call 'bed', but wood. But from Aristotle's point of view, in this thought experiment Antiphon is not considering wood as the matter of bed, but as the form of wood; Antiphon thus confirms that form effects generation by observing that wood comes to be from wood in the same way as man comes to be from man. And then, since what effects generation is the origin (in the sense of *moving cause*) of it, and since nature is the origin and moving cause of natural generation, nature is form (cf. *Metaph.* 1049b24-26).

The point of argument (ii) is based on one meaning of the word φύσις, 'the process of growth'. Aristotle points out that there is a difference between nature as the process of growth and art as the process of production: artificial production does not proceed towards art, but natural growth proceeds towards nature. That which a process proceeds towards is the end and *final cause* of that process, and the end and final cause of growth as well as production is always a form. If nature (in a different sense) as the final cause of growth is form, and if the final cause of a growth determines what this growth is a growth *of*, it is form, rather than matter, that determines nature in the sense of growth (cf. *Ph.* 224b7-8).

Put together, arguments (i) and (ii) reveal that natural genesis is *both from and towards* nature.¹³ Aristotle's favourite formula for this observation is 'man comes to be from man'. Obviously, the genesis of the city does not fit *this* formula: the first city, at least, does not come to be from another city. But as we shall see, the city does come to be from human nature in one sense and towards human nature in another sense (the two senses of human nature will be clarified later). Moreover, what connects these two senses of human nature is man's natural desire for good life, which operates in a way similar to the soul of a growing organism: both develop along with the development they effect. For Aristotle, no artifact contains in itself this kind of internal operation throughout its genetic process. We shall see that the act of legislation and the political regime it establishes are but the culmination of the evolution of man's natural desire for good life, and therefore are internal to the development of the human community that eventually produces the city.

(τὴν οὐσίαν) is that which persists uninterruptedly through these sufferings (διαμένει ταῦτα πάσχουσα συνεχῶς).'

13 Note that in argument (ii), when Aristotle says that what is growing is *not* the thing it is growing from, he is using the notion of γένεσις to refer only to the process (e.g.) of a human seed becoming a man. But insofar as a human seed in turn comes to be (γίγνεται) from an adult man, the path (ὁδός) of man's biological nature as the full circle of γένεσις is in some sense *both from and towards* itself.

According to Aristotle's hylomorphic theory of the four causes, which I outlined at the beginning of this section, argument (i) invokes nature's role as moving cause and argument (ii) invokes nature's role as final cause. Both roles derive from nature as formal cause: it is nature in the sense of form that both *originates* and is the *end* of natural generation. I shall therefore call argument (i) 'the Origin Argument' and argument (ii) 'the End Argument'. In my opinion, these two arguments provide the metaphysical foundation for the Genetic and the Telic Arguments. To these two political arguments we now return.

4 The Genetic Argument: Human Nature as Moving Cause

Aristotle remarks that 'the city is among the things that exist by nature (τῶν φύσει), and a human being is by nature a political animal (φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον)' (*Pol.* 1253a2-3). We have seen that nature is defined by Aristotle as an inner origin of change and rest, and in the case of biological substance, this inner origin is the moving cause of the natural change and rest that belong to the substance non-incidentally. The city is obviously not a biological substance, but if it exists by nature, it must also have such an inner origin; that is to say, it must contain in itself the moving cause of its own genesis. As many commentators have correctly suggested, *this* inner origin and moving cause is nothing other than human nature.¹⁴ In my view, the task of the Genetic Argument is precisely to prove this point.¹⁵

To begin with, not only does Aristotle at *Pol.* 1252b30 introduce the Genetic Argument with the word διό which I translate into 'consequently', indicating that the naturalness of the city is a *result* of how it comes to be, he also confirms this point by suggesting that the naturalness of the city relies on the naturalness of 'the first communities (αἱ πρώται κοινωνίαι)', namely, the household and the village. We have seen that the first communities come to be due to the biological impulses of man, which man shares with all living things, at least with all animals. These biological impulses include the natural needs for preservation and reproduction, as well as the equally natural strivings for

14 This interpretation can be traced back to Newman 1887, 29-30. See also e.g. Chan 1992, 191-195; Arnhart 1994, 464-485; Annas 1993, 150; Kraut 2002, 243-244; Cherry and Goerner 2006, 563-585; but cf. Yack 1993, 91-94.

15 Nature is defined *not* as a kind of moving cause, *only* as a kind of inner origin of change and rest. However, since I take the inner origin of the genesis of the city to be the biological impulses of the human being, which are indeed a kind of moving cause, in what follows I shall speak of 'inner origin' and 'moving cause' interchangeably.

the stability and continuity in meeting these needs. However, the naturalness of the first communities cannot guarantee the naturalness of the city unless the city comes to be in the same way as they do; that is to say, unless the city is brought about by the same biological impulses that have given rise to the household and the village. To confirm that this is the case, we must go through Aristotle's genetic narrative again.

First, most of the commentators do not question the naturalness of the household, although some question the naturalness of the Aristotelian household.¹⁶ But the focus of debate is on the naturalness of slavery, which is irrelevant to our current concern because, on the one hand, Aristotle recognizes slaveless households and never implies that they are not genuine households (*Pol.* 1252b10-12); on the other, the real issue here is not the acquisition and use of slaves but the employment of practical reason for the sake of preservation. The peculiarly human way of survival involves practical reason partly (if not mainly) because the peculiarly human threat to one's survival involves the practical reason of one's actual or potential enemies. As to the human impulse for reproduction, perhaps the abstract fact that men and women couple together to reproduce is not by reasoning and choice, but surely it is not without reasoning and choice, as recognized by Aristotle, that a particular man or woman marries a particular woman or man (cf. e.g. *EE* 1242a22-25; *Pol.* 1280b36-39, 1334b29ff.). If practical reason and choice are involved at the very beginning or the most basic level of the human community, those who deny the naturalness of the city by appealing to the fact that the practical reason and choice of the legislator are involved in creating the city must deny the naturalness of the household too.

Second, the transition from the household to the village is marked by an increase in the capacity for meeting the *same* biological needs and strivings that have given rise to the former. From the word ἐφημέρου ('day-to-day', *Pol.* 1252b16) that Aristotle uses to describe what is provided by the household, we may infer that the village, thanks to its larger size and higher degree of complexity, is better able to provide the same things that are already provided by isolated households in a less reliable fashion. Needless to say, compared with managing a single household (where all the ruled are in one way or another naturally inferior to the ruler), a higher level of practical reason is required for the heads of households to join together and cooperate with one another as equals, and the leaders of the villages need much more wisdom and skill to rule different households. Practical reason, therefore, makes possible the

16 See e.g. Reeve 2009, 514-515; cf. Levin 1997, 241-257.

development from the household to the village and is in turn elevated to its higher form of operation by the development it helps to realize.¹⁷

Third, the transition from the village to the city is initially prompted not by a different set of human impulses from those that have given rise to the household and the village. Instead, the city initially comes to be with a view to securing more stably and continuously the satisfaction of man's impulses for preservation and reproduction, the impulses that we may collectively call *the desire for mere life*.¹⁸ This interpretation of the genesis of the city takes full account of the difference made by Aristotle between that for the sake of which the city *comes to be* (γινόμενη) and that for the sake of which it *exists* (οὔσα). In fact, Aristotle nowhere claims that the village is already sufficient for mere life; instead, he suggests that good life is possible only in the city because (i) *good life* can be pursued only when *mere life* is sufficiently secured; (ii) the city is the first community that sufficiently secures *mere life*; and (iii) any community larger than the city is too large for *good life* to be possible (although he does not and needs not make this last point in the Genetic Argument).¹⁹ Only in the city does the human capacity of practical reason find its perfect stage of performance, because the city is the most authoritative (κυριωτάτη) of all human

17 At *EN* 1140b7-11 Aristotle claims that it is the same kind of person that 'can see what is good for themselves and for men in general' and therefore is 'good at managing households and cities' (cf. *EN* 1141b23-24). One may take him to mean that there is no hierarchy of practical reason in different levels of human community, only different applications of the same faculty. However, for one thing, Aristotle at *EN* 1140b7-11 and 1141b23-24 is talking about practical wisdom, not practical reason. The fact that men with full-fledged practical wisdom can manage well their households, villages and cities does not mean that we cannot find anyone who is competent at ruling a household but incompetent at ruling a larger community. More importantly, Aristotle insists that ruling a household and ruling a city differ in kind (*Pol.* 1252a7-16). One crucial difference lies in the nature of the ruled: theoretically and ideally speaking, heads of households rule their inferiors, rulers of cities rule their equals, and leaders of villages occupy a transitional position. And as Aristotle says, 'rule over better subjects is always better' (*Pol.* 1254a25-26).

18 Although Aristotle distinguishes between *mere life* as that for the sake of which the city comes to be and *good life* as that for the sake of which the city exists, he does not mean that the *desire for good life* does not exist before the city comes to be. However, insofar as good life cannot be properly conceived before the city comes to be, the desire for good life in lesser communities is necessarily premature, and its possible objects (such as economic prosperity, common defense, commodious living, or the pleasure of amusement) properly speaking belong to the category of mere life (cf. e.g. *Pol.* 1257b40-1258a1). In this sense, my expression 'the desire for mere life' covers the premature or incorrect desires for good life as well.

19 See Cherry and Goerner 2006, 574; but cf. Simpson 1998, 21.

communities and embraces (περιέχουσα) all the other human communities (*Pol.* 1252a4-6; cf. *EN* 1094a26ff.). The highest and political operation of practical reason secures the self-sufficiency for mere life so that human activity can afford to aim at not only advantage but also justice and nobility, and reason itself can afford to pursue knowledge for its own sake besides guiding action and production.²⁰

The development of the human community from the household to the city is therefore caused by the same set of human impulses (the satisfaction of which involves the exercise of practical reason from the very beginning) through and through, which we may reasonably take to be the *moving cause* of the city.²¹ Moreover, this moving cause is an *inner origin* that belongs to the city itself non-incidentally, since it is in the men who make up the city and its genetic history. Insofar as the city contains in itself the moving cause and inner origin of its genesis, that is to say, insofar as the city has a *nature* in an Aristotelian sense, it qualifies as one of the things that exist by nature.

But how about Aristotle's favourite formula for natural genesis, 'man comes to be from man', which we have met in the Origin Argument? One of Keyt's complaints is that according to Aristotle's theory of natural genesis, "a thing that comes to be by nature comes to be through the agency of a distinct object that is the same in species as itself", but this is not true for the genesis of the first city.²² Indeed, the primary instances of Aristotelian natural substance are reproductive organisms, the genesis of which strictly fits the formula of 'X comes to be from X'. But overemphasis on this formula runs the risk of blurring the difference between nature and art: for Aristotle, in some sense 'bed comes to be from bed' too, since metaphysically speaking, each bed comes to be through the agency of some carpenter's bed-making art, which *is* the form

20 Connected with the securing of self-sufficiency for mere life, which requires cooperation between men of equally mature practical reason, is the fact that only in the city do 'men share their life with a view to self-sufficiency, men who are free and either proportionately or arithmetically equal' (*EN* 1134a26-28). And for Aristotle, only among equal citizens under the rule of law is there justice in the strict sense, the fulfillment of which in turn requires the highest level of practical reason. As Aristotle remarks, 'the best man is not he who exercises his virtue towards himself but he who exercises it towards another, for this is a difficult task; justice in this sense, then, is not part of virtue, but the whole of virtue' (*EN* 1130a7-9).

21 It is, therefore, meaningless to ask whether the city is constituted by practical reason or by desire, since the human way of desiring involves the exercise of practical reason: Aristotle characterizes the human faculty of desire as that which has (practical) reason (*EN* 1103a1) insofar as it is inclined to listen to and obey (practical) reason (*EN* 1102b30-31).

22 Keyt 1987, 58.

of the bed that resides in this carpenter's mind. As far as the metaphysical difference between nature and art is concerned, the right emphasis should be on the fact that nature is, but art is not, an *internal* origin. Both natural substance and artificial product have 'fathers' (*Metaph.* 1032a25, 1032b11-12), so to speak, but only the former can grow into itself.

The reproductive formula of 'X comes to be from X' applies to both organisms and artifacts. But the city is neither an organism nor an artifact, although Aristotle likens it to both (e.g. *Pol.* 1291a24-28, 1325b40-1326a5). There is no temporally preexisting form that effects the genesis of the *first* city, that is, the first city after one of the recurrent cataclysms that result in the destruction of human society and the loss of all but the most rudimentary forms of knowledge.²³ But the first city resembles an Aristotelian organism and fails to qualify as an Aristotelian artifact in an important sense: the first city's moving cause, even though it involves the effort of the legislator, is never *external* to the developing community in the way that, for instance, the art of carpentry is external to the wood that is being worked (*Ph.* 192b28-32). The first legislator is necessarily one man among the people who make up the city and live under its regime.²⁴

5 The Telic Argument: Human Nature as Final Cause

From the Genetic to the Telic Argument, Aristotle moves from proving that the city exists by nature ($\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$) because the first communities do to claiming that the city is the nature ($\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of the first communities because it is their end ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$). Obviously, the $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$ in the Genetic Argument and the $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in the Telic Argument have different implications. I have proved that the former indicates that the city contains in itself the moving cause of its genesis. In what follows,

23 For Aristotle's cyclical view of history, see *Pol.* 1269a4-8, 1329b25-27; *Metaph.* 1074b10-13; *Cael.* 270b19-20; *Mete.* 339b27-30. Plato holds the same view in *Ti.* 22c-23b; *Criti.* 109d-110a; *Plt.* 270c-d; *Lg.* 676b-c. It must be noted that a genetic and historical account of the origin of the city is not necessarily a Darwinian one; for Aristotle, the genesis of the city is not so much a *progress* as it is a *recovery*, and not so much an *invention* as it is a *rediscovery*.

24 Since Aristotle is clearly arguing for the naturalness of the first city in the Genetic Argument, my defense of this argument also focuses on the first city. It goes without saying that *later* legislators occasionally establish regimes for colonies of which they neither are nor are going to be members. See e.g. *Pol.* 1273b30-34, 1274b23-25; cf. Arendt 1998, 64 n. 65; 194. However, this does not make these later cities unnatural, for reasons pointed out nicely by Cherry and Goerner 2006, 585.

I shall clarify in what sense the city is the nature and the end, namely, the final cause of the development of the human community.

The identification between nature and end is explained as follows: ‘we say that each thing’s nature (τὴν φύσιν ἐκάστου) is the kind of thing it is when its coming-to-be has been completed (γενέσεως τελεσθείσης), i.e. has reached its end (*Pol.* 1252b32-33). This principle is verified in the End Argument where it is asserted that ‘that which is growing’ is ‘not the thing it is growing from but the thing it is growing into’ (*Ph.* 193b17-18). However, in order to illustrate this point, Aristotle gives us a confusing list of examples: a human being, a horse, and a house (*Pol.* 1252b34).²⁵ A house’s being the end of the house-building process or house-building matter does not make it the nature of anything. Instead, a house is clearly one of the things that are ‘in accordance with art and artificial’ (*Ph.* 193a32). It therefore appears to many commentators that Aristotle must be led by a certain confusion to use the example of an artifact when he is attempting to prove the naturalness of the city. But perhaps *here* Aristotle is not trying to say that the city is a natural *rather than* artificial thing, but trying to lead us from the notion of nature as moving cause to the notion of nature as final cause.²⁶ The final cause of natural generation as well as technical production is always a form which determines the function and essence of the natural or artificial thing that is being generated or produced; and for Aristotle, this essential form is an important sense of nature.²⁷

We have seen in section 2 that nature in the sense of developed form is *contextually relative*. Recall the example at *Ph.* 193a36-b3 which says that ‘that which is flesh or bone potentially’, before it acquires the form of flesh or bone, ‘does not yet have its own nature’ and ‘is not by nature’. This is true only in the context in which the natural material that flesh or bone is made of is viewed as the matter for flesh or bone, since in a different context it may well be viewed as the form of whatever *it* is made of. On the other hand, fully formed flesh and bone are in turn the matter for an animal’s body whose form and nature is its soul. In a word, when there is more than one developmental phase involved in the generation of an organism, the developed form as the end of one phase could be the undeveloped matter for the next phase.²⁸ When the organism is completed, the multilayer phases of its genetic process become the multilayer

25 Cf. Pangle 2013, 35 n. 19.

26 Cf. Trott 2013, 53-54.

27 Aristotle often speaks of the nature of nonnatural things, see e.g. *EN* 1094b25, 1137b18, 1170a21; *Pol.* 1340a1, 1341b35, 1342b16; *Po.* 1449a14-15; cf. *Metaph.* 1015a11-13.

28 Can man be for the sake of the human seed? The answer is negative. See *Metaph.* 1072b30-1073a3; cf. Makin 2006, 193-194.

hierarchy of its ontological structure: in each organism, there can be multiple intermediate matter-form relationships between the four elements as a kind of prime matter on the one end, and the soul as the essential form on the other.

I have mentioned that this conception of the multilayer hylomorphic relationship within the genesis and structure of an organism can be extended to the genesis and structure of the community of that organism. In the case of man, human adults as the end of human reproduction are in turn viewed by Aristotle as the *matter* for the city and its regime, which is the political *form* established by legislation (cf. *Pol.* 1276b1-11, 1325b39-1326a5). When a group of human beings is viewed this way, it is viewed not as a group of completed and self-sufficient biological substances, but as a population that must receive determination, in terms of the fundamental ways and goals of its common life, from the city and its regime, as matter must receive determination from form.²⁹

However, there is an essential difference between (e.g.) flesh and bone as the matter of man and man as the matter of the city: the former are, but the latter is not, the hypothetical necessity that serves the purposes of the corresponding form. Rather, the city comes to be for the sake of man's mere life and exists for the sake of man's good life. On the other hand, the city is not the means by which, but the community in which, human beings realize their ultimate end and natural perfection.³⁰

It is therefore wrong to understand the notion of end (τέλος) in a purely temporal sense, as Aristotle teaches at *Ph.* 194a32-33: 'the end (τέλος) should not be every last thing (τὸ ἔσχατον), but the best (τὸ βέλτιστον)'. It is precisely to save us from this mistake that Aristotle clarifies, immediately after declaring the status of the city as the end, that the end is the best and the best is self-sufficiency (*Pol.* 1252b34-1253a1), lest we should take some larger and later community, like the alliance of cities, to deserve the status of the end more than the city does. That the city 'possesses the limit of every self-sufficiency' indicates that the self-sufficiency achieved by the city is both the self-sufficiency for mere life and the self-sufficiency for good life. For Aristotle, the city is the only community that can achieve both kinds of self-sufficiency at the same time: any lesser community would be unable to provide the kind of self-sufficiency for

29 The conception of political regime as the form (and therefore the nature) of the city has a normative aspect, which is closely related with Aristotle's remark that correct regimes are natural but deviant regimes are against nature (*Pol.* 1287b37-41): this is because deviant regimes aim only at the private benefit of the ruler(s), rather than the common benefit of the city as a whole (*Pol.* 1279a16-21); they therefore cannot provide a unified form for the city and cannot sustain a common life for the citizens.

30 See Barraclough 1929, 491; Yack 1993, 96-100, 102-108; Kraut 1997, 101.

mere life, whereas any larger community would be unable to provide the kind of self-sufficiency for good life.³¹

It should become clear now in what sense the city is the nature and the end, that is, the final cause of the first human communities. Since for Aristotle the city is ultimately for the sake of man's good life, and since in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle has sufficiently revealed that man's good life is the virtuous performance of the human function and therefore the perfect realization of human nature, to say that the city is the final cause of the first human communities is equivalent to saying that the perfect realization of human nature, which is possible only in the city, is the final cause of the development of the human community. Therefore, the final cause of the city's genetic process is also internal to itself, and this makes the city natural according to Aristotle's notion of what is natural.

6 The Two Senses of Nature and the Evolving Desire for Good Life

Many commentators have noticed that in his ethics and politics, Aristotle uses the concept of nature in two different senses, the distinction between which is never explicitly made.³² He sometimes uses 'nature' in the sense of man's 'mere nature', namely, man's biological impulses and innate tendencies, as well as his rational capacity; but he also frequently speaks of the perfect realization of the human good as the natural end of man, including the sufficient satisfaction of his biological impulses and the excellent exercise of his desiderative and intellectual capacities, which we may call man's 'full nature'. I have argued above that man's mere nature is the moving cause and man's full nature is the final cause of the genesis of the city. I have shown that the Origin and the End Arguments in *Physics* 2.1 can be viewed as the metaphysical foundation for the Genetic and the Telic Arguments in *Politics* 1.2. I have also proved that there is

31 For the two kinds of ἀνθρώπεια, cf. *Pol.* 1326b4 with *Pol.* 1326b8-9. Aristotle fails to prove that a super large household (the typical village is but the natural extension of the household, see *Pol.* 1252b16-17) is unable to provide the kind of self-sufficiency for mere life, and I do not believe that he can. There must be something else about the household that makes it an improper environment for good life, which, I believe, is the lack of equality among its members. See *EN* 1134a26-32; cf. the references to the Cyclopean household at *EN* 1180a26-29; *Pol.* 1252b20-24. On the other hand, what marks off the city from larger communities which may well be able to guarantee equality among the members, such as the alliance of cities, is the possibility of political friendship. See Cooper 2005, 65-89.

32 See e.g. Nichols 1992, 18; Annas 1993, 144; 1996, 734-735; Kraut 2002, 207; cf. also Dobbs 1994, 77.

no inconsistency between the Naturalness Thesis and its metaphysical basis. Now I turn to discuss the *relationship* between man's mere nature and full nature, with a view to revealing an important sense in which the genesis of the city resembles the growth of a natural substance.

As we have seen, in *Physics* 2.1 Aristotle also uses the concept of nature in two senses: nature as underlying matter and nature as developed form. The former is analogous to mere nature, and the latter is analogous to full nature.³³ Further, just as there is something in between an organism's underlying matter and developed form, there is also something in between man's mere nature and full nature. The growth of an organism starts from its matter and ends in its form, but what effects the growth is its soul as a kind of *developing form*. Similarly, the premature conception and imperfect realization of man's full nature are present during the genesis of the city, which are expressed by man's *evolving desire for good life*. In my opinion, this desire operates in a way similar to the soul of a growing organism: both develop along with the development they effect.³⁴ In what follows, I shall illustrate this point concretely with the help of a passage from *Politics* 3.6.

In my previous discussion, I have suggested that the natural desire for mere life is the moving cause that effects the genesis of the city. However, at *Pol.* 1278b17-30 where he explicitly refers back to the Development Argument, Aristotle specifies three reasons for people to 'come together and maintain the political community': (i) 'even when they are not in need of each other's help, they no less desire to live together' (*Pol.* 1278b20-21); (ii) 'common advantage draws them together, to the extent that ($\chi\alpha\theta'$ ὅσον) they each take a share of noble living' (*Pol.* 1278b21-23); (iii) people also come together and maintain the city 'for the sake of life itself', for perhaps 'there is some piece of the noble even in life itself taken alone' (*Pol.* 1278b24-26).

The above account from *Politics* 3.6 is not inconsistent with that at *Pol.* 1252b29-30 (or my interpretation of it) for two main reasons. First, although the desire for simply living together mentioned in (i) also contributes, independently of the desires for mere life and good life, to the development of the human community, *this* desire does not necessitate the city, because it could be satisfied in lesser communities where mere life is not sufficiently secured or

33 This point is made by Annas 1996, 735 n. 12. To avoid confusion: in terms of the full circle of natural generation (through which e.g. a human being generates another human being), the moving cause is the mature form of the male parent; in terms of growth (through which e.g. a human seed becomes a human being), the moving cause is the growing soul of the underlying matter.

34 This interpretation is indebted to Lear 1988, 19.

larger ones where good life is impossible or difficult to achieve; hence Aristotle has good reason not to mention it in *Politics* 1.2.³⁵ Second, the preservation of 'life itself' mentioned in (iii) is certainly part of the 'common advantage' mentioned in (ii), which is just what Aristotle means by 'living' at *Pol.* 1252b29-30 ('the city comes to be for the sake of living'), and the desire for this common advantage is covered by my expression 'the desire for mere life'.³⁶ The only part of the *Politics* 3.6 passage that might shed some new light on our understanding of the genesis of the city is thus (ii): common advantage or mere life draws people together *to the extent that* (or *insofar as*) they each take a share of good life (cf. *Pol.* 1280a25-34).

The new light is this. In the Development Argument, Aristotle distinguishes between mere life as that for the sake of which the city comes to be and good life as that for the sake of which the city exists, but now we see that he does not mean that the *desire for good life* does not exist before the city comes to be, that is, before good life can be properly conceived and sufficiently realized. In fact, people always pursue mere life with at least *some* conception of good life in mind, and they take pains to secure mere life insofar as they can take a share of the kind of good life they conceive. The desire for mere life is still the primary moving cause that effects the development of the human community, since no one before the first legislator (perhaps not even him) is able to conceive good life in its fullest sense and make it the conscious goal that organizes all one's practical endeavors.³⁷ But some conception of good life is always present in the human impulse that eventually makes the city, which is manifested in man's efforts to ever increase the stability and continuity of his mere life so that he could enjoy what that stability and continuity could offer, besides

35 We may say that this desire is merely man's *social* urge, not his *political* urge. Cf. *EN* 1169b17-19; see Kraut 2007, 201-207.

36 Although Aristotle equates 'common advantage' with 'good life' at e.g. *EN* 1129b14-19 and 1160a8-23, at *Pol.* 1278b21-23 'common advantage' is taken to be different from 'noble living', and therefore falls into the category of mere life.

37 An example of the kind of 'good life' available to lesser communities, where mere life is not yet sufficiently secured, could be the pleasures of amusement (τῶν παιδιῶν αἱ ἡδέϊαι, *EN* 1176b9), which, when pursued as a kind of relaxation (ἀνάπαυσις) so that more serious work can be accomplished afterwards, is for Aristotle a correct source of enjoyment (*EN* 1176b33-35; *Pol.* 1337b36-1338a1; cf. *Metaph.* 981b17-20). Compared with what good life really consists in, i.e. virtuous activity performed for its own sake, this premature form of 'good life' is actually part of man's mere life. Therefore, the present discussion of the evolving desire for good life as what effects the development of the human community is not inconsistent with my previous point that the desire for mere life is the moving cause of the city.

the securing of mere life itself. As mere life is more and more secured, there is more and more room in one's life for activities which are not means of, but constitute, one's good life, and the conception of good life evolves along with the evolution of the human community. The desire for good life thus develops along with the development of the human community that it causes, just as the soul of a growing organism matures along with the growth it effects. The art of legislation, which reaches the perfect conception of good life and creates the perfect community for its realization, is but the culmination of the natural evolution of man's desire for good life, the final fruit of the historical accumulation of the experience and knowledge produced by this natural desire. We may say that the legislative act makes the city in the same way that the final maturity of a soul completes the organism it animates.³⁸

But if so, legislation is not an instance of production, but an instance of practice, and the same is true for the whole development of the human community. For Aristotle, the moving cause of practice is choice, which is the combination of practical reason and desire, and the final cause of practice is happiness, which is the ultimate satisfaction of man's rational desire for life and good life. Moreover, happiness consists in nothing other than good practice, 'for good practice is the end, and desire seeks this' (*EN* 1139b3-4). Man's practical nature seeks its own perfection, and therefore makes possible and necessary the establishment of the city. On the other hand, as the human community develops, the peculiarly human activities in the growing community become more and more practical, because there is more and more room for good practice which is nobly pursued as an end to itself. Again, we see that man's practical nature matures along with the community it creates. In a word, human practice and the city are internally connected, whereas artificial production is both prompted by a desire external to itself and seeks an end external to itself.³⁹ Insofar as the genesis of the city is a matter of practice, it is not a matter of production (*EN* 1140a2-6); and since 'art must be a matter of production, not practice' (*EN* 1140a17), the city is not created by art, but by nature.

I therefore conclude: rooted in man's practical nature, containing in itself and satisfying through itself man's natural desire for life and good life, and having in itself its own moving and final causes, the city is, in a strictly Aristotelian sense, natural.⁴⁰

38 Cf. Trott 2013, 19-23, 49-50, esp. 56.

39 At *Metaph.* 1048a10-13 Aristotle claims that the desire and choice for a certain product are external to art, and at *EN* 1139b1-3 he says that the end of production is for something else.

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