

The City as a Living Organism:
Aristotle's Naturalness Thesis Reconsidered

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to defend Aristotle's Naturalness Thesis. First, I argue against the claim that the city fails to meet the criteria (e.g. separability, continuity, etc.) Aristotle sets for substantiality. Second, I examine the problem of the Principle of Transitivity of End (PTE) in Aristotle's telic argument for the naturalness of the city. Finally, I discuss the role of legislator in the genesis of the city. I argue that the existence of legislator is not incompatible with Aristotle's NT.

Keywords

Aristotle; naturalness thesis; city; legislator

Aristotle's Naturalness Thesis: A Metaphor?

In *Politics* I.2, Aristotle famously raises three theses which are later called the "three basic theorems" of the *Politics*. These include (a) the naturalness thesis that every city exists by nature (*Pol.* 1252b30); (b) the onto-biological thesis that man is by nature a political animal (*Pol.* 1253a2-3); and (c) the priority thesis that the city is by nature prior to the individual (*Pol.* 1253a18-28). Among the three, the naturalness thesis (hereafter NT) occupies the central place. For both the onto-biological thesis and the priority thesis depend to a large extent on the naturalness of the city: if the

city is not a natural end for man, it cannot be inscribed in the nature of man; and if the city is not a natural substance, it cannot be prior to man as a natural whole to its natural parts. In this sense, NT is indeed the cornerstone of Aristotle political naturalism.

Yet around the cornerstone of Aristotle's political naturalism, there has been a long-standing dispute. In a monumental article, Keyt claims that there is a blunder in NT, from which it follows that "the scholarly consensus concerning the consistency of Aristotle's political philosophy may well be wrong".¹ According to Keyt, nothing in Aristotle's philosophy can come to be both as a natural substance and as an artifact. If Aristotle holds that the city comes to be as a work of the legislative art, it is contradictory for him to say that the city is a natural substance which, by definition, comes to be through its "inner principle of motion and rest" (*Phys.* 192b13-19). Moreover, in arguing for the naturalness of the city, Aristotle seems to rely on an implicit premise which can be termed the Principle of Transitivity of Naturalness (PTN).² According to the PTN, the city exists by nature because the first communities (πρῶται κοινωνίαι) exist by nature. But this inference is, in Keyt's view, wrong even "within the context of Aristotle's own philosophy": a house is prior in substance to the natural materials of which it is composed, but we cannot conclude thus that it comes to be by nature. Rather, it comes to be by art even though the materials of which it is composed are natural.³ Partly addressing Keyt' critiques,

¹ See Keyt (1991), 120.

² For the full description of PTN, see Keyt (1991), 129: if x is prior in substance to y and if y exists by nature, then x exists by nature.

³ It should be noted that when making this critique, Keyt might misunderstand the texts of *Pol.* 1252b32-34: οἶον γὰρ ἕκαστόν ἐστι τῆς γενέσεως τελεσθείσης, ταύτην φαμὲν τὴν φύσιν εἶναι ἕκάστου, ὥσπερ ἀνθρώπου ἵππου οἰκίας. The interpretative issue consists in Aristotle's enumeration: ἀνθρώπου ἵππου οἰκίας (a human being, a horse, or a household). The Greek term οἰκία can mean both household and house (in an extended sense). Keyt, of course, thinks that "Aristotle is referring to houses" (Keyt (1991), 130, n.33). For "a house, like a man and a horse, comes into being and reaches its end through a series of stages whereas a household is the first stage in the coming-into-being of a city". But this argument is unsatisfactory. A household, in Aristotle's view, also "reaches its end through a series of stages". For the household arises from two more primitive forms of community: the community of male and female and the community of master and slave (*Pol.* 1252a26-1252b9). The οἰκία, in my opinion, must refer to the "household" which is as natural a substance (rather than an artifact) as the other two examples Aristotle mentions in the text (human being and horse). Kullmann (1991), 98, also holds the same wrong

Kullmann suggests the naturalness of the city is only a “metaphorical” expression for Aristotle.⁴ Aristotle cannot, according to Kullmann, mean “literally” that the city is “an independent substantial being as a house or an animal”, and the natural development of the city “enters into the discussion only in a subsidiary way”.⁵ From Kullmann’s point of view, the fault is certainly not on Aristotle’s part but on Keyt’s. For Keyt takes the metaphor too seriously.

Kullmann offers several reasons for claiming that NT only intends to be metaphorical, but none of them, in my view, is convincing. Kullmann’s most elaborated opposition, for example, is that Aristotle doesn’t “speak of the εἶδος [form] and of the οὐσία [substance] of the city” and doesn’t write “in a strictly terminological manner about the ὄλη [matter] of the city” in the *Politics*.⁶ But this is not true. For Aristotle clearly talks about the form (εἶδος) of the city and the matter (ὄλη) of the city (which is identified as the unity of the political multitude, the amount of territory, etc.).⁷ Kullmann cannot be unaware of those passages.⁸ His denial, therefore, cannot be taken literally to say that Aristotle doesn’t “speak of the *form* and of the *matter* of the city” (which is obviously not the case), but that there is no formal metaphysical discussion of the *matter* and *form* of the city in the *Politics*. Now if this is Kullmann’s

conclusion.

⁴ See Kullmann (1991), 98. The similar implication that “natural” cannot mean literally in the case of natural city can also be found, as Keyt himself notices, in Bradley (1991), 13-56; Barker (1946), 7, n.1.

⁵ Kullmann (1991), 100 and 110.

⁶ Kullmann (1991), 111.

⁷ In *Pol.* 1276b1-13, Aristotle identifies the form of the city with constitution (πολιτεία), arguing that “it is especially by looking to the constitution that the city is said to be the same”. “If the constitution becomes different in form (εἶδος)”, Aristotle says, “it might be held that the city is no longer the same [as the previous one]”. For “the same goes with any other community and any compound, when the compound takes a different form (εἶδος)”. Also, matter (ὄλη) is mentioned in Aristotle’s discussion of the best constitution (*Pol.* 1325b40-1326a5). Aristotle claims that for the politicians and the legislators, “the proper matter (ὄλη) shall be available in a suitable condition”, just like “in the case of other artisans, matter (ὄλη) that is suitable to be worked on shall also be available”.

⁸ For Kullmann certainly notices that “in *Pol.* 1325b40ff., the idea of ὄλη is used in a relevant context” (111). But he dismisses it in an unsatisfactory and sophistical manner by citing Schütrumpf that “Aristotle is not talking about the city here at all, but rather about the prerequisites for political action”. It must be stressed, in opposition to Kullmann, that the whole *Pol.* VII.4 focuses on the point that the realization of the best εἶδος [form] of the city (what Aristotle calls “the best constitution”) depends on the availability and suitability of the ὄλη [matter].

real opposition to a literal reading of NT, we can grant it to the extent that there is indeed no elaboration, as Kullmann would expect, of the political hylomorphism in the *Politics*. But this can be explained within the context of the *Politics* itself. For the *Politics* is first and foremost a work written for the *πραγματικοί* (in contrast to the *θεωρητικοί*). And the *πραγματικοί*, as Aristotle emphasizes in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13, need only to contemplate the object of the theoretical science for the sake of the practical and up to the point that is adequate for practical purposes (*NE* 1102a23-25). It is highly possible, therefore, that the absence of a theoretical elaboration of the political hylomorphism in the *Politics* is not because it is not feasible for Aristotle, but because it is, in Aristotle's view, a "thematically unnecessary" task for such a book as the *Politics*. After all, to proceed in a geometer's manner in carpentry, as Aristotle says, will only make "things secondary to the works multiply" (*τὰ πάρεργα τῶν ἔργων πλείω γίνηται*) (*NE* 1.8.1098a33). So that even if we grant that Kullmann's observation is true, his inference that the political hylomorphism for Aristotle is impossible certainly lacks stringency.

The tension Keyt identifies between NT and Aristotle's natural philosophy cannot, therefore, be simply dismissed by a metaphorical approach. In the next section, I shall consider some more serious attempts. I shall argue that while those approaches have relieved, in one way or another, the tension between NT and Aristotle's natural philosophy, they fail to solve the problem at the root of Aristotle's political naturalism.

Previous Defense of Aristotle's NT

For a better assessment of the previous defense of NT, let's first reformulate Keyt's main charges in a more concise and succinct way. According to Keyt, Aristotle's NT blunders because: (I) Aristotle's NT rests on an invalid principle (the PTN); (II) Aristotle's NT is incompatible with Aristotle claim that the city comes to be by the legislative art. From (I) Keyt concludes that (i) Aristotle fails to prove the city exists by nature; and from (II) Keyt concludes that (ii) Aristotle contradicts himself by suggesting the city is an artifact. So a defense of NT will be adequate if

and only if it can refute both (i) and (ii).

In response to (I), all the previous commentators seem to base their arguments on the fact that there is in man an *inner* and natural impulse for preservation and reproduction. They argue that the PTN works for Aristotle because “the city is brought about by the same biological impulses that have given rise to the household and the village”.⁹ Since Keyt grants the Aristotelian thesis that the household exists by nature “because the relations of which it is composed are grounded in natural impulses”,¹⁰ he cannot resist the PTN (and consequently Aristotle’s argument that the city exists by nature) if it can be proved that “through and through” those natural impulses serve as the same *inner* efficient cause in the genesis of household, village and the city.¹¹

Admittedly, Keyt’s charge (I) is greatly weakened by the arguments sketched above, but I doubt the same applies to his conclusion (i). For by accepting that the household exists by nature, Keyt concedes too much. If he holds on to the point that “the product of a natural impulse need not itself exist by nature”,¹² conclusion (i) will remain intact. Consider, for example, a house that is built by a man out of his natural impulse for physical protection: the fact that the house is built out of an *inner* natural impulse of man – a natural impulse for seeking protection – doesn’t lead to the conclusion that it exists by nature. Rather, the house comes to be by the art of building. The same applies and not only applies to the city, but also applies to the household, the village, and any other sort of human community. In my opinion, Keyt is mistaken in claiming that Aristotle’s NT blunders because it rests on the PTN. For the very beginning of PTN, the “naturalness of the household” itself is as much a suspicious presupposition as the “naturalness of the city”. As an improvement to (I), one can argue that Aristotle’s NT blunders because it seems to rest on another untenable

⁹ See Chen (2017), 11.

¹⁰ See Keyt (1991), 122. This is also the premise that many other commentators accept, see e.g. Kullmann (1991), 96-97; and more recently, Trott (2014), 45. It is right for Cherry & Goerner (2006) to point out first that “in admitting the naturalness of these first partnerships, Aristotle’s critics effectively concede too much” (571).

¹¹ See Chen (2017), 13.

¹² See Keyt (1991), 126.

principle, the Principle of Transitivity of End (PTE). Aristotle seems to presuppose in his telic argument (*Pol.* 1252b27-1253a2) that the end of the citizen is also the end of the city.¹³ But the genesis of x can be regarded as natural if and only if x is moved by its inner principle toward its *own* end. If x is generated for the sake of something else (e.g. its constituents), it cannot be regarded as a natural substance. In this sense, as long as the city exists for the sake of the preservation, reproduction, self-sufficiency and happiness of *its citizens*, it cannot be regarded as a natural substance which naturally tends to its *own* complete actualization.¹⁴ With this refined argument, Keyt's conclusion (i) will remain intact.

In response to (ii), the previous solutions diverge. Chan attempts to solve the tension between Aristotle's NT and the role of the legislator by distinguishing between the city "as a type of community" (e.g. the city of Athens) and "as a particular instance of a form of that type" (e.g. the city of *democratic* Athens).¹⁵ He argues that only the latter for Aristotle is the work of the art. The city "as a type of community" is natural.¹⁶ But the distinction Chan relies on is nowhere found in Aristotle,¹⁷ and Chan's "city without a form" is in fact, I shall say, wholly un-Aristotelian: a city is always a city of a particular form for Aristotle. There is no city without a particular form, just like there is no living body without a particular soul. Chan's solution, therefore, cannot prove that the Aristotelian city is in harmony with the role of the legislator.

K. Cherry and E. A. Goerner attempt to eliminate the tension by arguing that (a) the form of a city is not imposed arbitrarily by the legislator but is derived from a

¹³ Cf. *Pol.* 1252b27-30: "The complete community, arising from several villages, is the city. It reaches a level of full self-sufficiency, so to speak; and while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well". While Aristotle makes it clear that the end of the city is "full-sufficiency" and "good life", he is opaque about whether "full-sufficiency" and "good life" are said with regard to the citizens or to the city. The same ambiguity persists through the whole *Politics*, see *Pol.* 1280a31-32; 1280b29-1281a2; 1321b14-18; 1325a5-10; 1326b7-9.

¹⁴ A similar concern can also be found in Miller (1995). But Miller take this equivalence as a proof that the communities are not organisms (54).

¹⁵ See Chan (1992), 196.

¹⁶ See Chan (1992), 199-200.

¹⁷ As is pointed out by Nederman (1994), 286-287.

shared “*logos-sociality*” which is an innate “constituent aspect of the nature of human beings”; and (b) the form is imposed through the action (πρᾶξις) rather than the making (ποίησις) of the legislator.¹⁸ Argument (a) is in effect identical to the argument that the legislative art completes what nature initiates. According to this view, the efficient cause of the genesis of the city is still an inner impulse (in Cherry & Goerner’s case, the “*logos-sociality*”) of the nature of human beings. The legislative art is only employed to perfect or complete the task that nature has set forward.¹⁹ But this approach still has to respond, as I argued above, to the challenge of PTE. That is, how the form/end of the city can be distinguished from that of the human being if it is derived from the “*logos-sociality*” of the human being? Argument (b) is Cherry & Goerner’s unique contribution. But it has not convinced me that the genesis of the city is an action (πρᾶξις) rather than the product of making (ποίησις) of the legislator.²⁰ In my opinion, it is impossible to reduce the role of the legislator to mere action (or what Cherry & Goerner calls the “leadership”). Nowhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* does Aristotle explicitly argue that the legislative art is simply a matter of action.²¹ It can at best be argued that ποίησις and πρᾶξις are both involved

¹⁸ See Cherry & Goerner (2006), 563-585.

¹⁹ A similar point is made by Reeve (2009), 513-514

²⁰ I am unconvinced by the arguments for two reasons. Firstly, if the fact that carpentry requires certain amount of theoretical (mathematical) knowledge doesn’t make it a *theoretical* process, the fact that the legislative process requires certain amount of prudence shall not make it a *practical* process either. Secondly, what Aristotle exactly says in *NE* 1041b24ff is that the *political* art (which includes the deliberative art and the juridical art) is bound to action. It is questionable whether the *legislative* art for Aristotle is also a matter (or solely a matter) of action. Considering the fact that the legislative art is said to be primarily concerned with the universal – in contrast to the political art which is concerned with particular (*NE* 1041b26) – I would like to suggest that it is not. In a recent article, Chen (2017) adopts a similar defense strategy: “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 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” (5, emphasis added). By Chen’s criteria, however, the restoration of one’s own health (the product of one’s own medical art) would also have to be taken as a *practical* process other than a *productive* one.

²¹ A possible objection is *NE* 1180b30-31, where Aristotle claims that “[the legislative art] seemed to be a part of the political art”. But it is only “seemed to be” (ἐδόκει εἶναι). The point Aristotle is driving at is that a skilled legislator shall not only know about the universals but also about the particulars which fall under the scope of the political art. One is only able to conclude, therefore, that the legislative art cannot exist without the political art.

in the legislator's founding of the city.

The most promising approach, in my view, is offered by Depew. In his paper, "Does Aristotle's Political Philosophy Rest on a Contradiction?", Depew points out that the PTN would work for Aristotle if we take household, village and the city to be "*stages of a single developmental process*" (emphasis added). "For then the city would come to be by nature in the same way an adult human being comes to be from embryo, neonate and child".²² Besides, Depew argues that the tension between the naturalness of the city and the intention of the legislator would resolve if one recognizes that the end of the city is always the good life, which is a natural end for Aristotle. This end of the city, according to Depew, "cannot vary with its constitution", because the different constitutions that the legislator brings about are only different representations of the concept of the good life.²³ In general, I believe that Depew's organic approach to Aristotle's NT is on the right track. But there are still some questions that remain to be solved: firstly, in what sense are the household, the village and the city "stages of a single developmental process" rather than "species of the same genus, communities"? Secondly, can this organic understanding of Aristotle's NT address to the problem of PTE properly? And finally, if the legislator doesn't bring about the end for the city, what is his role in the genesis of the city?

With these questions in mind, I shall turn to my own solution to the problem of Aristotle's NT. I shall argue in the following section that (a) the city is a natural substance in the Aristotelian sense; and (b) the household and village are to the city as the embryo and child to the mature human being; and (c) in the genesis of the city, the legislator plays a role analogous to that played by the male semen in the animal generation.

Aristotle on the City as a Living Organism

Is the City Substantial?

The first obstacle encountered in thinking the city as a living organism is its

²² Depew (1989), 9. Cf. Pangle (2013), 35.

²³ D. J. Depew (1989), 15.

substantiality: if the city is not a substance in the Aristotelian sense, it cannot be a living being.²⁴ Most commentators certainly think that the city is not literally a living substance but is only one by analogy. Yack, for example, claims that there are not sufficient grounds for concluding that Aristotle thinks of the city as a living substance. “Aristotle’s frequent organic analogies”, says Yack, “do not themselves answer the question [whether the city is a natural substance], for they may merely seek to illustrate similarities between the structure of the city and that of organic forms”.²⁵

Indeed, Aristotle’s organic analogies are not sufficient proof that Aristotle takes the city as a living substance. But are there adequate grounds for thinking that the city is not? According to the criteria of the *Categories*, for example, the individual city (e.g. the democratic Athens) ought to be qualified as primary substance: it, no less than the individual living organism, is neither predicated of nor present in (2a11-2b6), and it is able to receive contraries while remaining numerically one and the same (4a10-22). From the standpoint of the *Categories*, therefore, if the living organism is substance, there is no reason to think that the city is not.

It can be objected, of course, that Aristotle may have abandoned the criteria of substantiality in the *Categories* and is later in favor of the hylomorphic theory of substance in the *Metaphysics*.²⁶ In that case, the result of the *Categories*-test certainly proves nothing. But does Aristotle’s hylomorphic account of substance in the *Metaphysics* deny that the city qualifies as a substance? In the *Metaph. Z.3*, Aristotle does add another set of criteria of substantiality. To qualify as a substance, Aristotle claims, an entity must satisfy the following conditions:

- (a) separability (τὸ χωριστὸν), viz. being capable of existing separately; and
- (b) thisness (τὸ τόδε τι), viz. being something determinate and specific.²⁷

²⁴ Aristotle at least twice declares, or seems to declare, that only living beings qualify as substances: *Metaph.* 1041b28-31, 1043b19-23; cf. *Metaph.* 1042a7-8, 1043a5-6, 1070a5-20; *Phys.* 192b32-4.

²⁵ See Yack (1993), 92-93.

²⁶ A view held by e.g. Shields (2007), 235-237. For a compatibilist reading of the accounts of substance in *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, see Wedin (2000).

²⁷ There are two other criteria that are somehow of a secondary status: (c) natural continuity and (d) not being composed of substances (Cf. Reeve (2000), 123-124, n.9). I will consider whether the city satisfies the two criteria later in my response to the commentators who deny substantiality to the city.

But there is no way that the city can be thought to fail those criteria. In the first place, we have seen that the city is capable of hylomorphic analysis: the constitution of the city is the *form*, and the men who constitute the city's citizen body, together with the territory, are the *matter* (*Pol.* 1276b1-13; 1325b40-1326a5). Secondly, Aristotle's priority thesis suggests that the city satisfies the criterion of separability: the city is naturally prior to the individual citizen in the sense that the former is capable of existing separately from the latter, while the converse is not the case (*Pol.* 1253a18-26).²⁸ Finally, the city is always a "this-something", viz. a city with determinate boundary and specific character which is determined by its constitution and history. Given these considerations, it is difficult to say that the *Metaphysics*-test of substantiality favors a result different from that of the *Categories*-test.

Now the commentators who deny substantiality to the city also appeal to the following claims: firstly, substances cannot be composed of substances (*Metaph.* 1039a3-4; 1041a4-5). The city, therefore, cannot be a substance insofar as it is composed of substances (viz. the human beings);²⁹ secondly, Aristotle's criticism of Plato in *Pol.* II.2 shows that Aristotle doesn't believe the city can have the same unity as a substance (e.g. an individual);³⁰ thirdly, the parts of the city are not physically continuous. The unity of the city, therefore, is qualitatively different from the unity of a substance.³¹

I am unconvinced by those claims. Firstly, it is not literally true that Aristotle holds that substances cannot be composed of substances. What Aristotle says is that substances cannot be composed of *actual* substances, which means the parts of a composite substance can very well be substances as long as they are *potential*.³² This

²⁸ For a discussion of the different senses of priority in Aristotle, see Miller, pp.46-47. According to Miller, there are four types of priority in Aristotle: (a) priority in generation; (b) priority in knowledge; (c) priority in completeness; and (d) priority in separateness. I disagree with Miller in that I hold that the priority found in *Pol.* I.2 is (d). The same position is also held by Mayhew (1997a), 18.

²⁹ See Mayhew (1997b), 328.

³⁰ Mayhew (1997b), 329.

³¹ Mayhew (1997b), 330.

³² When Aristotle says that the city is composed of the citizens, the human being *qua* citizen is only substance *potentially*. For none of the citizens exists separately from the city, and when they are separated, they too exist, but

is important, for it explains why Aristotle, on some occasions, suggests that the physical parts of a living substance, when separated, can stay alive,³³ and are substances in their own right.³⁴ And if this is the case, one cannot conclude from the fact that the physical parts of the city (viz. the citizens) are substances and those substances are alive when separated, that the city is not a living substance. For the same can also be said about some other living substances (e.g. some insects and plants).

Secondly, the commentators who understand Aristotle's critique in *Pol.* 2 as downplaying the substantiality of the city perhaps get Aristotle wrong. What Aristotle's critique attempts to reveal, in my opinion, is that the criterion of substantiality that Plato applies to the city is false. That is, if the Platonic homogeneity (or "oneness") is to determine what qualifies a substance, then we will be driven downwards (viz., the city → the household → the individual).³⁵ We will have to reduce the city to the village, and the village to the individual, and so *ad infinitum*. It is a process that, in Aristotle's view, would "destroy the city" and make the city "no longer a city" (*Pol.* 1261a16-21). For it renders the city "indeterminate". This is exactly the same argument to which Aristotle appeals in *Metaph.* Z.3, where he denies the substantial status of the (prime) matter on the basis of indeterminacy and inseparability (*Metaph.* 1028b36-1029a30; 1037a27). In *Pol.* II, we find Aristotle

only as human being. The same applies equally to the parts of animals, which, according to Aristotle, are also *potential* substances and exist only as matter when they are separated (*Metaph.* 1040b6-8).

³³ For Aristotle, the physical parts of some insects and plants certainly can live for a given time when being separated. Cf. *Metaph.* 1040b13-14; *DA* 411b15-30; 413b16-24; *LA* 707a27-707b5; *Juv.* 468b9-15.

³⁴ The most direct evidence is from *Metaph.* Δ.8 and *De Caelo* III.1, where Aristotle claims: "We call substances the simple bodies ... and in general bodies and the things composed of them, both animals and divine beings, and *the parts of these*" (1017b10-13) and "Of substances, I mean the simple bodies ... and all things composed of them (e.g. the whole heaven and *its parts*), animals, plants and *their parts*" (298a29-32). Other textual evidences include, but are not limited to, *Phys.* 192b8-13, 32-34; *Cat.* 3a29-32, 8b15-18; *Metaph.* 1035a19-20. For a full discussion of those evidences, see Ge (2015), 476-478.

³⁵ In *Metaph.* 1015b16-1016b17, Aristotle distinguishes between five senses of oneness. The things are called one because they are either (a) continuous; or (b) one in species; or (c) one in genus; or (d) one in definition; or (e) one as a whole. Plato certainly hopes the city to be one in the sense that it is composed of parts that are (d) "one in definition", but "the city is not naturally one in this sense" (*Pol.* 1261b7). The city is called one because, according to Aristotle, it is (e) "one as a whole", that is, all the parts of the city have one form (1016b13).

doing the same thing. He denies that the individual qualifies as substance, on the grounds that the individual is not determinate (*Pol.* 1253a32-37) and not self-sufficient (*Pol.* 1253a26-28; 1261b11-15). Aristotle's critique of Plato reveals, therefore, that the city is more qualified as a substance than the individual (just like the form is more qualified as a substance than the matter), and not the opposite.

Finally, the commentators who deny continuity to the city in a way misconstrue the sense in which Aristotle takes a living substance to be continuous (*συνεχές*). There are three key passages in which Aristotle explicates the meaning of the continuous (*τὸ συνεχές*). From those passages,³⁶ it is not difficult to infer that a whole is naturally continuous for Aristotle if and only if

- (i) it has (*ἔχειν*) parts, and those parts are brought together (*συν*) in such a way that otherwise they would separate and move in accord to its own impulse;³⁷ and
- (ii) its parts have by their own nature one single movement (*κίνησις μία*); and
- (iii) its parts are present potentially.

Does the city fall short of those characterizations? In the first place, we see Aristotle says that when as a part of the city human being is the best of the animals, but the worst of all when separated from it (*Pol.* 1253a31-33). For man, says Aristotle, will act according to his own savage impulse rather than virtue when separated from the city (*Pol.* 1253a34-37). In this sense, the city does "hold together" the individuals. In the second place, Aristotle asserts in *NE*. 9.6 that the city "is unanimous (*ὁμονοεῖν*) when men have the same opinion about what is in their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common (1167a26-28)", which is to say that the citizens will have by their own nature one single movement toward the common good or the prosperity of the city as long as the city is not in a state of faction (*Pol.* 1303a25-26). Finally, the parts of the city (e.g. the human being *qua*

³⁶ Cf. *Metaph.* 1016a5-7; 1023a17-23; 1023b32-34.

³⁷ Cf. Ribera-Martin (2017), 231-232: "the usual English translation of the Greek "*συνέχειν*" (the continuous) is potentially misleading ... the word 'continuous' is currently associated with the idea of something going on without interruption. Thus, in order to recover the import of the continuous, it is crucial to highlight the meaning of the preposition '*συν*' (TOGETHERNESS) and bear in mind that continuity (*συνέχειν*) means 'HOLDING-TOGETHER' (*συν-ἔχειν*)".

citizen), as we have argued at the very beginning, are potential substances for Aristotle. They exist potentially because they cannot exist independently: a citizen is no longer a citizen when separated from the city. But this doesn't mean when the citizen is separated from the city, he/she is no longer a *substance*. He/she can still be a substance, and can still be a human being. He/she is just no longer the *potential substance* he/she once was, namely, the citizen.³⁸ Given all this, therefore, it is difficult to see why the city cannot be a continuous entity for Aristotle.

The End of the City and The End of the Individual

I now want to turn to the problem of PTE. As I have mentioned before, Aristotle seems to suggest in his NT that the end of the city is reducible to that of the individual, which implies that the city is more an artifact which exists for the sake of others than a natural substance which exists for its *own* intrinsic end. In what follows, I shall maintain the substantiality of the Aristotelian city. I argue that the happiness (end) of the city and the happiness (end) of the individual citizen are not the same for Aristotle.

In *Pol.* VII.2, Aristotle touches on the question whether happiness is the same for both an individual and a city. On the first glimpse, Aristotle seems to suggest that it is the same (1324a7-8). But on closer inspection, we have reason to think that it is not. For Aristotle immediately adds that the sameness consists in the fact that those who ascribe happiness to *X* in the case of a single person will also call the city as a whole happy if the city is in a state of *X* (1324a8-13). In other words, the happiness of the city and the happiness of the citizen are the same only in the sense that they share the same frame of reference by which they are called happy. Aristotle never means that the two happinesses *per se* are identical. In fact, as the subsequent discussion in *Pol.* 7 shows, the happiness of the city is not irreducible to that of the individual citizen. For

³⁸ The same can be said about any bodily part of a living being. A hand, for example, is no longer a hand when it is separated from the body. But it doesn't mean that the separated hand itself cannot be a substance in its own right: the separated hand can very well be a distinct substance. It just cannot be the potential substance that it once was in the body, viz. the hand.

if the happiness of the city and the happiness of the individual are identical, the common frame of reference by which the city and the individual are called happy – that which Aristotle calls “living well” – shall mean the same thing for both, too. But this is not the case. For the two best ways of life (viz. the political life and the philosophical life), according to Aristotle, have distinct philosophical contents for the individual citizen and the city:

	The Individual Citizen	The City
Political Life	being devoted to ruling over other individuals (political offices)	being devoted to ruling over neighboring cities (<i>Pol.</i> 1324a35-1324b41)
Philosophical Life	being devoted to contemplation	being devoted to common activities (κοινωνία) undertaken by the parts of the city in relation to one another (<i>Pol.</i> 1325b26-27)

Both the political life and the philosophical life of the city are distinct from those of the individual. This is a clear sign that the city has its own way of life which cannot be reduced to that of the individual. For otherwise, as Morrison correctly notes, the political life and philosophical life for a city shall be that in which “all or most citizens devote themselves to political activity” and that in which “all or most citizens are philosophers”.³⁹ But Aristotle obviously doesn’t think so. The happiness of the city consists in the actualization of its own ways of life, which are distinct and irreducible to those of the individual.

That the city has its own ways of life leads us to conclude that the city is a living substance which exists for its own end.⁴⁰ This end, on the one hand, is irreducible to

³⁹ Morrison (2017), 11-24.

⁴⁰ I don’t mean by this argument that the city, in Aristotle’s view, should not take care of the end or happiness of its citizens. For Aristotle clearly says that “it is impossible for the city to be happy as a whole unless most citizens, or all or some of its parts, are happy. For happiness is not the same kind of thing as evenness: this can exist in the

that of the human being; but on the other hand, it is analogous to that of the human being. For both the human being and the city are, in Aristotle's view, organisms that come to be, grow and develop to completion through progressive stages:⁴¹

	The Individual Human Being	The City
First Stage	Embryo: exists for the sake of biological perfection	Household: exists for the sake of biological needs (<i>Pol.</i> 1252b12-14)
Second Stage	Child: exists for the sake of non-biological (ethical) perfection	Village: exists for the sake of non-biological needs (<i>Pol.</i> 1252b15-16)
Final Stage	Adult: exists for the sake of trans-biological (political/philosophical) perfection	City: exists for the sake of trans-biological needs (living well) (<i>Pol.</i> 1252b29-30)

Those stages are marked off by their own ends: the first is marked off by a biological end, the second by a non-biological end, and the third by a trans-biological end. Those ends are in themselves separate, but are, at the same time, continuous in such a way

whole but in neither of its parts, but happiness cannot" (*Pol.* 1264b15-22). It is, however, one thing to say that the end or happiness of the city presupposes the end or happiness of its citizen, another to say that they are identical. For example, to acquire the well-being of a human being, one shall take care of the well-being of the body (human body being an important organic part of human being). But by admitting this, it doesn't follow that the well-being of a human being is identical to that of a human body.

⁴¹ One may object that the development of the city doesn't share exactly the same pattern we find in the growth of a natural organism. For when a seed grows into a plant, the seed simply becomes the plant; but when a city grows out of households and villages, the households and villages remain. As a response, I want to make two points. First, while the coming-to-be of a plant is an exemplar of a substantial change caused by addition (*πρόσθεσις*), it is not the only type of substantial change in Aristotle (Cf. *Phys.* 190b5ff.). The change from village to city can very well be a substantial change caused by composition (*σύνθεσις*). Second, while it seems apparent that the seed receives a new form after changing into a plant, the villages also receives a new form after the city comes into being. There is no reason to think that the form of the city is not included in the villages after the change. Take Aristotle's example of the segment-circle: a circle comes into being through the composition of segments. But after the change, the segment receives a new form. For a segment of a circle is now a circular arc, which has the form of circle in its formula.

that each is linked with the next as a prerequisite: the end of childhood is the beginning of adulthood, and the end of the village is the beginning of the city. The continuity of those ends ensures the inner motion of an organism to be continuous toward its ultimate end, which is identified as its nature.⁴² This is why Aristotle claims in *Pol.* I.2 that the city exists by nature:

Therefore, if the first communities are natural, so is the city, for it is the end of them, and nature is an end. For what each thing is – for example, a human being, a horse, or a household – when its coming into being is complete, we call, the nature of that thing. (1252b30-34).

For the city, like other living organisms, has a certain end (τι τέλος) or nature that underlies the whole progression from the very first stage (the πρῶται κοινωνίαι).

The Role of the Legislator in the Development of the City

So far I have made two proposals. Firstly, the city satisfies or at least roughly satisfies (just as some other natural substances do) the criterion Aristotle sets for substantiality in both *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. It cannot be simply denied, therefore, that it is a natural substance in the Aristotelian sense (Section 1 and Section 2); secondly, the development of the city shares the same pattern we find in the natural growth of a living substance (Section 2). The city, therefore, can possibly be regarded as the final product of the natural growth of the first communities which are most of all natural for Aristotle.⁴³ I now want to turn to the last obstacle for the city to be a natural substance, namely, the place of the legislator (or the legislative art) in the genesis of the city.

According to Keyt, there are quite a few allusions in the *Politics* that suggest the

⁴² We may recall Aristotle's definition of "by nature": "for those things are 'by nature' which, moved continuously from a certain principle in itself, arrives at certain end" (*Phys.* 199b15-17).

⁴³ For reasons why the first communities are most natural for Aristotle, see *NE* 1162a17-19: "human being is naturally inclined to form couples – even more than to form cities, inasmuch as the household is earlier and more necessary than the city, and reproduction is more common to man than the animals". Cf. *EE* 1242a22-26, where the human being is said to be an "animal of the household" (οἰκονομικὸν ζῷον).

city is an “artifact of practical reason” rather than “a natural entity”.⁴⁴ In *Pol.* I.2, for example, Aristotle suggests that the city is “founded” (συστήσας) by the legislator (1253a30-31). Later, after suggesting that the city is a hylomorphic compound (*Pol.* 1276b1-11), Aristotle compares the role of the legislator to that of the artisan, suggesting that the constitution (viz. the form of the city) is not the endowment of nature but the “creation” of the legislator (*Pol.* 1325b40-1326a5).⁴⁵ Now if the form of the city is in the mind of the legislator (or in the legislative art), the city cannot be a natural substance in the Aristotelian sense. For the form of a substance, according to Aristotle, differs from that of an artifact in that it is present within, rather than imposed from outside.⁴⁶

The solution I am to suggest lies in seeing that the form of the city is not something “imposed” from outside, but something “actualized” within. That is to say, the form of the city is not something external, something arbitrarily imposed by the legislator at a certain point of the development of the city. Rather, it is present at the very beginning (in the *πρῶται κοινῶνιαι*), but in such a way that it exists only *potentially*. The role of the legislator, then, is to bring this inner *potentiality* to its completion, viz. its *actuality*.

In support of this solution, I wish to draw the reader’s attention to the role that the male semen plays in the embryonic development of animals. There are a few passages in the *Generation of Animals* (*GA*) that, in my view, can help to illuminate the role of the legislator in the genesis of the city:

Hence in such animals [viz. animals that the male and the female are separate], the male always completes the business of generation ... either by itself directly or by means of semen. As the parts of the animal to be formed are present potentially in the matter, once the principle of movement has been supplied, one thing follows on after another without interruption, just as it does in the

⁴⁴ Keyt (1991), 119.

⁴⁵ Examples of those legislators who are not only “artisan of laws” but “artisan of the regime” can be found in *Pol.* II.12.

⁴⁶ See e.g. *Phys.* 192b28-29; 199b28-9; *GA* 735a2-4; Cf. also *Metaph.* 1070a4-8; *NE* 1140a10-16.

“miraculous” automatic puppets. (*GA* 741b4-9)

Once the embryo has “set”, it behaves like seeds sown in the ground. The first principle (of growth) is present in the seeds themselves too, and as soon as this, which at first was present potentially, has become distinct, a shoot and a root are thrown out from it ... So too in the embryo, in a way all the parts are present potentially, but the first principle has made the most headway, and on that account the first to become distinct in actuality is the heart ... Once the embryo which has been formed is separate and distinct from both the parents, it must manage for itself, just like a son who has set up a house of his own independently of his father. That is why it must have a first principle, from which also the subsequent ordering of the animal’s body is derived. Otherwise, supposing this principle is to come in at some moment from outside and take up its position inside later on, then we may well be puzzled at what moment this is to happen, and also we may point out that of necessity the first principle must be present at the outset, at the time when each of the parts is being separated from the rest, since the growth and movement of the other parts are derived from it. (*GA* 739b33-740a13)

Nature acting in the male of semen-emitting animals uses the semen as a tool... those which emit no semen ... are so weak that Nature is unable to accomplish anything at all through intermediaries: indeed, their movements are only just strong enough when Nature herself sits watching over the business; the result is that here Nature resembles a modeler in clay rather than a carpenter; she does not rely upon contact exerted at second hand when fashioning the object which is being given shape, but uses the parts of her own very self to handle it. (*GA* 730b19-32)

A few conclusions can be drawn from those passages about the role that the male semen plays in animal generation: firstly, the form, the ἀρχή, or the so-called ruling principle (*GA* 735a14-16), is not introduced “at certain moment from outside” but

rather present “at the very outset” in potentiality. The role of the male semen is to complete the animal generation by bringing what was previously in *potentiality* into *actuality* – a process linked with the formation of the heart; secondly, once the heart is formed, the other organic parts are formed one after another (*GA* 734a27-29) and the embryo will be self-sufficient like “a son who has set up a house of his own independently of his father”; finally, the male semen is only Nature’s tool for the female matter to be enformed (or “actualized”).

Now all this, in my view, sheds light on the role of the legislator in the genesis of the city. The legislator can possibly play a similar role in the genesis of the city as the male semen plays in a biological context. That is to say, the form of the city, firstly, is not introduced by the legislator at a certain moment from outside, but rather present at the very beginning in potentiality. The role of the legislator is to actualize this potentiality *qua* potentiality. That is, to actualize this potentiality in the form of some specific constitution (e.g. democracy, aristocracy, and etc.).⁴⁷ Secondly, the constitution that the legislator established (or “actualized”) is the “heart” of the city. When this “heart” is formed, all the other organic parts of the city will be formed accordingly, and the city will reach “a level of full self-sufficiency” (*Pol.* 1252b28-29) comparable to that of the actualized embryo. Finally, though the legislator “who first founded the city is responsible for the greatest of goods” (*Pol.* 1253a30-31), the legislator, or more strictly speaking, the legislative art only serves as a tool for nature. The city, as a natural substance, acquires its form or end ultimately from nature rather than the legislative art.

⁴⁷ I will pick up this point later. For the time being, it is important to note that the legislator is only responsible for the “determinate actualization” of the form of the city. He is not responsible for the form of the city. The form of the city is determined by nature, as the end of the city is determined by nature. There is no way the legislator (or the legislative art) can do with the end of the city (Cf. *Pol.* 1252a4-6: “all communities aim at some good, and ... [the city] aims at the most authoritative good of all”). To better understand this point, take the example of the human being. The end of the human being, human happiness, is determined by nature. Individual human beings are only responsible for the various connotations of happiness which are subject to intentional choice. In “choosing” a specific form of happiness, however, an individual human being doesn’t “create” happiness. What he creates is the specific form of happiness toward which the human happiness is actualized (For a discussion of this topic, see Chapter 6 “Complete Virtue and the Definition of Happiness in Aristotle”). The same can be said about the relation between the specific form of the city and the legislator.

One objection toward this interpretation is that though the Aristotelian principle allows a natural object to come about with art as an tool, the natural object shall also be able to come about without the tool.⁴⁸ For example, the art of medicine can assist nature when a physician restores a sick man to health, but health, as a natural object, is also able to come about without the aid of art. In other words, if the city is natural, it shall be able to come about without the aid of legislator or the legislative art. But this rule, as we shall see, does not strictly apply to all the natural objects. Virtue, for example, is natural for Aristotle, but it does not come about without the political art.⁴⁹ In fact, as Aristotle says, art “in some cases completes what nature is *unable* (ἀδυνατεῖ) to bring to a finish” (*Phys.* 199a16-17). The case of the city, alongside with the case of virtue, certainly belongs to those cases in which the nature is unable to bring about its product on its own. Art, therefore, must be supplied. But the addition of art by no means makes the city an artifact for Aristotle. For in *Pol.* II.8, Aristotle clearly attempts to distinguish between the city and the artifacts. He writes that

As in other arts (τέχνας), so in the political arrangements, it is impossible that all things should be precisely set down in writing; for enactments must be universal, but actions are concerned with particulars. Hence it is evident that laws should be changed sometimes and in certain cases, but when one look at the matter in another way, great caution would seem to be required. For the habit of lightly changing the laws is an evil, and, when the advantage is small, some errors both of lawgivers and rulers had better be left; for the city will not gain so much by making the change as it will lose by the habit of disobedience. The argument from the example of the arts is false; a change in a law is a very different thing from a change in an art. For the law has no power to command obedience except that of habit, which can only be given by time, so that a readiness to change from old to new laws weakens the power of the law. (*Pol.* 1269a9-24)

⁴⁸ See Keyt (1991), 120.

⁴⁹ This is why Aristotle says that virtue is “somehow” (πῶς) present by nature (*NE* 1144b4-5). For it is a natural end for all human beings, but it does not arise in the absence of prudence which is “in fact the same state (ἕξις) as political art” (*NE* 1141b23-24; 1144b16-17).

In the cases of other arts, when an art is improved, the product of the art is also improved. For example, when the medical art is improved, the health condition of human being gets improved. But in the case of the legislative art, the situation is different: though the legislative or political art “is also regarded as one of those arts” (*Pol.* 1268b36-37), the product of it, the city, will not be benefited as much from changing as it will be harmed (*Pol.* 1269a17-18). For “the law has no power to command obedience except that of habit, which can only be given by time” (*Pol.* 1269a22-23). Aristotle concludes that the general art-artifact model is not a good example (παράδειγμα) in thinking the legislative art-city relationship. We may ask that if the city is an artifact, why the art-artifact model does not serve a good example here? The reason seems quite straightforward: although the city is, in a way, a “product” of art, it is not an artifact for Aristotle. For an artifact, according to Aristotle, has no inner principle of change, and therefore has no growth (αύξησης) (*Phys.* 192b12-18). When an artifact is made, it is already complete. But this is not the case with the city: when the city is established by the legislative or political art, it is far from being complete. It has to grow so as to be complete, and this process takes time.⁵⁰ The city, therefore, is more akin to a natural substance that *grows* through art than an artifact that is *made* by art. For it has its own natural growth.⁵¹ That’s why Aristotle says that the improvement in legislative art or law is not necessarily advantageous for the city, for any new change will disrupt the natural growth of the city, and in the worst case, result in decay (φθίσις).⁵²

⁵⁰ According to Aristotle’s theory of growth, any part of a natural substance grows by the accession of something. The natural substance becomes larger when this something is transformed into the same form as that of the part of the substance. For example, a body becomes larger when the food is transformed into the same form as that of the flesh of the body (*GC* 322a4-16). Now in our case, the substance that grows is the city, and the thing that gets transformed is the potential citizen. The city grows when the potential citizen is transformed in accord with the form of the city, viz. the law. But unlike the transformation of the food in other natural organisms, the transformation of potential citizen takes time. For the transformation can only be achieved through habituation (ἔθος), which, in Aristotle’s view, “cannot be created except over a period of time”.

⁵¹ See *Pol.* 1302b33-1303a2, where Aristotle talks about the disproportionate growth of a city in comparison with that of an animal.

⁵² The decay of the city happens when the law cannot do the transformation (viz. habituate its citizens) any more, not only not as much as is required for the form and a greater quantity, but not even so much as is required for an

We might wonder, however, if the form of the city is present at the very beginning (in the *πρῶται κοινωνίαι*) in potentiality, why does Aristotle claim at the same time that the form of the city, which is identified as some specific constitution (e.g. democracy, aristocracy, and etc.), is done through the hands of the legislator? To answer this question, we might have to distinguish between two kinds of forms in Aristotle. The first is, of course, species-form. That is, the form (*εἶδος*) that belongs to the city as a species (*εἶδος*). When we say that the form of the city is present at the very beginning in potentiality, we mean the form in this sense: common and undifferentiated to the city *qua* city. But Aristotle also posits another sense of form (*εἶδος*) which can very well be said to be “below the level of species”.⁵³ The form in this sense has a multiplicity that the species-form does not have. For example, on this level, the form (*εἶδος*) of Coriscus is said to be different from that of Socrates, even though they share the same species-form, “human being” (*GA* 767b29-768a2). So, when Aristotle says that the form of the city is imposed by the legislator, he is talking about the “form” in this specific sense. The form in this specific sense is important to the city’s identity (*Pol.* 1276b1-13), but not to its being. For though a democratic city is different from an aristocratic city, none of them *qua* city is more or less a city than another, just like no human being *qua* human being is more or less a human being than another (*Cat* 3b33-34; 3b37-38; Cf. *Metaph.* 1044a10-11).⁵⁴ So the various

equal quantity. Cf. *GC* 322a28-33; Aquinas (1964b), 17.118.

⁵³ It is disputed whether *εἶδος* can mean something other than the species-form for Aristotle. Some commentators, e.g. Woods (1993), 399-415 and Bostock (1995), 134, hold that there is only one indivisible form (viz. the species-form) in Aristotle, whereas other commentators, such as Cooper (1990), 84 and Balme (1987), 291, believe that the form – at least in biological contexts – can be further divided below the species level. The dispute, of course, cannot be handled here. But as the dominant view is that the form in Aristotle’s embryological theory is some sub-specific form (Note, however, the sub-specific form need not to be individual or particular), it is reasonable to assume that the sub-specific form also appears in Aristotle’s political treatises. For the city is a living organism for Aristotle, and the forms (*εἶδη*) of the city are analogous to those of the animal: “Now if there were then only so many forms (*εἶδη*), and there were varieties of these (I mean, for example, a certain number of forms (*εἶδη*) of mouth and stomach and sense organs, and further of the locomotive parts), the number of combinations of these things will necessarily make a number of forms (*εἶδη*) of animals ... one may proceed in the same manner in the case of the constitutions spoken of” (*Pol.* 1290b29ff).

⁵⁴ My interpretation differs from that of Chan (1992) in that I don’t share his view that the sub-specific form of the city (e.g. the democratic form) is imposed by the legislative art (Cf. Chan (1992), 199-200). On my interpretation,

forms (εἰδή) the legislator imposes on the cities are only determinate actualizations of the species-form (εἰδός) that Nature sets forth, and they do not differ in species-form (εἰδός).⁵⁵

We may conclude, then, that the presence of a legislator or a legislative art in the genesis of the city is not incompatible with the city being a natural substance for Aristotle. For the legislator is only responsible for the actualization or completion of the potential form that Nature has set forth. The intentional choice of the legislator is thus not between various potential forms of the city, but between multiple determinate actualizations of one species-form, that is, the form of the city which, in Aristotle's view, pre-exists by nature.

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both the species-form and the sub-specific forms of the city are determined by nature. The legislator or the legislative art is only responsible for the act of "actualizing" the species-form of the city. We should by all means distinguish this act of "actualizing" from that of "imposing": the act of "actualizing" is to bring about a specific end that exists in the city's own nature, while the act of "imposing" is to bring about a specific end that exists only in the mind of the legislator.

⁵⁵ For a useful discussion of how Aristotle distinguishes between various sub-specific εἰδή of a εἰδός, see Lennox (1987), 339-359. According to Lennox, a high level εἰδός (e.g. genus-form or species-form) is always for Aristotle the matter or substratum for differentiation into its sub-specific εἰδή. That is to say, a sub-specific form is one determinate actualization of a genus-form or species-form: Socrates is a determinate actualization of human being, as water-fowl is a determinate actualization of bird (348).

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