

## THE PRIORITY ARGUMENT AND ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL HYLOMORPHISM

SIYI CHEN

*Department of Philosophy, and of Religious Studies, Peking University*

I wish to demonstrate in this article that Aristotle's argument for the priority of the city in *Politics* I 2 is supported by his conception of the ontological priority of form (and actuality) over matter (and potentiality). This interpretation should enable us to see that, just as his hylomorphism is a middle path between Presocratic materialism and Platonic dualism, Aristotle's political hylomorphism is a middle path between two radical versions of political naturalism by Antiphon and Plato.

Key words: political priority, political hylomorphism, phusis, nomos

**I**N *Politics* I 2, Aristotle argues that the city is naturally prior to the household and the individual in a similar way as the whole body is prior to its organic parts (*Pol.* 1253a18–29). In what follows I shall call this argument *the Priority Argument*. Evidently, this argument is meant to prove the primacy of the city for the realization of the human good. The importance of the Priority Argument can be seen most clearly from the beginnings of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*,<sup>1</sup> where Aristotle establishes the primacy of the political for the investigation of the highest human good. In *NE* I 2 Aristotle remarks that the highest human good is the concern of politics, which is most authoritative (κυριωτάτης) (*NE* 1094a26–28), while in *Politics* I 1 he claims that the city is the most authoritative (κυριωτάτη) of all human communities (*Pol.* 1252a4–5). In *NE* I 2 he points out that the end of politics embraces (περιέχει) all the other human ends (*NE* 1094b6–7), while in *Politics* I 1 he remarks that the city embraces (περιέχουσα) all the other human communities (*Pol.* 1252a6). These parallelisms between the beginnings of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, along with the finishing lines of

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**Contact:** Siyi Chen <1506186106@pku.edu.cn>

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

the former that transit the whole investigation to the latter, make it clear that these two works are two consecutive parts of the same course of lectures on political philosophy that constitute “the philosophy of human affairs (ἡ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπεια φιλοσοφία)” (NE 1181b15).<sup>2</sup> The primacy of the city is therefore of paramount importance for Aristotle’s ethics and politics as a unified whole. In this sense, it is not exaggerating to say that the Priority Argument is the core doctrine of Aristotle’s political philosophy.

It is precisely this core doctrine that invites serious criticisms from modern scholars. Jonathan Barnes, for instance, complains, “I am an independent individual. That, in the end, is the crucial fact about me (and about you), and it is a fact which, in the *Politica*, Aristotle ignores or suppresses” (1990: 63). For critics like Barnes, the Priority Argument most clearly exposes the totalitarian side of Aristotle’s political philosophy by viewing the city as a natural organism of which individuals are merely dependent parts: the city is prior to the individual just as the human body is prior to the hand. Responding to Barnes, Robert Mayhew offers an excellent defense of Aristotle through carefully distinguishing various senses of ‘part’ and ‘whole’ in Aristotle’s philosophy. Concerning the Priority Argument, Mayhew correctly points out that “All that Aristotle means is that the city is prior to the individual in that the city can exist without any particular individual, but every individual human requires a city in order to exist (as a human)” (1997: 336). Mayhew’s reading is consistent with Aristotle’s ontology: the individual requires the city in order to *be* a human, because the most strict sense of ‘being’ for Aristotle is ‘functioning activity (ἐνέργεια).’ Without the city no individual can acquire the capacity and have the opportunity to perform the human function and *be* human in the fullest sense.

The main goal of this article is to strengthen and develop Mayhew’s defense of Aristotle by putting it on the basis of Aristotle’s metaphysics. I shall demonstrate that the Priority Argument is consistent with and supported by Aristotle’s conception of the relationship between form (and actuality) and matter (and potentiality) in terms of ontological priority. According to Aristotle’s hylomorphism, form is ontologically prior to both preexisting and concurrent matter, and actuality as functioning is ontologically prior to potentiality as the capacity of functioning. The above senses of priority together constitute what I call “the Priority Thesis,” which is the core doctrine of Aristotle’s metaphysics. Moreover, I shall argue that the Priority Thesis is established through Aristotle’s dialectical engagement with his predecessors’ views on nature and essence, most importantly through his criticism of Antiphon the sophist’s ‘Buried-bed Argument’ and its Presocratic materialistic basis on the one hand and his modification of Plato’s principle of ontological independence on the other. As our discussions

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2. On the unity of Aristotle’s ethics and politics, see Bodéüs (1993), Salkever (2009)

unfold in the following pages, we shall be able to see that hylomorphism is Aristotle's middle path between Presocratic materialism and Platonic dualism and on the basis of this theoretical middle path, Aristotle's political philosophy steers a practical middle path between two versions of radical naturalism by Antiphon and Plato. From this perspective, Aristotle's political philosophy can be viewed as the political application of hylomorphism: political hylomorphism.

The key link between the Priority Argument and the Priority Thesis is the political application of Aristotle's metaphysical conception of *nature*. On the one hand, the Priority Argument is about the city's *natural* priority over the household and the individual, and it is immediately preceded by and closely connected with Aristotle's arguments for the *naturalness* of the city and the political *nature* of man (*Pol.* 1252a24–3a18; hereafter, 'the Naturalness Argument'). In fact, Aristotle seems to treat the priority of the city as an important consequence of the naturalness of the city: because the city is natural in the sense that it both results from and fully realizes the political nature of man, it enjoys natural priority over each individual and over lesser communities. A defense of the Priority Argument, therefore, must include a defense of the Naturalness Argument. On the other hand, the essential teaching of the Priority Thesis is that *nature* understood as form rather than matter determines the essence and function of each natural being, and that the realization of *nature*, that is, the transition from essential form to functioning activity, is the final end of each natural being. As we shall see, ultimately speaking, the city is prior to the household and the individual because political life is the fulfillment of human nature, and therefore, human beings cannot function as human beings and realize their final end without the city. By clarifying the meaning and structure of nature, the Priority Thesis justifies not only the Priority Argument but also the Naturalness Argument, and therefore serves as the metaphysical foundation of Aristotle's most fundamental political teachings.

In what follows, I shall first summarize the contemporary debate concerning the Naturalness Argument and its metaphysical basis and offer my own interpretation, with an emphasis on the need of a 'metaphysical turn' for sufficiently understanding Aristotle's most fundamental political teachings (Section 1). Next, I shall present a systematic interpretation of the Priority Thesis and its hylomorphic framework, with a view to showing how the core doctrine of Aristotle's metaphysics is established through his dialectical engagement with Antiphon and Plato (Sections 2–3). I shall then offer an interpretation of the Priority Argument on the basis of my interpretation of the Priority Thesis (Section 4). Finally, I shall conclude with a discussion of Aristotle's political middle path between Antiphon's and Plato's radical political philosophies (Section 5).

## 1. The Naturalness Argument: The Debate

In *Politics* I 2, Aristotle famously argues that the city is natural and the human being is by nature a political animal. It is widely agreed that there are some metaphysical assumptions behind these arguments. Particularly, the concepts of ‘natural’ and ‘nature’ in these arguments are used in a specifically Aristotelian sense. This connection between political and metaphysical thoughts is perceived by some commentators to be a source of confusion and inconsistency. David Keyt, for example, asserts that “there is a blunder at the very root of Aristotle’s political philosophy” (1987: 54), because: (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 (1987; 1991). As Keyt points out, there are places in *NE* 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, claims Keyt, the conclusion must be that the Naturalness Argument is inconsistent with Aristotle’s metaphysical theory of natural genesis.

Since Keyt’s attack, many commentators have made efforts to reconcile the naturalness of the city with the role of the legislator.<sup>3</sup> The following examples may represent the main ways of defending Aristotle: Joseph Chan (1992: 189–192) distinguishes between the city as a type of community and a particular city with a particular regime as a form of that type, and argues that while the latter may be the product of the legislative art, the former is the outcome of human nature which functions as the internal origin and cause of the development of human relations. K. Cherry and E. A. Goerner point out that the “first person who brought people together in a polis may have had no intention of creating a specifically new kind of partnership,” and the character of the role of later legislators who intend to design a regime is not “the imposition of political form on a people,” but “leading a people in a shared exercise of what we have called *logos-sociality*” (2006: 563–585). C. D. C. Reeve suggests that not every natural thing “realizes or perfects its nature *by nature*” and appeals to *Phys.* 199a15–16 where it is said that “art . . . completes that which nature is unable to bring to completion” (2009: 513). Fred Miller maintains that in Aristotle’s account of the genesis of the city, human nature and the legislator “function as joint causes of the completed polis” (1995: 42).

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3. A recent systematic defense is made by Trott (2013).

I believe that the solutions proposed by 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. Admittedly, Aristotle frequently likens the legislator to a craftsman and suggests an analogy between legislative action and technical production (e.g., *Pol.* 1253a30–31, 1268b34–38, 1273b32–33, 1274b18–19, 1276b1–11, 1282b14–16, 1325b40–6a5, 1326a35–38; cf. *NE* 1112b14, 1181a23; *EE* 1216b16–19). But it must be noted that unlike Plato, Aristotle never uses expressions such as πολιτική τέχνη and νομοθετική τέχνη. This is because legislation, and political action in general, are not instances of artificial production in a strictly Aristotelian sense. The solutions proposed by Chan and Cherry and Goerner are on the right track but inadequate. Chan correctly notes that the genesis of the city is caused by an inner origin which is simply human nature, but is wrong to assign the role of the legislator (or what he calls 'human effort') to the side of *external* condition. Chan suggests that "Human effort is a necessary condition of the existence and maintenance of the polis" just as sunlight and water are necessary conditions of the growth of a tree (1992: 191–195). If human effort, of which the city-founding act of legislation is a grand instance, is nothing but the actualization of human nature, why oppose human effort to human nature as the external to the internal? Cherry and Goerner's conception of "the shared *logos*-sociality" as "the uniquely human capacity for reason and speech about the just and unjust, the advantageous and disadvantageous, the good and bad," the excise of which in the process of legislation requires rational and social interactions between the legislator and the rest of the people, accurately captures the essence of the inner origin underlying the development of the human community that culminates in the establishment of the city, and to a large extent corrects Chan's unnecessary division between internal human nature and external human effort (2006: 565, 576–581). However, since they avoid metaphysical discussions, they in fact fail to respond to Keyt's accusation of inconsistency between the Naturalness Argument and its metaphysical basis.

The metaphysical basis of the Naturalness 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 function of the generated natural being, 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 function of the generated artifact, the performance of which serves the end of something else. Keyt (as well as Reeve and Miller) fails to consider the most important distinction between nature and art made by Aristotle in *Physics* II 1: in a non-incidental way, nature

is an *internal* origin, whereas art is an *external* one (*Phys.* 192b21–23).<sup>4</sup> Insofar as the act of legislation is essentially internal to the genesis of the city, it is not an act of art in an Aristotelian sense. And insofar as the political form established by legislation serves no other end external to the political community itself, the city is not an Aristotelian artifact.<sup>5</sup> Both legislation and its outcome are natural. The Naturalness Argument is, therefore, consistent with Aristotle's metaphysical theory of natural genesis.

Since the main concern of this article is on the Priority Argument, the above short defense of the Naturalness Argument should be sufficient for our purpose, which is to show that a proper understanding of Aristotle's main arguments in *Politics* I 2 requires understanding the connection between these arguments and their metaphysical basis. Applying the same method, we shall see in the following sections that the Priority Argument is consistent with and supported by the core doctrine of Aristotle's hylomorphic metaphysics.

## 2. The Buried-Bed Argument: Antiphon Refuted

In the first book of *Physics*, Aristotle systematically investigates his predecessors' views concerning the origins and causes of change as an undeniable phenomenon of the natural world. His conclusion is that matter (ύλη) and form (εἶδος) are the origins and causes of the coming-to-be and existence of natural things (*Phys.* 190b17–20). Then, *Physics* II begins with a definition of nature (φύσις) as the inner origin and cause of natural things' change and remaining static (*Phys.* 192b21–23). The main task of *Physics* II 1 is to establish, explicitly, the priority of form over matter as the nature of natural things, and implicitly, the priority of form over matter as the being and essence of any hylomorphic composite. Aristotle starts this mission by criticizing an argument by Antiphon the sophist:<sup>6</sup>

Some people think that the nature and the being (ή φύσις καὶ ή 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 (ἀρρύθμιστον καθ' ἑαυτό). For instance, wood is the nature of the bed (κλίνης φύσις τὸ ξύλον), and

4. See Trott (2013: 19–23); cf. Keyt (1991: 58–59).

5. Aristotle's thought that political regime should be internal to the city is closely related to his remark that only correct regimes are natural, whereas deviant regimes are against nature (*Pol.* 1287b37–41): this is because legislative acts that establish deviant regimes are external imposition of political forms which aim only at the private benefit of the ruler or rulers, rather than the common benefit of the city as a whole (*Pol.* 1279a16–21). I owe this note to an anonymous reviewer.

6. On the identity of Antiphon, see Pendrick (2002: 1–26); cf. Gagarin (2002: Chapter 2).

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 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 (τὴν οὐσίαν) is that which persists uninterruptedly through these sufferings (διαμένει ταῦτα πάσχουσα συνεχῶς). (*Phys.* 193a9–17)

The first thing to be noted is that Aristotle strangely allows the opinion of Antiphon to be expressed as “wood is the *nature* of the bed.” It is strange because he has just made clear that an artifact such as a bed, *as such*, does not have a nature (*Phys.* 192b16–20, cf. 192b23–32; *Meta.* 1046a9–10). Aristotle does not seem to disagree with the attribution of nature to the bed; rather, he complains that Antiphon incorrectly thinks that the nature of the bed is wood, namely, its matter. In fact, here φύσις is used interchangeably with οὐσία, which means not a concrete substance, but the being or essence of a concrete substance, natural as well as artificial.<sup>7</sup> This usage of φύσις and οὐσία is so Aristotelian that one may reasonably doubt if Antiphon could have possibly formulated his argument in the reported manner (cf. *Meta.* 1070a9–15).

If we believe Aristotle's report that Antiphon indeed used these words (φύσις and οὐσία), he most likely used them to refer to something relatively concrete—natural thing and reality. Antiphon is not concerned with the essence of the bed, or what it is to be a bed, but with *what is natural* and *what is real*. His point is that only natural things are real, whereas man-made things are simply an arrangement by custom and art. What we call “bed” is an artificial and customary appearance; the real natural being is concealed by this appearance but will eventually outlive it, for the true reality manifests itself when this short-lived appearance is removed by a natural process of rotting. Through the rotting of the bed, wood, the real natural being, gets back its capacity of sending up shoots and therefore turns back into its true self, as if it recovers from a temporary death imposed upon it by the human convention.

The plausibility of the above reconstruction of Antiphon's argument is confirmed by the political thought of this sophist, which will be discussed later. Here it suffices to note that the point of the Buried-bed Argument is *not* that the nature and being of a thing is its matter, *but* that things by nature are real whereas things by convention are not. However, since the natural being concealed by the appearance of the bed is, from Aristotle's point of view, the matter of the bed, Aristotle manages to reformulate Antiphon's *political* argument that advocates

7. The word οὐσία is used by Aristotle to mean both a concrete substance (e.g., Socrates) and the essence of a concrete substance (e.g., the soul of Socrates). I translate οὐσία in the former sense into ‘substance’; in the latter sense, ‘being’.

radical naturalism into a *metaphysical* one that advocates reductive materialism, through replacing the political opposition between *phusis* and *nomos* with the metaphysical one between matter and form.<sup>8</sup> Once Antiphon's argument is reformulated in terms of matter and form, Aristotle goes on to exploit its logical consequence: if the nature of the bed is wood, which is its matter, why stop at the level of *immediate* matter? Wood is in turn made of some more basic matter (presumably earth and water), which, being the nature of wood, should be the deeper nature of the bed. But along this line of reasoning, the four basic elements (or one or several of them) will eventually be shown to be the nature of all things (*Phys.* 193a17–28). In this way, Aristotle reveals the theoretical affinity between the political naturalism of Antiphon the sophist and the metaphysical materialism of Presocratic natural philosophers (as he interprets them).

In *Physics* I Aristotle has replaced Presocratic materialism with his hylomorphic framework. Having put Antiphon's argument within this framework, he now remarks that one way of using the word φύσις is “the primary underlying matter (πρώτη ὑποκειμένη ὕλη) in each case, of the things which have in themselves an origin of their movements and changes,” and the other way is “the shape and the form that accords with [a thing's] definition (ἡ μορφή καὶ τὸ εἶδος τὸ κατὰ τὸν λόγον).” (*Phys.* 193a28–31) He then concludes 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 (δυνάμει).” (*Phys.* 193b6–8) This conclusion is brief but significant. It appeals to the concepts of *actuality* and *potentiality*, and thus directs our attention to Aristotle's deepest metaphysical insight.

In *Metaphysics* Θ, where the concepts of actuality and potentiality are explained thematically, Aristotle first introduces us to the general distinction between actuality and potentiality, with the capacity-exercise and the matter-form distinctions as its two specific instances (*Metaphysics* Θ 6), and then proceeds to give us one of his most important metaphysical teachings (*Metaphysics* Θ 8): actuality is *prior to* potentiality (πρότερον ἐνέργεια δυνάμει ἔστιν) in account (λόγῳ) and in being (οὐσία) without qualification, and in time (χρόνῳ) in some qualified sense (*Meta.* 1049b5, 10–12).<sup>9</sup> It is relatively easy to understand priority in account and in time. Actuality is prior to potentiality in account, since for any pair of actuality and potentiality, the account of the latter always involves that of the former, but not vice versa (*Meta.* 1049b12–17). Actuality is prior to potentiality in time in the sense that, in any (typical) process of genesis, it is always something which exists in actuality in the relevant respect that, as the moving agent, brings about the process (*Meta.* 1049b17–50a3).

8. See Pendrick (2002: 283), Gagarin (2002: 70).

9. On the plan of *Metaphysics* Θ, cf. Frede (1994: 173–193) with Anagnostopoulos (2011: 388–425).



Priority in being (or as I shall call it, ontological priority), however, calls for more explanation. Aristotle gives two reasons for the ontological priority of actuality over potentiality: (i) “things posterior in coming-to-be (τῆ γενέσει ὕστερα) are prior in form and in being (τῶ εἶδει καὶ τῆ οὐσίᾳ πρότερα);” (ii) “the actuality is an end (τέλος), and the potentiality is acquired for the sake of this (τούτου χάριν).” (*Meta.* 1050a4–10) Put together, these two reasons explain the ontological priority of both form over preexisting matter and exercise over capacity. Since the form of a substance is simply the capacity (or set of capacities) that defines the function (and therefore, the essence) of this substance,<sup>10</sup> ontological priority in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 is to be understood in the context of the life of a substance as a continuous teleological sequence, which includes not only the process of genesis in which matter takes on form, but also the transition from form as unexercised capacity to its exercise.

For Aristotle, the exercise of form-capacity, that is, the performance of the essential function of a substance, is the final end for this substance: “the function is an end (τέλος), and the activity (ἐνέργεια) is the function, hence also the word ἐνέργεια is based on ἔργον and points towards ἐντελέχεια.” (*Meta.* 1050a21–23) The doctrine of ontological priority in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 thus effectively establishes that, within the life of a substance as a continuous teleological sequence, the more the substance approaches functioning as its final end, the more it *is* as itself. Therefore, the ultimate teaching of Aristotle's doctrine of ontological priority, which I have called ‘the Priority Thesis,’ is that functioning is the very *first*, that is, the most strict, sense of being.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Ontological Independence: Plato Modified

Aristotle's refutation of Antiphon in *Physics* II 1 and his discussions of ontological priority in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 justify only part of the Priority Thesis: the priority of exercise over capacity and that of form over preexisting matter. To see how the Priority Thesis can be extended to the relationship between form and concurrent matter, we must turn to Aristotle's official explanation of “prior” and “posterior” in *Metaphysics* Δ 11, where a different account of ontological priority is given:

Some things are called prior and posterior (πρότερα καὶ ὕστερα) . . . in respect of nature and being (κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν), i.e., those which can be without other things, while the others cannot be without them (ὅσα ἐνδέχεται εἶναι ἄνευ ἄλλων, ἐκεῖνα δὲ ἄνευ ἐκείνων μὴ), a dis-

10. As Aristotle says: “everything is defined by its function (ὠρισμένα τῶ ἔργῳ)” (*Meta.* 390a10).

11. On this general conclusion, see Beere (2009).

inction which Plato used. Then [if we keep in mind that] there are various senses of being, firstly, the underlying thing (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) is prior, so that substance (ἡ οὐσία) is prior; secondly, in respect of potentiality and actuality (κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κατ' ἐντελέχειαν), different things [are prior], for some things are prior in respect of potentiality, others in respect of actuality, e.g., in respect of potentiality the half [line] is [prior] to the whole [line], and the part to the whole (τὸ μέρος τοῦ ὅλου), and the matter to the being (ἡ ὕλη τῆς οὐσίας), but in respect of actuality these are posterior (ὑστερον); for it is only when [the whole line, the whole, or the being] has been destroyed (διαλυθέντος) that they will actually exist (κατ' ἐντελέχειαν ἔσται). (*Meta.* 1019a1–11)<sup>12</sup>

The *Metaphysics* Δ 11 version of ontological priority is explained in terms of ontological independence: X is prior to Y in being if and only if X can be or exist without Y, but not vice versa (*Meta.* 1019a3–4). This principle is said to be held by Plato, presumably because Aristotle takes Plato to claim that forms can be or exist independently of the sensible things that participate in them, but not vice versa (e.g., *Cate.* 2b5–6, 14a29–35; cf. *Meta.* 988a10–11, 988b4–6, 1059b38–60a1, 1069a18–21, 1076a36–b4, 1078b30–31, 1086a32–b5). I cannot assess here the accuracy of Aristotle's interpretation of Plato's theory of forms, any more than I can assess the accuracy of Aristotle's report of Antiphon's argument. However, these issues do not really matter for my interpretation of Aristotle; and in what follows, I shall speak solely from an Aristotelian point of view, disregarding the issue of interpretive fairness to Plato.<sup>13</sup>

To begin with, what should to be noted here is that Aristotle explicitly adopts with modification the allegedly Platonic principle of ontological independence in his explanation of ontological priority. To understand this modified adoption, we must first take a brief look at Aristotle's dialectical engagement with the allegedly Platonic theory of forms. The texts of Aristotle's diagnosis and criticism of Plato's theory of forms are quite scattered, but his understanding of Plato roughly runs as follows (the following is a synopsis of relevant passages from *Metaphysics* A 6, M 4 and M 9): among his predecessors, Aristotle credits the Platonists for having expressed most nearly his notion of essence and being (*Meta.* 988a34–b6). To seek the essence and being of a thing is to give its definition, and Aristotle takes Socrates to be the first to seek the universal and to give defini-

12. For a detailed discussion of the textual and interpretative issues arising from this passage, see Peramatzis (2011: 317–319).

13. For a comprehensive study of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's theory of forms, see Fine (1993). For the most part Plato uses εἶδος and ἰδέα interchangeably (see, e.g., *Euthyphro* 6d–e). I translate both into “form” in order to highlight the continuity between Plato and Aristotle regarding this concept.

tions in a scientific way, although concerning not nature as a whole, but ethical matters only (*Meta.* 1078b17–29). Then, Plato is said to be inspired by Socrates's effort at seeking universal definitions, while being convinced by the Heraclitean and Cratylean doctrine that all sensible things are ever in flux and therefore there is no knowledge of them (*Meta.* 987a32–34; cf., e.g., *Symposium* 207d–e; *Philebus* 59a–b; *Timaeus* 52a–c). Consequently, Plato gives universals and definitions, as the real objects of knowledge, separate existence “apart from sensible things (*παρὰ τὰ αἰσθητά*)” and calls them “forms” (*Meta.* 1086b7–10). Moreover, Plato views forms as the only things that truly exist and treats sensible things as their shadowy images that exist only in an attenuated sense (e.g., *Republic* 476e–479d, 508b–520a; *Timaeus* 27d–28a).

For Aristotle, the root of Plato's mistake is that he treats essences or beings as if they were yet another class of concrete substances (see esp. *Meta.* 997b3–12; cf. *NE* 1096a34–b5). In other words, Plato confuses οὐσία in the concrete sense with οὐσία in the abstract sense, and therefore makes the latter into the ‘eternal duplicates’ of the former.<sup>14</sup> Plato's ‘substantialization’ of essences and separation of forms from sensible substances result in many difficulties in his theory of forms. One of these difficulties, implicitly dealt with in the passage from *Metaphysics* Δ 11 cited above, is his application of ontological independence to separate forms, i.e., his claim that forms can *be* without their sensible instances, without qualifying the sense of *being*. Aristotle verbally accepts this principle, using it to explain ontological priority, but qualifying it with his distinction between different senses of *being*. For example: when the categories are concerned, substance is ontologically prior to quantity, quality, and so forth, because substance can be without this or that accident of it, but not vice versa (e.g., *Phys.* 189a30 ff.; *Cate.* 2a34 ff.; *Meta.* 1070b36–1a1).<sup>15</sup> This is relatively easy to understand. But when potentiality and actuality as two fundamentally different senses of being are concerned, Aristotle elliptically remarks that matter (or the part) is ontologically prior to form (or the whole) in respect of potentiality, while the reverse is true in respect of actuality. This thesis is central to *Metaphysics* Δ 11; it is quite difficult to understand because of the apparent inconsistency between the ontological priority of form (or the whole) over matter (or the part) in respect of *actuality* and Aristotle's remark that matter (or the part) exists *actually* only when form (or the whole) has been destroyed.

Let us focus on the second half of the central thesis, which has a direct bearing on the Priority Argument: form (or the whole) is ontologically prior to matter (or the part) in respect of actuality. In order to apply the principle of ontological independence to this thesis *and* make it consistent with Aristotle's claim that

14. Cf. Cherniss (1944: 204–205).

15. It goes without saying that for Aristotle, there cannot be ‘bare substance’ without any accident whatsoever.

the part (or matter) exists actually only when the whole (or form) has been destroyed (*Meta.* 1019a10–11), we must distinguish between two senses in which the matter or the part of a hylomorphic whole is said to *exist* or *be* actually: (i) Aristotle remarks elsewhere that when the whole or form exists, the part or matter exists only *potentially*, that is to say, not as an autonomous entity whose identity is independent of the relevant whole or form (*Phys.* 250a24–25). This is fully in line with his claim here that the part or matter comes to exist actually only after the whole or form has been destroyed. However, (ii) Aristotle also holds that the part or matter cannot exist *actually*, that is to say, as functional or functioning part or matter, when it is separated from the whole or form, e.g., a severed finger is a finger in name only (*Meta.* 1035b23–25; *Pol.* 1253a20–25). The upshot is that for each part-whole or matter-form pair, the part or matter owes its function, and therefore its essence and identity, to the whole or form, whereas the whole or form does not owe its essence and identity to the part or matter, or to anything else, since the whole or form is the ultimate source of function, essence and identity.

The thesis that form is ontologically independent of matter but not vice versa means not that form can be or exist without matter, but that form fixes the function, essence and identity of matter but not vice versa.<sup>16</sup> Form is prior to matter in this sense; and this priority is *ontological* priority in respect of *actuality*, because in Aristotle's metaphysics *actual being* is defined in terms of functioning. In this way, Aristotle adopts Plato's principle of ontological independence, which the latter applies in a mistaken way to the relationship between *separate form* and sensible composite, and modifies it into an explanation of the relationship between *immanent form* and concurrent matter. Aristotle's two accounts of ontological priority in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 and Δ 11 thus jointly establish the ontological hierarchy both between form and preexisting or concurrent matter and between exercise and capacity. If we put these two accounts together, we shall have the complete Priority Thesis that consists in three sub-theses: first, form enjoys ontological priority over preexisting matter; second, form (or the whole) enjoys ontological priority over concurrent matter (or the part); third, exercise enjoys ontological priority over capacity.

In Aristotle's view, while Presocratic materialism takes the ultimate matter to be the being and nature of all things, Plato, in refuting it, goes to the other extreme with his conception of unqualified ontological independence. From this perspective, the Priority Thesis and Aristotle's hylomorphic framework under which it unfolds steer a middle path between Presocratic materialism and Platonic dualism. With this metaphysical middle path in mind, we may now turn to the Priority Argument to appreciate its political implication.

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16. This interpretation is indebted to Peramatzis (2011: Chapters 8–10).

#### 4. The Priority of the City and its Metaphysical Basis

The city is also by nature prior to (πρότερον τῇ φύσει) the household and to each one of us (ἕκαστος ἡμῶν). For the whole is necessarily prior to the part (τὸ γὰρ ὅλον πρότερον ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τοῦ μέρους). For instance, there will be neither foot nor hand when the whole [body] has been destroyed, except homonymously (ὁμωνύμως), as when one speaks of [a foot or hand made of] stone, for such [a foot or hand] will have been ruined. Everything is defined by its function and its capacity (πάντα δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ ὄρισται καὶ τῇ δυνάμει), so that they [i.e., a foot and hand] in such a condition should no longer be said to be the same things, except homonymously. It is clear, then, that the city is both by nature and prior to the individual (ἢ πόλις καὶ φύσει καὶ πρότερον ἢ ἕκαστος). For if the individual is not self-sufficient when separated (μὴ αὐτάρκης ἕκαστος χωρισθείς) [from the city], he will be like other parts in relation to their whole (ὁμοίως τοῖς ἄλλοις μέρεσιν ἔξει πρὸς τὸ ὅλον). But anyone who lacks the capacity to share in community, or has no need to because of his self-sufficiency, is no part of the city (οὐθὲν μέρος πόλεως) and therefore is either a beast or a god. (*Pol.* 1253a18–29)

The cited passage is the full text of the Priority Argument, which is meant to prove the primacy of the city for the realization of the human good. We have seen that for Aristotle, one thing can be prior to another in different senses. In which sense is the city prior to the household and the individual? Before we set out to answer this question, it should be noted that the priority of the city over the household and the individual must be (i) the kind of *synchronic* priority that the whole holds over the part (*Pol.* 1253a20), and (ii) *analogous* to the kind of priority that the whole body holds over its organic parts (*Pol.* 1253a20–25). In the rest of this section, I shall first present several apparent candidates for the sense of priority at work in the Priority Argument, and then offer my own interpretation, which will be based on what we have learnt from the preceding two sections about the Priority Thesis.

First of all, among the various senses of priority we have discussed, the city is evidently not prior to the household and the individual in time. It could be suggested that, since Aristotle holds a cyclical view of history, there are always cities that are temporally prior to any household or individual (*Pol.* 1269a4–8, 1329b25–27; *Meta.* 1074b10–13; *DC* 270b19–20; *Met.* 339b27–30). However, one can be equally sure that there are always cityless households and individuals that are temporally prior to any city. In fact, this problem haunts Aristotle's discussion of temporal priority in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 too; but there the priority of actuality over potentiality in time is not merely temporal. Accurately speaking, it

is the priority held by the *moving agent* that brings about a process of genesis, the primary examples of which are the soul of a male parent and the form of a product in the mind of a craftsman.<sup>17</sup> Needless to say, no *first city* (after one of the recurrent cataclysms) is a moving agent that brings about the genesis of households and individuals.

With priority in time dismissed, let us consider the other two senses of priority discussed in *Metaphysics* Θ 8. It can be argued that the city is prior to the individual in account. Man is said to be the kind of animal that has *logos*. There are two aspects of this account of man: first, since man has reason, he is the kind of animal capable of living a rational and ethical life (*NE* 1097b22–8a18); second, since man has speech, he is the kind of animal capable of living a political life in the strict sense, namely, a life to be led in the city (*Pol.* 1253a7–18). The full account of each individual man thus involves the account of the city, but not vice versa.<sup>18</sup> It can also be argued that the priority of the city over the household is the ontological priority of form over preexisting matter, which is the *Metaphysics* Θ 8 version of ontological priority that assumes the context of teleological genesis: things posterior in the process are prior in form and in being, since form and being, as actuality, is the end for the sake of which earlier stages of the process, as potentialities, come to be and exist. Since in *Politics* I 2 Aristotle has mainly been speaking about the genesis of the city before introducing the Priority Argument, it seems reasonable to suppose that he is applying the ontological priority of form over preexisting matter to the relationship between the city and earlier communities.<sup>19</sup>

However, priority in account is ill-suited to the city's priority over the household, since the account of the latter does not involve that of the former (cf. *Pol.* 1252b12–14). The ontological priority of form over preexisting matter, on the other hand, is ill-suited to the city's priority over the individual, since the latter as such does not constitute a stage in the genesis of the former. More importantly, neither of these two senses of priority is the kind of synchronic priority that the whole holds over the part or analogical to the kind of priority that the whole body holds over its organic parts. Therefore, even if Aristotle may accept that the city is prior to the household or the individual in one or both of these senses, neither of them is what he has in mind in the Priority Argument.<sup>20</sup>

17. *Meta.* 1049b17–50a3 discusses priority in time and genesis; cf. *Meta.* 1018b14–21 where the qualification “and genesis” is absent.

18. See Barker (1906: 278); cf. Miller (1995: 47), Kraut (2002: 258).

19. See Dobbs (1994: 77), Kraut (2002: 260).

20. Some commentators resort to Aristotle's discussions of priority in places other than *Metaphysics* Θ 8 and Δ 11 (e.g., *Cate.* 14b4–8; *Pol.* 1275a38–b3) and argue that the city is prior to the household and the individual in the sense that it is more perfect or more valuable than them, see, e.g., Kraut (2002: 264–267), Miller (1995: 50–53). However, these interpretations are too weak to make fully intelligible Aristotle's analogy between the city and the body.

In my opinion, two senses of priority are relevant to the Priority Argument: (i) the ontological priority of the whole over the part,<sup>21</sup> (ii) the ontological priority of exercise over capacity. In the Priority Argument, Aristotle's immediate explanation for his claim that the city is prior to the household and the individual is that "the whole is necessarily prior to the part" (*Pol.* 1253a20). The part-whole relationship is mentioned twice in Aristotle's account of ontological priority in *Metaphysics* Δ 11. First, it is said that in respect of potentiality the part is prior to the whole, but in respect of actuality the whole is prior to the part, because it is only when the whole has been dissolved that the part will actually exist (*Meta.* 1019a8–11). Soon afterwards, it is said again that "some things can exist without others in respect of generation, e.g., the whole without the parts, and others in respect of destruction, e.g., the part without the whole." (*Meta.* 1019a12–14) According to my interpretation of *Metaphysics* Δ 11 in the preceding section, both remarks square nicely with the Priority Argument.

Recall the distinction between (i) the part actually exists as an autonomous entity whose identity is independent of the whole, and (ii) the part actually exists as a functional entity whose identity is determined by the whole. With this distinction in mind, if we apply the part-whole relationship to the household-city or the individual-city relationship, we get the following thesis: the city is ontologically prior to each household and individual in respect of actuality, since it is the city that fixes the function, essence and identity of each household and individual, not vice versa. This is exactly what Aristotle is driving at in the Priority Argument, since he explicitly invokes the concept of *function* as what defines everything, and the thought that if the whole is destroyed, and consequently the parts lose either their functional capacity or the opportunity and environment to perform their function, the parts will no longer exist *actually*, because they can no longer be functional or functioning (*Pol.* 1253a23–25). At this point, we should appreciate again the importance of Aristotle's modification of Plato's principle of ontological independence: when the sense of existing is *not* qualified, it is not true that the city can actually exist without each and every household or individual, nor is it true that households or individuals cannot actually exist without the city.

Second, Aristotle's analogy between the city and the body should be taken seriously, but as what it is, namely, an *analogy*.<sup>22</sup> This means that we must clarify

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21. Although the form-matter relationship is not identical with the whole-part relationship, Aristotle treats them on a par in *Metaphysics* Δ 11; cf. *Pol.* 1276b1 ff. and 1325b39 ff. where Aristotle hints that the regime of the city is the form, and the population of the city is the matter, of political life.

22. Similar analogies can be found throughout *Politics*, see e.g., *Pol.* 1277a5–6, 1290b23–39, 1291a24–28, 1302b33–3a2, 1309b18–35, 1326a35–b2; cf. *EN* 1168b31–33; *MA* 703a29–b2. That these analogies should not be taken too literally is proved by Aristotle's criticism of Plato's over-unified

the aspect in which the relationship between the city and each individual resembles that between the body and each of its organs, and the aspect in which it does not. Aristotle views both the city-individual relationship and the body-organ relationship as falling under the more general whole-part relationship, the most salient feature of which is that the part can perform its defining function only as a part of the whole—just as a hand can no longer perform its function as a hand without the body as a whole, an individual can no longer perform his function as a human being without the city. Here is where the ontological priority of exercise over capacity comes into play: since exercise or functioning is the most strict sense of being, a cityless man cannot be a man in the most strict sense, any more than a dead hand can be a hand in the most strict sense. However, this analogy does not entail that the city has a function over and above each individual in the same way as the body has one over and above each of its organs, nor does it entail that the function of each individual is instrumental in the way that the function of an organ is.<sup>23</sup> The analogy does entail, and Aristotle intends it to do so, that men who are cityless even by chance are ‘less than human’ in that they cannot live a full human life. They may have the capacity of living a full human life, but they do not have the opportunity and environment to exercise it. In fact, this is just what Aristotle means by the remark that “the individual is not self-sufficient when separated [from the city]” (*Pol.* 1253a26; cf. *NE* 1168a6–7). The same is true for isolated households (*Pol.* 1259b18–21, 1260b13–20).

Supported by the Priority Thesis, the Priority Argument proves the primacy of the city for the realization of the human good. It invokes the second and the third sub-theses of the Priority Thesis (the whole is ontologically prior to the part; exercise is ontologically prior to capacity), and argues that no one can *be* a human being in the most strict sense without the city.<sup>24</sup>

After the Priority Argument, Aristotle goes on to say that: “By nature, then, the impulse for such a community [the city] exists in everyone; but the first to set one up is responsible for things of very great goodness. For as human beings are the best among animals when perfected, so they are the worst of all when separated from law and justice. . . . But justice is a political matter, for it is the arrangement of a political community, and judicial justice is the judgement of what is just” (*Pol.* 1253a29–39). The Priority Argument says that “the individual is not self-sufficient when separated ( $\chi\omega\rho\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ )” from the city (*Pol.* 1253a26),

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conception of the ideal city in the *Republic*: too much unity will make the city into an individual and this would be the destruction of the city (*Pol.* 1261a16–25; cf. *Republic* 462c).

23. See Mayhew (1997: 325–340).

24. Although Aristotle claims that substances do not admit of degrees at *Cate.* 3b33–4a9, I agree with Stephen R. L. Clark that substance “as the composite individual does admit of degrees, for potential can be more or less actualized” (1972: 283); cf. *Met.* 390a10–13: “All things are defined by their function; for things which are able to perform their function are each truly ( $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ ), e.g., an eye, if it sees ( $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}$ ).”



and here the notion of 'being separated' appears again: human beings are the worst of all animals "when separated ( $\chi\omega\rho\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ) from law and justice." (*Pol.* 1253a32) For Aristotle, a city that truly deserves the name must be ruled by law and justice, and one of the most important functions of law is to educate citizens in practical virtue, of which justice in the broad sense is the comprehensive expression.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, here Aristotle is arguing not only that without the threat of legal punishment and justice in the narrow sense as fair distribution of what is advantageous and harmful, man is the worst animal, but also that without moral education provided by the city, and consequently, without justice in the broad sense as complete virtue (cf. *NE* 1130a3–13), man is the most vicious animal (cf. *Pol.* 1332a7–18). In this way, *Politics* I 2 concludes with an emphasis on the *educational* aspect of political life and the *political* aspect of moral education.

For Aristotle, moral education must be arranged and regulated by the city, instead of by individual households or private educators, because "no citizen should consider himself as belonging to himself, but all as belonging to the city, for each is part of the city; but the care of each part naturally looks to the care of the whole" (*Pol.* 1337a27–30).<sup>26</sup> It is significant that the whole-part relationship between the city and the individual is invoked again in Aristotle's argument for the necessity of public moral education. Since moral education is a kind of genesis in which the raw matter and potentiality of human nature take on the form and actuality of practical virtue, we may say that Aristotle's argument for public moral education in fact invokes the first sub-thesis of the Priority Thesis (form is prior to preexisting matter) and argues that without the city, no one can *become* a human being in the fullest sense.

Both the becoming and the being of the human being, therefore, depend on the city, and now we see that this dependence, which is expressed as the part's posterity to the whole, is consistent with and supported by Aristotle's metaphysical theory of ontological priority.

## 5. Aristotle's Political Hylomorphism: A Middle Path

In Sections 2 and 3, I have demonstrated that the Priority Thesis, which is the core doctrine of Aristotle's hylomorphic metaphysics, steers a middle path between Presocratic materialism and Platonic dualism. In Section 4, I have offered an interpretation of the Priority Argument, which is the core doctrine of Aristotle's political philosophy, on the metaphysical basis of the Priority Thesis. In this and the final section of this article, I shall argue that with his defense of the

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25. For the distinction between the broad and the narrow senses of justice, see *NE* V 1.

26. On Aristotle's arguments for the need of public moral education, see Curren (2000).

primacy of the city for the realization of the human good, Aristotle's political philosophy steers a middle path between two versions of radical naturalism by Antiphon and Plato. Since the essential rationale of this political middle path is based on Aristotle's hylomorphic conception of ontological priority, it can be properly described as *political hylomorphism*.

Let us begin with Antiphon's political naturalism. We have seen how Aristotle, in his report of the Buried-bed Argument, has reformulated Antiphon's argument with his hylomorphic principles, thus treating it as a materialistic argument with theoretical affinity with Presocratic natural philosophy. But the original point of Antiphon's argument is to stress the opposition between *phusis* and *nomos* and advocate political naturalism.<sup>27</sup> For this sophist, *phusis* means what is necessary and everywhere the same: pleasure and pain, advantage and harm, life and death, all of which stand in sharp opposition to *nomos* with its moral and legal requirements (DK 87 B44 B3–4).<sup>28</sup> He discovers that “most things that are just according to *nomos* (κατὰ νόμον) are hostile to *phusis* (πολεμίως τῇ φύσει)” (B44 B2), and that “the advantages laid down by the *nomoi* (ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων) are bonds on nature, but those laid down by *phusis* (ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως) are free” (B44 B4; cf. B44 B5). A firm belief in the irreconcilable opposition between *phusis* and *nomos* such as this, however, does not necessarily lead to relativistic conventionalism (B44 A2, B44 B1). Antiphon recommends that “a person would best use justice to his own advantage if he considered the *nomoi* important when witnesses are present, but those of *phusis* important in the absence of witnesses” (B44 B1), because one who violates *nomoi* “avoids shame and punishment” when there is no witness, but one who violates *phusis* is immediately harmed “not in people's opinions (διὰ δόξαν) but in truth (δι' ἀλήθειαν)” (B44 B2). In other words, the requirements of *phusis* are to be obeyed unconditionally as long as to do so does not harm *phusis* incidentally, whereas those of *nomoi* can be completely disregarded unless to do so would violate *phusis* at the same time. *Phusis* is thus the true standard of human behaviour, and justice should be used for the sake of self-interest.

Commentators have attempted in different ways to save Antiphon from the accusation of immoralism.<sup>29</sup> However, their very efforts reaffirm the first impression of Antiphon's political teaching. Even if Antiphon's own moral standpoint is substantively different from that of a Calliclean immoralist, his naturalistic

27. For general surveys of views on *phusis* and *nomos*, see Guthrie (1971: 55–134), Kerferd (1981: 111–130).

28. In citing Antiphon's texts, I have followed Diels-Kranz's ordering of Antiphon's fragments in Diels and Kranz (1952). All translations are cited with modification from Gagarin (2002).

29. Since the discovery of Antiphon's political fragments, the author of *Truth* is traditionally viewed as a Calliclean immoralist, see e.g., Taylor (1926: 119, Footnote 1), Field (1930: 90), Sinclair (1951: 70–73). For various attempts to save Antiphon from this accusation, see e.g., Havelock (1957: 255–294), Guthrie (1971: 107–113), Moulton (1972: 329–366), Saunders (1977: 215–236).

arguments do have the effect of undermining the dignity of political life and the authority of traditional morality. Although Plato never mentions Antiphon in his dialogues, the kind of sophistic naturalism Antiphon represents is doubtlessly the main target of his political philosophy. Plato understands very well the danger of sophistic political teachings, and his diagnosis and treatment of sophistry can be summarized as follows. To begin with, as far as the *phusis-nomos* debate is concerned, the sophists can be roughly divided into two groups: relativistic conventionalists, represented by Protagoras, and objectivistic naturalists, represented by Callicles. At first glance, it seems that these two groups are symmetrically opposed to each other: conventionalists are the upholders of *nomos* (e.g., *Theaetetus* 167c, 172a–b, 177c–d; *Laws* 714b–c), whereas naturalists are the upholders of *phusis* (e.g., *Gorgias* 482c–6d; *Protagoras* 337c–d; cf. *Laws* 690b–c, 715a). For Plato, however, the laws and customs that the former panders to is already contaminated by the latter's false conception of human nature, and no verbal celebration of traditional morality can conceal the dangerous innovation of turning political virtue into an art of success which only reinforces the prevalence of self-interest (e.g., *Protagoras* 319a). This deep insight into the unity of sophistry explains Plato's deliberate conflation of these two groups of sophists (*Laws* 889d–90a). But what concerns Plato most is the emerging and consolidating collusion between sophistry and the corrupted city: the sophists, in different ways, are simply catering "the passions and appetites of a huge, strong beast," that is, the crowd that make up the city, whereas the latter are the "greatest sophists of all" (*Republic* 492a–3c). In a word, sophistry is like a disease which causes the body to desire nothing but sickening food that nourishes the vicious circle of corruption.

In *Republic*, Plato claims that this disease can be cured only by the medicine of philosophy, combined with the power of political revolution (cf. *Republic* 473c–d and 541a). Through the voice of Socrates, Plato describes the legislative mission to be undertaken by those fully educated philosopher-kings as follows: "And once they have seen the good itself (ιδόντας τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό), they must each be compelled to use it as a pattern (παράδειγματι) for ordering the city, private men, and themselves for the rest of their lives" (*Republic* 540a8–b1). This reveals Plato's eagerness to rearrange political life in accordance with the true nature of justice that can be perfectly realized only in the inner life of the philosopher's soul. This rearrangement is so relentless in applying the philosophic vision of the form of the Good that it is bound to destroy the most fundamental elements of political reality. Compared with Antiphon, Plato's political philosophy teaches a completely different kind of political naturalism, but no less radical.<sup>30</sup>

Aristotle may agree with Plato's diagnosis, but not his prescription. To be

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30. For an interpretation of Plato's political naturalism, see Maguire (1947).

sure, Aristotle is against sophistry as much as Plato is, but he never extends his hostility against sophistry into his attitude towards the city and its *nomos*. From Aristotle's perspective, Plato's vision of the form of the Good to be beheld outside the 'cave' of the city is aloofly above political life, as much as Antiphon's notion of human nature as what is completely free from political normativity is savagely below it. The dignity of the city and its *nomos* is threatened by Plato's separate forms, which are accessible only to god-like philosophers who are unwilling to rule the city, no less than it is by Antiphon's emphasis on the commonality, rather than the difference, between human beings and beasts.<sup>31</sup> Political life is for neither gods nor beasts, says Aristotle, but human beings as such (*Pol.* 1253a27–29).

We have seen that Aristotle takes pains to defend the primacy of the city for the realization of the human good through the Priority Argument, the very argument that holds his ethics and politics together as a unified whole. After the Priority Argument, Aristotle goes on to emphasize the merit of the legislator and argue for the necessity of law and justice for the fulfillment and perfection of human nature (*Pol.* 1253a29–39). This further argument invokes the first sub-thesis of the Priority Thesis (i.e., form is ontologically prior to preexisting matter), and argues that without the form of political life provided by the city, no one can *become* a human being in the fullest sense. Aristotle's whole defense of the city in *Politics* I 2 therefore shares the rationale of what I have called *political hylomorphism*, since it invokes all the three sub-theses of the Priority Thesis, which is the core doctrine of Aristotle's hylomorphism. Political hylomorphism is Aristotle's middle path between the radical political naturalisms of Antiphon and Plato. Against Antiphon, and the sophistic naturalism he represents, Aristotle contends that human nature should be viewed as the matter that contains potentialities towards the form of political life which can be provided only by the city. Against Plato, who postulates the separate form of the Good contemplated by the philosopher as the eternal pattern for ideal legislation, Aristotle views the regime of the city as the immanent form of political life that possesses its own dignity and authority.

However, Aristotle's defense of the city does not lead to conventionalism, for he is fully aware of the fact that not every regime is correct, not every law is good, and not every city cares about virtue and moral education. When Aristotle says that the city exists for the sake of good life, he does not necessarily mean good life *in the correct sense*, since he recognizes that different regimes have different conceptions of happiness (*Pol.* 1283a16–22, 1294a10–11, 1328a35–b2; cf. *NE* 1131a27–29). Nonetheless, he claims that "the city truly and not verbally so

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31. The substantive contrast and structural similarity between Plato's and Antiphon's (and in general, the sophists') political teachings are accurately captured by Guthrie (1971: 130).

called must make virtue its care," and that the deviated regimes are "against nature" (*Pol.* 1280b6–8, 1287b36–41). Aristotle, therefore, is no less a naturalist than Antiphon and Plato; the difference between him and them is that he insists on the interpenetration of *phusis* and *nomos* and regards the latter as the realization of the former, in the way that form is the realization of matter. For Aristotle, political philosophy should neither liberate bare human nature from political normativity nor revolutionize political life according to the philosophic notion of natural justice, but should provide practical guidance for the political fulfillment and perfection of human nature. Aristotle's political hylomorphism is a form of political naturalism that is moderate, as moderation is the spirit of hylomorphism.

## Abbreviations

*NE* = *Nicomachean Ethics*.

*EE* = *Eudemian Ethics*.

*MM* = *Magna Moralia*.

*Pol.* = *Politics*.

*Phys.* = *Physics*.

*Meta.* = *Metaphysics*.

*DA* = *De anima*.

*Cate.* = *Categories*.

*Top.* = *Topics*.

*Mete.* = *Meteorology*.

*DK* = Diels, Hermann Alexander and Walther Kranz (Eds.) (1952). *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (6th ed.). Weidmann.

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