SUBSTANTIAL CITY: REFLECTIONS ON ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS*

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Abstract: Minimally, Aristotle's account of the 'city' (*polis*) is isomorphic with his metaphysical doctrine of 'substance' (*ousia*) and teleological conception of nature. Maximally, his political theory depends on it. Part I explains what this means. Part II discusses the significant consequences the notion of a 'substantial city' has for Aristotle's political theory. Part III suggests how this notion can be deployed to address the notorious question of whether the *Politics* forms a unified whole, or whether Books 4, 5 and 6 — the 'realist' or empirical books — simply cannot be reconciled with Books 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8, the more 'idealist' or even 'Platonist' side of the work.

Minimally, Aristotle's account of the 'city' (*polis*) is isomorphic with his metaphysical doctrine of substance (*ousia*) and teleological conception of nature. Maximally, his political theory depends on it. Part I explains what this means. Part II discusses the significant consequences the notion of a 'substantial city' has for Aristotle's political theory. Part III suggests how this notion can be deployed to address the notorious question of whether the *Politics* forms a unified whole, or whether Books 4, 5 and 6 — the 'realist' or empirical books — simply cannot be reconciled with Books 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8, the more 'idealist' or even 'Platonist' side of the work.

I

The city, Aristotle tells us in Book 3 of the *Politics*, is a 'multitude of citizens' (1274b41).[2] This definition is amplified a few lines later: 'the city is a multitude of [citizens] that is adequate with respect to the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) of life' (1275b20–21). The second formulation points back to Aristotle's sketch (in Book 1) of the city's genesis. From the original coupling of male and female, through the development of the 'household' and the 'village' (the union of a multitude of households) — both of which are primitive communities that are for the sake of the preservation of life — the city emerges as 'a complete community (*koinonia teleios*) composed of many villages that has, so to speak, reached the full limit of self-sufficiency. It comes into being for the sake of living, but is for the sake of living well. Therefore, every city is natural, if the primitive communities are natural. For it is the end (*telos*) of these, and nature is *telos*' (1252b27–33).

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[2] My Greek text is W.D. Ross's edition of Aristotle's *Politics* (Oxford, 1988). Unless noted otherwise translations are my own.

While the household is for the sake of meeting the 'daily needs' (1252b13) and the village is for the sake of meeting a long-range set of 'nondaily' (1252b16) but still largely biological needs, the city, which is 'the most authoritative' (*kuriōtatē*: 1252a5) community of all and is composed of these simpler communities, is required for citizens to live an excellent and fully human life. Unlike the household and village it is 'self-sufficient'; by itself a city makes it possible for citizens to live a life of virtue.

Note, however, that the phrase 'so to speak' (*hōs epos eipein*) qualifies the ascription of 'self-sufficiency' to the city. This is why: no actual city can be literally or completely self-sufficient, for it must interact with and at times depend upon its neighbours. Cities typically import and export goods, enter into treaties, join alliances, go to war and so on. Even though cities are legally self-sufficient — they are, to use an anachronistic term, 'sovereign' entities — they cannot be self-sufficient in every way. As such, 'self-sufficiency' in this context functions both descriptively and normatively. The latter sense is familiar from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For example, in Book 1.7 Aristotle states that 'the final (*teleion*: 1097b8) good seems to be self-sufficient . . . and we define the self-sufficient as that which by itself makes life choiceworthy and in need of nothing' (1097b15).[3] He then argues that as a consequence a life devoted to the attainment of honour cannot be best or happiest. 'For it seems to depend more on those who do the honouring than on the one being honoured, and we intuit that the good belongs to [the happy man] and is hard to take away from him' (1095b25). This normative sense of self-sufficiency, as will be shown below, resonates throughout the entirety of Aristotle's *Politics*.

The city is a multitude of citizens forming a community that is, in the senses articulated above, self-sufficient. As such, it is the 'most complete' community in which human beings participate. But calling the city a 'multitude' only partially describes it. For it is better characterized as a 'whole' (*holon*: 1253a20) of which citizens are parts.[4] Aristotle defines 'whole' in the *Metaphysics* as 'that from which is absent none of the parts of which it is said by nature to be a whole' (1023b26). This definition nears that of the 'all' or the 'sum' (*pan*). But there is a difference: in the case of an 'all' the position or order of the parts is irrelevant. For example, all the letters of BAT are B, A, T. But these can be combined to form TAB as well as BAT. 'If position does make a difference, then it is a whole' (*Metaph.* 1024a1–3). Alternatively formulated,

[3] This is one of several reasons why Aristotle argues that the theoretical life is best. As he puts it: 'and what is called "self-sufficiency" would fit best the theoretical life' (1177a27). The concept of self-sufficiency takes on a life of its own in the works of Epicurean, Cynic and Stoic philosophers. See A. Long, *From Epicurus to Epictetus* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 11, 17, 29 and 78.

[4] Not all 'parts' of the city are citizens. As Aristotle puts it, 'it is not the case that all of those without whom there would be no city are citizens' (1278a3). There are also slaves, and in some cases manual workers are excluded from citizenship.

the whole is that 'which has a beginning middle, and end (*telos*)' (*Poetics* 1450b27). Like BAT it is a singular, orderly or in-formed unity of parts.

This definition sheds important light on the description of the city as a 'complete community'. As 'that from which nothing is absent' a whole is a complete (*teleion*) unity of parts. Indeed, 'the whole and the complete are either entirely the same or their natures are akin. For nothing is complete unless it has a *telos*. And a *telos* is a limit' (*Physics* 207a15). A mature adult is whole because she is a complete set of parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of her entire being. *Teleion*, however, can also be translated as 'perfect', which derives from the Latin, *perficere*, 'to achieve, accomplish, bring to an end'. This word, in both English and Greek, has normative connotations. What is 'perfect' is not only 'that from which nothing is absent', but it is also maximally good and 'cannot be exceeded in its kind. For example, a perfect doctor or a flutist are those who, according to the form of the excellence that belongs to them, lack nothing' (*Metaph.* 1021b17–18). The city, then, as the 'complete' or 'perfect' community is also the 'best' (*beltiston: Pol.*.1253a1). It is ontologically superior, or 'prior', to the households and individuals comprising it.

The source of the city's wholeness is not immediately obvious. Aristotle addresses this issue in Book 3.3 of the *Politics* when he tackles the 'puzzle' of the city's self-identity by asking, how can one 'properly say that a city is the same?' (1276a18). Simply having geographical limits does not do the job, for a village may have these. So too did Babylon, for it was entirely surrounded by its walls. Nonetheless it was too big and internally disorganized to be counted as a genuine whole. Probably relying on Herodotus, Aristotle reports that 'its capture [by the Persians] was not perceived in a certain part of the city for three days' (1276a30).[5] The use of 'perceive' is telling here and is a reminder that Aristotle's paradigm for wholeness is the organic unity of an animal: (His examples in the *Metaphysics* passage cited above are 'a man, a horse, and god, all of which are animals' (1023b32).) That one part of Babylon did not feel the pain of another suggests why it was not a real *polis*. Its parts were insufficiently interconnected and mutually interactive. It was not a whole but only an amorphous collection of 'people' (*ethnos*). In a similar fashion, even if a population were entirely homogeneous in racial 'type' (*genos*: 1276a35) it would not qualify as a city. For the political community requires a higher level of internal organization. It must be the same as itself even as it undergoes, through the passage of time, significant material changes (in population, territory and so on). As a result, it requires a unifying principle.

[5] Herodotus I.191 reports on the capture of Babylon by Cyrus: 'The Babylonians themselves say that owing to the great size of the city the outskirts were captured without the people in the centre knowing anything about it; there was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until they learned the news the hard way', trans. A. de Sélincourt (New York, 1983).

Before examining what this is, consider the following as the metaphysical context in which Aristotle's solution to this puzzle is best understood.

> That which is composed (*suntheton*) of something *is* in such a way that the whole is a unity; it is not like a heap but like a syllable. For the syllable is not the letters, and so '*ba*' is not the same as '*b*' and '*a*', nor is the flesh the same as earth and fire; for after distintegration the flesh and the syllable no longer exist, but their elements, which are the letters for the latter and fire and earth for the former, do exist. The syllable, then, is not only its letters (the vowel and the consonant) but something else/other (*heteron ti*), and flesh is not only fire and earth or the hot and the cold but something else/other. If, further, this 'something else/other' must also be either (1) an element or (2) a composite of elements, then if it is an element (1) the same argument will apply again, for flesh will then be composed of this element and of fire and of earth and of something else yet, and in this way the process will go on to infinity. But if it is composed of elements (2), clearly it is composed not of one element (for we will have the previous case) but of many, so that again the same argument will apply to the result, whether in the case of flesh or of the syllable. It would seem, however, that this [something else/other] is not an element but the cause of this being flesh and that being a syllable. And it is similar in all other cases. *And this is the substance (ousia) of each thing*; for this is the first cause of the being of the thing. Now some objects are not substances, but those that are substances are naturally constituted and this nature — which is not an element but a principle (*archē*) — would appear to be a substance (*Metaph.* 1041b12–31; emphasis added).

In the *Politics* Aristotle describes the city as a 'composite' (*sungkeimenon*: 1274b39), a word closely related to *suntheton*, which is found at *Metaphysics* 1041b12. As mentioned above, the city is neither an 'all' nor a 'heap' but a 'whole', and so it is not reducible to an enumeration of its elements. Instead, it requires 'something else or other' that causes the citizenry to be a whole. The general or metaphysical answer to the question of what causes the wholeness of any composite is 'substance' construed as 'principle' (*archē*). This latter word is semantically loaded. Its base meaning is 'beginning', 'origin' or 'what is first', but it also comes to mean 'power', 'rule', 'authority' or 'political office'. The cause of a composite being's unity, then, is its (metaphysical) ruler. Alternatively, the cause of a city's unity is its substance, best understood as its form.

Even if they have not been fully explained, the (metaphysical) pieces are now in place to explain why, unlike Babylon, the city is not a mere 'heap' and to disclose the cause of its self-identity. It is its 'form of government' (*politeia*; also translated as 'constitution', 'regime' or 'polity'.) It is not, Aristotle tells us, 'by means of walls' (1276a26) or of population stock that a city remains identical to itself. 'For a city is a certain kind of community: a community of citizens of a form of government' (1276b1–2), which in turn is 'a certain ordering of those who live in the city' (1274b36). More specifically,

the 'form of government is an ordering of the city and of all the offices (*archōn*) of the city, especially of the one that is most authoritative. In every case the governing body (*politeuma*) of the city is authoritative, and the form of government is the governing body' (1278b9–11).

Politeuma can also be rendered as 'the ruling class or government of the city' for it 'denotes that individual man or that body of men, in whose name the state is governed, and hence the sovereign (*kurios*)'.[6] The *politeia*, then, is the form, organization or structure of the city's governance. It can be divided into various branches (legislative, executive, judicial, military) and it determines who qualifies as a citizen and what sort of education they will receive. It is, as Aristotle later puts it when he comes close to making explicit the metaphysical-biological underpinning of his political theory, 'the way of life (*bios*) of the city' (1295b1). Or as Isocrates formulates the same point, 'nothing other than *politeia* is the soul of the city'.[7] This metaphor is thoroughly Aristotelian because it suggests an analogy: as the form of government is to the city, so the 'soul' is to an animal. An organism undergoes continual metabolic processes that result in the transformation of its entire cellular make-up within a short period of time. Nonetheless, thanks to the causal efficacy of its 'substance' — namely, its *psuchē*, its 'life-force' or 'soul', which Aristotle identifies as its form — it remains identical to itself throughout these continuous changes (see *De Anima* 2.1–2). Analogously, the citizens that constitute a city are in continual change as they are born, grow, die and are replaced, but throughout these transformations the city can properly be said to be the same as itself for it too has a unifying principle: its form of government. This is why the city is best construed as 'substantial'.

A brief digression is needed since the preceding statement — indeed, the title of this article — must be clarified.[8] Is the 'substantial city' an actual substance or is it like one? There seems to be an immediately good reason to reject the first option. As already suggested, the paradigm of a (composite) Aristotelian substance is the organically unified animal, for it has the salient features of ontological independence and hylomorphic unity.[9] Because a city is a community of such animals it surely is not a substance in this primary sense. So, for example, if a part of an animal, say the eye, were separated from

[6] F. Susemihl and R. Hicks, *The Politics of Aristotle* (New York, 1976).

[7] Isocrates, *Areopagatiticus* §14. The sentiments throughout this treatise, which was probably written in 355 BC, are often strikingly Aristotelian. See, for example, what Isocrates says about 'proportional equality' in §21, virtue and habit in §40, and education in §43.

[8] I owe this section to the urging of the referee who commented on this article.

[9] As Furth puts it: 'actual Aristotelean substances are pre-eminently the biological objects, living things — which means in practice the higher animals, metazoans, the ones he could see'. M. Furth, *Substance, Form and Psyche: An Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 68. No wonder, then, that animals begin Aristotle's list of substances at *Metaphysics* 1028b9.

the body it would be no more than a chunk of decomposing matter and no longer an eye 'except in name' (*De Anima* 412b21).[10] By contrast, a citizen separated from a city does seem to retain his ontological status as a human being. A city thus appears to lack the requisite level of unity characteristic of a genuine substance. In fact, Aristotle seems to make precisely this point in his criticism of Plato's *Republic*. The city that Socrates there proposes, in which 'children, women and possessions' (1261a7) are held in common and 'everyone says mine or not-mine at the same time' (1261b18), is excessively unified. As a result it 'comes to be more of a household than a city, and more of an individual human being than a household' (1261a17–19).[11]

Aristotle, however, is not entirely clear on this point for he also says this: because 'human being is by nature a political animal he who is without a city (*apolis*) on account of his nature and not merely through misfortune is either a lowly sort or more than human' (1253a2–4). A man 'incapable of participating in the community . . . is not a part of the city, and so is either a beast or a god' (1253a28–29). Someone not a member of a *polis*, someone separated from the whole of which he is a proper part, is not really, or at least not fully, human.[12] On this account a citizen is more like an eye and so a city can make a stronger claim to organic wholeness and therefore to substantiality. If so, however, it becomes difficult to comprehend who it is that actually lives in villages or non-cities like Babylon.

Perhaps, then, the city is a substance but, to borrow the language of the *Categories*, not in the 'authoritative and primary sense' — exemplified by 'a human being or a horse' — but in a 'secondary' sense; that is, it is more like a species or genus than an actual, composite particular (see 2a11–15). This comparison cannot be strict for the city, after all, is a particular not a universal.[13] Nonetheless, perhaps the distinction in the *Categories* suggests that the very concept of a substance is somewhat flexible. It might, for example, extend so far as to embrace artefacts. This possibility, which is controversial, is relevant because although Aristotle clearly asserts that the city is natural he also seems to grant it some degree of artefactual status when he says that 'he who first established (*sustēsas*) the city was the cause of the greatest goods' (1253a30–31).

The remarks above suggest that determining the precise ontological status of the city would require a full delineation of Aristotle's criteria for being a substance, a task far beyond the reach of this article. Fortunately, this is not

[10] Aristotle makes the same point about the foot and hand at *Politics* 1253a21–22.

[11] Again, my referee rightly urged me to address this issue.

[12] Ambiguity abounds. A 'lowly (*phaulos*) sort' is still human. Also, there are some human beings, namely those described in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7–8 and *Politics* 7.2 who are separated from the city and, although they are men, seem to be more like gods.

[13] Of course, most scholars think that Aristotle's views on primary and secondary substance are different in the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*.

required for the present purpose, for it is unmistakable that he ascribes features of a substance to the city: it is natural, an in-formed unity of parts and a whole that retains its identity over time even as those parts are changing. Again, whether these features are sufficient to qualify it as an actual substance remains unclear. As a result, the phrase 'substantial city' as used here does not imply a definitive answer to this question and the argument of this article can remain neutral on it. Minimally, the city is much like a substance: it may, however, be more than that. Parts II and III below will continue to explore this question as well as show that conceiving of it as being substantial, even in an attenuated sense, pays useful dividends in grappling with the *Politics*.

II

What follows are two examples of consequences that follow from attributing substantiality to the city. First, briefly consider Aristotle's definition of the citizen. In the fullest sense he 'is defined by nothing other than participating in decision and ruling' (*archēs*: 1275a24); he is engaged in the governance of the city. This definition emerges from the organic model of wholeness Aristotle employs to articulate the nature of the city. A part that does not contribute to the well-functioning of the whole is not really a part. Concomitantly, failure to participate in ruling is failure to be a citizen. In addition, however, a citizen must also subordinate himself to the dictates of the greater community. After all, 'the city is prior by nature to the household and to each of us as individuals. For the whole is necessarily prior to the part' (1253a19–20). Therefore, 'the good citizen must know how to and be able both to be ruled and to rule, and this is the excellence of the citizen' (1277b13–15).

This strand in Aristotle's political theory is, broadly speaking, civic-republican at least in the sense that, as Michael Sandel puts it, 'liberty depends on sharing in self-government'. Furthermore, 'to share in self-rule . . . requires that citizens possess, or come to acquire, certain qualities of character, or civic virtues . . . The Republican conception of freedom . . . requires a formative politics, a politics that cultivate in citizens the qualities of character self-government requires'.[14] In Aristotelian terms, the primary tasks of civic education include inculcating in the citizens 'love (*philia*) of the established form of government, then a great capacity for doing the work of political rule, and third virtue and justice that is appropriate for that particular form of government' (1309a34–36). More succinctly, 'by habituating the citizens lawgivers make them good' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b3–4). This statement, anathema to a liberal sensibility and its appraisal of autonomy — but deeply attractive to neo-Aristotelians like Sandel — coincides with a conception of the city as a substantial whole that is prior to and thus responsible for its parts.

[14] M. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), pp. 5–6.

The second example is more central to the thesis of this article. The notion of the substantial city sheds useful light on Book 7, Aristotle's discussion of the 'ideal' city, the one for which we might 'pray' (see 1325b36).[15] Consider the following features it has. Most important, it is moderately sized and 'resolutely local' (a phrase explicated in Part II below). Instead of succumbing to the temptation of expansionism that infects most other forms of government it celebrates its own self-sufficiency (understood in its normative sense). Simply put, this city must be big enough to 'have everything and need nothing' (1326b30) and yet also be wary of becoming too big. For a too-big city cannot, Aristotle thinks, be well governed; that is, ruled by law (1332a25). Furthermore, 'too many people will lead to more poverty, which in turn leads to instability' (1265b12) or factionalism, the disease that threatens all cities.[16] Finally and for the reasons discussed in Part I above, a too-big city would no longer be able to forge the bonds of mutually dependent interaction that characterizes an organic whole.

Like a substance, the ideal city is ontologically separate; that is, it is independent and self-contained. For example, rather than expanding its trading economy or acting on the temptation to become extremely wealthy and continually 'to have more' (*pleonexia*: 1327a31) it imports only necessities unavailable at home and exports only its surplus goods. Unlike regimes such as Sparta and Crete it does not have imperial ambitions and so its army is solely for the purpose of protecting its borders, its well-defined limits (1333b40). It has a navy, which in antiquity required a large number of sailors (1327b7) to man the oars, but maintains it only 'up to that number' (1327a42) required for defence. To gauge the size of Aristotle's ideal city consider this: in order for a regime to qualify as excellent it must organize itself by properly distributing the responsibilities for judging and ruling. To do this well citizens, those who 'share in decision and rule', must recognize one another and 'know what sort of person each other is' (1326b15). The ideal city now sounds like a small town in which gossip flows freely and keeps the citizens well informed of each other's characters and actions.

Even if it is not huge the city cannot be too small either. Like a work of art it must be beautiful and fine, qualities it cannot attain without having sufficient magnitude. Nonetheless, a city does not become great 'by number' but by its 'capacity' (1326a12), by what it can do. Aristotle offers the following comparison (which reinforces the conclusions of Part I above): 'as is the case with animals, plants and tools, for a city there is a certain proper measure. For each of these will not achieve its own potentiality if it is too small or too big'

[15] For a discussion of the phrase *kat'euchēn* see R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 2002), who renders the phrase 'a city that is the most one could hope or pray for' (p. 192).

[16] Aristotle assumes that the poor will always be many: 'the rich are everywhere few and the poor many' (1279b37–38).

(1326b35–38). A ship only a few inches wide or ten miles long cannot do what a ship is meant to do — namely, sail the seas and transport cargo and men — and so is not really a ship. Similarly, living beings are big enough when they have matured, attained their proper form, and have actualized those capacities such that they can perform those functions intrinsic to their species. When it comes to politics, a city is big enough when it is self-sufficient and, most important, able to generate the conditions that allow its citizens, or at least some of them, to live excellent lives that fulfil their natures as human and political beings.

To reformulate this point: the best city, Aristotle says, must be of such a size as to afford a 'synoptic' view of itself; it must be 'easily seen as a whole' (*eusunopton*: 1327a2). It has a 'form', an *eidos* (derived from the verb 'to see'). Because it has visible, intelligible, reachable borders it can be traversed by an individual and is therefore small enough to allow citizens to participate in ruling. Like an organism its dynamically interacting and mutually enabling parts are unified by its *archē*, its ruling principle; its form of government. Like a substance, it is a mode of being characterized by ontological independence. To elaborate: a substance does not depend on any other category for its being. By contrast, a quality (such as green) depends on there being a substance (such as a tree) in which it inheres. Similarly, the ideal city is self-sufficient and so resolutely remains within its political borders and economic limits. It is, or at least it aspires to be, 'substantial'. By contrast, expansionist regimes are infected by metaphysical confusion: they elevate the category of quantity over that of substance, and thus the infinite over the finite. For them, more is better and as a consequence they are doomed to catastrophe.[17]

Because it is a defined or determinate being, the ideal city, the one for which we might reasonably pray, is 'complete' or 'perfect'. Again, it is resolutely local for it refuses to reach beyond its borders in order to actualize itself. Nonetheless, it can be every bit as active — in fact, even more so — than a city that is dedicated to expansion. As Aristotle puts it, 'a single city, the one which is governed in manifest fineness, could be happy with respect to itself (*kath' heautēn*), if it is possible for a city to live by itself (*kath' heautēn*) using decent laws. Its form of government would not be directed towards war or domination of its enemies' (1325a1–4).

A city can and therefore should aim to function 'with respect to itself' (*kath' heautēn*). In the *Metaphysics* this phrase refers to 'the essence of a being (1022a26); to its substance. A city, then, should aspire to become substantial, self-contained, an autotelic unity of parts. To argue that this is in fact possible Aristotle offers the following: 'For many communities are with respect to each other in their political parts. And in a similar vein this condition can be achieved by a single human being. For [if this were not so] then

[17] This paragraph is borrowed from D. Roochnik, 'Aristotle's Defense of the Theoretical Life: Comments on *Politics* VII', *Review of Metaphysics*, 61 (2008), pp. 711–35.

god could not be in a leisurely and fine condition nor could the whole cosmos (*kosmos*), because they have no external actions in addition to those that belong to themselves' (1325b26–30).

To return to the question with which Part I ended, namely whether the city is or is like an actual substance, the passage just cited certainly leans towards the former. Just as the parts of a single human being act with respect to themselves — that is, contribute to the well-being of the whole of which they are parts — so too does the entire cosmos. Perhaps, then, the ideal city is a substance in the same sense as is the cosmos. It contains within itself other substances but nonetheless functions as an independent ontological unit. Such, at least, is the aspiration expressed in Book 7.

To reformulate this point by again borrowing language from the *Metaphysics*, the ideal city should aim to be more like an *energeia* than a *kinēsis*. The latter is a motion or process that advances towards an end (*telos*) external to itself. An example is dieting for the sake of being thin. While in the process of losing weight and disciplining oneself to eat less, one has not yet attained the goal for which he strives. But when the target number of pounds has been lost, the dieting can cease. Similarly with learning, walking and building. I study arithmetic in order to know it. Once I succeed, the learning stops. I walk in order to get to the store. When I get there I come to a halt. When the house is complete, I stop building. These are 'motions and they are incomplete' (*ateleis*: 1048b30).[18] By contrast, seeing, thinking, living well and being happy are *energeiai*. Each is 'complete' and an end in itself.

These metaphysical notions can now be translated into political terms. At least when they are not being invaded by foreign armies, the citizens of the ideal city will concentrate only on the excellent functioning of their own community. As a consequence, they will live in peace with as little faction and as much leisure, a necessary condition for the attainment of the highest virtues, as possible. This city embodies the maxim that 'war must be for the sake of peace, lack of leisure (*ascholia*) for the sake of leisure (*scholē*), and the necessary and useful things for the sake of the beautiful ones' (1333a35–36). The ideal city, like a fully actualized substance, has reached the *telos* of political life. Its citizens engage in both politics and philosophy, the best achievements available to the human race, and so it has no need to look beyond its own borders.[19]

[18] In the *Physics*, *kinēsis* is initially defined as 'the actuality (*entelèchеia*) of what is potentially, insofar as it is such' (201a11), a formulation which Aristotle subsequently modifies when he states that '*kinēsis* seems to be actuality (*energeia*) but it is incomplete' (*atelēs*: 201b31–32). For the purpose of this article no distinction needs to be made between *entelecheia* and *energeia*.

[19] Actually, it is far from clear to what extent the citizens of the ideal city, or how many of them, will be philosophers.

III

Scholars have long debated the order, and even the unity, of the eight extant books of Aristotle's *Politics*. At least since Jaeger (1923), they have frequently been tempted to assign Books 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 to a younger, more Platonic Aristotle, while attributing Books 4 and 5 to the mature — that is, empirically minded and scientific — stage of his work.[20] This article cannot seriously address the issue of Aristotle's putative philosophical development, but by focusing on the notion of the substantial city it can at least suggest ways in which to integrate Books 4 and 5 into the larger project and thereby avoid invoking a chronological hypothesis to explain the work's unity.

Book 5, which addresses the causal mechanisms of regime change and *stasis*, often translated as 'faction' or 'conflict', is the key to understanding this claim.[21] To begin Aristotle says, 'we must investigate the sources of change in forms of government . . . what things destroy each form of government; from what sort and into what sort they principally change' (1301a21–23). By knowing this, one would furthermore know both 'the general ways to preserve forms of government' and 'the means by which each form of government is principally preserved' (1301a25). This last clause seems to promise a distinctly value-neutral analysis, for knowledge of how to preserve regimes would apparently be useful to all rulers, even the most corrupt. So, for example, Aristotle seems to offer mechanical or 'Machiavellian' advice to a tyrant who desires to retain (efficiently) his despotic rule.[22] He should, for example, 'perform or seem to perform everything else in a noble, kingly fashion' (1314a38). This impression of value-neutrality, however, is misleading. For as is true of Books 1, 2, 3 and 7, Book 5 is a thoroughly teleological work and so its account of what-is also includes what-should-be. In other words, it is consistent with the metaphysical background theory discussed in Part I above. A substance, best exemplified for Aristotle by an organism, is complete or a whole. It has a form, but as he says in the *Physics* (198a25), form is purpose; formal and final causality are one and the same.

This coalescence of formal, efficient and final causality, this manifestation of teleology at work in the political realm, is best seen through the lens of 'proportional equality', which Aristotle identifies in his terse account of the genesis of political diversity: 'many forms of government (*politeiai*) have come into being because, though everyone agrees about justice — that is to say, proportional equality (*to kat' analogian ison*) — they are mistaken about

[20] See, for example, P. Pellegrin, 'On the "Platonic" Part of Aristotle's *Politics*', in *Aristotle's Philosophical Development*, ed. W. Wians (Lanham, 1996), p. 347.

[21] See K. Kalimtzis, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease: An Inquiry into Stasis* (Albany, 2000), pp. 3–13, for a thorough discussion of what, from a historical perpsective, *stasis* means.

[22] 'Machiavellian' here simply means 'value-neutral' and does not refer to Machiavelli's own complex teachings.

it' (1301a26–29). Note this startling assertion: 'everyone' agrees that justice (*to dikaion*) is a kind of equality. Similarly, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says 'that the just is equality seems, without argument, true to everyone' (1131a13–14). Earlier in the *Politics* he put the point this way: 'it seems that justice is equality (*ison*), and it is' (1280a11).

Despite the fact that everyone agrees as to what justice is, 'they' are mistaken about it. But who is the 'they'? The grammar of the sentence suggests it might be 'everyone' (*pantōn*). If so, then is Aristotle saying that everyone both agrees and is mistaken at the same time? Whatever the answer — and this point will be discussed shortly — the sort of mistake he has in mind is revealed in the next sentence:

> For democracy (*dēmos*) arose from those who are equal in some respect thinking themselves to be unqualifiedly (*haplōs*) equal; for because they are equally free, they think that they are unqualifiedly equal. Oligarchy, on the other hand, arose from those who are unequal in some respect taking themselves to be wholly unequal; for being unequal in property, they take themselves to be unqualifiedly unequal. The result is that the former claim to merit an equal share of everything, on the grounds that they are all equal, whereas the latter, being unequal, seek to get more (*pleonektein*) (1301a28–35).[23]

As explained in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (in the context of 'distributive justice'), proportional equality is a relationship comprised of four terms: two people and two items (*pragmata*: 1131a20). If it is achieved, 'there will be the same equality between the people involved and the items involved, If the people are not equal, they will not have equal shares of these items' (1131a20–22). In other words, the equality at stake here is not uniform or numerical. Instead, it is determined 'according to worth' (*kat' axian*: 1131a26). As a result, while 'justice seems to be equality, and it is, it is not for everyone, only for equals' (1280a10).

To illustrate by an example: I am teaching a class in which there are five possible grades. To grade 'equally' — or to use the more natural English word (favoured by Ostwald in his translation) 'fairly' — I must award these grades in accord with what students actually earned.[24] Students who put in 120 hours of excellent work during the semester receive an 'A', whose numerical value is 4. Those who did 90 hours of good work get 'Bs', whose numerical value is 3. Those with 60 mediocre hours under their belt got Cs, valued at 2. In each case, the proportion of hours to grade-point is 30 to 1. Their grades were not the same, but the distribution was just. The students got what they deserved.[25]

[23] Translations in this section come from C. Reeve, *Aristotle's Politics* (Indianapolis, 1998).

[24] M. Ostwald, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (New York, 1962).

[25] Obviously it is the quality and not simply the number of hours of work that a student puts in that determines the grade.

Analogously, in a political regime there are offices and positions of power to distribute. Justice on this account demands not that every citizen participate equally but only that each gets what he deserves.

If in my classroom I were to give all students who are six-feet tall or taller an 'A', the distribution would obviously not have been made on the basis of 'worth' and so would be unjust.[26] Nonetheless, it would have been made on the basis of a principle. For whatever corrupt reason I have determined that students who are 'unequal' or superior in one way — namely, height — are deserving of the superior grade. However misguided, I still operate under the auspices of some conception of proportional equality, and hence justice, to manage my classroom. An analogous situation would obtain in an extreme oligarchy in which the rich receive a vast share of political power and advantage simply because of their wealth. While they are rightly counted as unequal because they are superior in one way, they are not superior in every way or the politically appropriate way. Therefore, an extreme oligarchy is 'mistaken'. While it embodies a principle of justice, namely its own version of proportional equality, it does so badly. In a parallel situation, all citizens in a democracy are counted as equally free. This can, but should not, be interpreted to mean that all citizens should share equal portions of political power and advantage. For they are equal only in one sense but not in an 'unqualifiedly' or politically appropriate sense.

The extraordinary consequence of Aristotle's assertions here is that all regimes, and even my hypothetical classroom, both conceive of themselves as being and in some attenuated sense actually are just. As he puts it, 'all these regimes [democracy and oligarchy] possess justice of a sort, then, although unqualifiedly speaking they are mistaken' (1301a36). It is possible to be just and wrong at the same time.[27]

In 'mistaken' political communities there will be 'conflict', 'revolution' or *stasis*. In an extreme oligarchy, in which the rich are granted unfair privilege, the poor will eventually protest and they will do so in the name of equality. As Aristotle puts it, 'faction is everywhere due to inequality, when unequals do not receive proportionately unequal things . . . For people generally engage in faction in pursuit of equality' (1301b27–29). He continues: 'for those who desire equality start faction when they believe they are getting less, even though they are the equal of those who are getting more; whereas those who desire inequality (that is to say, superiority) do so when they believe that, though they are unequal, they are not getting more but the same or less. Sometimes these desires are just, sometimes unjust' (1302a24–29).

All faction begins with a desire for justice understood as proportional equality. The poor citizens of an oligarchical city demand to be treated

[26] Aristotle himself discusses this possibility of distribution by height in Book 3.12.

[27] To reinforce this point the referee pointed out that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that 'everything lawful (*panta nomima*) is in a way just' (1129b12).

according to their worth. They demand to get what they think they deserve. In oligarchical regimes 'the many start faction on the grounds that they are treated unjustly because they do not participate equally, in spite of being equal. In democracies the notables do so because they do participate equally, in spite of not being equal' (1303b3–6).

The Greek word translated above as 'desire' (at 1302a29) is *oregesthai*, the verbal form of *orexis*, which is identified as the fundamental source of all animal motion at *De Anima* Book 3.10. Because of this distinctly physiological connotation it is perhaps better translated as 'urge' than as desire. Its appearance in the passage cited above thus suggests that Aristotle is offering, on a political level, a naturalized version of an old Socratic principle: all human beings desire the good. Recall that a 'regime' (*politeia*) is 'a certain arrangement (*taxis*) of those who inhabit the city' (1274b37). The city is 'among the things that exist by nature', 'human being is by nature a political animal' (1253a3), and the *politeia* or 'form of government' is the ordering principle that unifies a multitude of citizens into a natural, unified being; into the substantial city. But under the auspices of Aristotelian teleology, a form is also a *telos*. The *telos* of the city is justice, a goal towards which all cities, by virtue of their adherence to some principle of proportional equality, no matter how distorted, are directed. The political realm, conceived as a stratum of the natural world, is thus teleologically driven. 'Everyone' agrees that justice is proportional equality and all regimes, even the mistaken ones, express an urge for such equality.

This sort of political-naturalism is easily detected in the following passage: 'changes also occur in regimes because of disproportionate (*para to analogon*) growth. For just as a body is composed of parts that must grow in proportion if balance (*summetria*) is to be maintained . . . so a city is composed of parts, one of which often grows without being noticed. For example, the multitude of the poor in democracies or polities' (1302b35–40).

Stasis is caused by imbalance; and just as the immune system of a healthy animal naturally tends to restore balance to the organism so too do political regimes, thoroughly natural as they are, tend towards balance. Forces internal to, say, an extreme oligarchy, in which vast numbers are impoverished and disenfranchised, will be mobilized to restore balance. This is a natural response, a natural motion. Book 5 of the *Politics*, then, is not merely a value-neutral analysis of the casual mechanisms behind regime change and thereby a guidebook to the retention of political power.

To reinforce this point by another example, consider the following: 'we should notice that not only some aristocracies but also some oligarchies survive, not because their constitutions are secure but because those in office treat well (*eu chrēsthai*) both those outside the regime and those in the governing class. They do this by not being unjust to the nonparticipants and by bringing their leading men into the regime' (1308a2–7).

This is not Machiavellian advice offered to an oligarch. Instead, it is a diagnosis made by a political-physician-naturalist. In order for an oligarchy to be stable and enduring, and for its wealthy leaders to continue enjoying their positions of power and privilege, they must not allow a *stasis* to threaten their very existence. To prevent the poor from pressing for regime change or a restoration of balance, which they take to be a proper application of proportional equality, they should treat the poor justly. It is in the self-interest of oligarchs to do so.

Two more examples:

> In democracies, the rich should (*dei*) be treated with restraint . . . In an oligarchy, on the other hand, one should take good care of the poor, and distribute offices that yield some gain to them . . . It is beneficial, both in democracy and oligarchy, to give either equality or preference in all other matters to those who participate least in the regime, the rich in a democracy and the poor in an oligarchy (1309a14–30).

> Kingships in particular are preserved by being made more moderate. For the fewer areas over which kings have authority, the longer must their office remain intact. For they themselves become less like masters, more equal in their characters, and less envied by those they rule (1313a19–23).

Finally, consider the following statement: 'the tyrant should refrain from all forms of arrogance' (*hubris*: 1315a14). Once again, the 'should' has both descriptive and prescriptive force. It is, one might say, a 'fact' that in order to preserve his rule the tyrant must not alienate a vast number of his own subjects through public acts of *hubris*. If he does so, *stasis*, in this case revolution, is likely to occur. Consequently, the best way for the tyrant to avoid being overthrown is to become a better ruler and less of a tyrant. As Aristotle puts it, 'one way to preserve a tyranny is to make it more like a kingship' (1314a34). In turn, and as just noted above, the way to preserve a kingship is by making it more moderate.

These prescriptions can now be reformulated and generalized: all regimes 'should' aim to be like the 'polity' (*politeia*), succinctly defined in Book 4.8 as 'a mixture of oligarchy and democracy' (1293b33) and said to be the 'best possible' as well as 'easier and more attainable by all' (1288b37). Again, the force of this 'should' is neither simply empirical and value-neutral nor normative; it is neither Machiavellian-mechanical nor moral. Instead, it is naturalistic and teleological. The polity is the fullest achievement of proportional equality, or justice, attainable in the real world, for it is the proper political integration of the rich few and the many poor. It is the city, understood as a natural being, in its optimal and hence most stable, or healthiest, condition. As such, it is the implicit goal of all *stasis*, of all political life. Recall Aristotle's assertion: 'people generally engage in faction in pursuit of equality' (1301b28). Cities, like all living beings, are in constant motion directed at a *telos*.

Mary Nichols makes just this point: 'All regimes', she says, 'are potentially forms of polity . . . regimes other than polity are relatively unstable due to their partial justice. They are best preserved by moving closer to polity . . . When the statesman studies "how any given regime . . . might be preserved for the longest time" (1288b27–30)' — in other words, when a statesman studies the apparently value-neutral science of politics — 'his task is at the same time improvement'.[28] All regimes tend towards justice understood as proportional equality. Like an individual member of a biological species, a city is an organic whole, a set of dynamically and mutually enabling parts that continually interacts with its environment and strives to actualize its form; to be, in other words, healthy. Like an organism, there is continual risk of imbalance or infection and therefore the consequent need for continual maintenance. Most, perhaps all, cities will fall short of the *telos*. This is because, as Aristotle understands, those citizens who attain power will promote their own interests rather than work on behalf of the common good. As he tersely puts it, people 'judge badly about what concerns themselves' (1280a20). As a result, those who rule will inevitably assign themselves more and more power and prestige, and thereby throw the political balance of their cities out of whack. In an oligarchy, the rich will eventually take more than their fair share and in a democracy the poor will try to disenfranchise the rich. In both cases, the natural response will be *stasis*, the city's urge to re-balance itself. Book 5 of the *Politics*, then, is both an etiology of such political motions — and as such might prove useful to rulers even of corrupt regimes — as well as an expression of their teleology. All regimes, however imperfectly and perhaps without even realizing that they are doing so, strive for justice.[29]

Finally, a suggestion about the unity of Aristotle's *Politics*: the 'polity', which is both outlined and defended in Book 4.8–11 as the finely 'mixed' and best attainable form of government, is the *telos* of ordinary political life. All rulers, therefore, can benefit by studying it and then nudging their own cities, even those that dreadfully implement their own version of proportional equality, towards it. The polity, especially a prosperous one able to generate a substantial middle class, 'is least likely to suffer from faction' (1296a7) and so is most likely to last. Furthermore, on the empirical level, it has the best chance to generate precisely the kinds of conditions described in Book 7. It will be of moderate size, non-expansionist and as self-sufficient as possible. Again Aristotle uses a distinctly metaphysical phrase to make the point: 'a polity that has been well mixed . . . should be preserved through itself (*di' hautēs*) and not through something external' (1295a36). Such a form of government will

[28] M. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics* (Lanham, 1992), pp. 88–9.

[29] Such striving, as my referee suggested I mention, is not deterministic. Indeed, in Book 5.12 Aristotle criticizes Plato for, in effect, making precisely this mistake and too rigidly conceiving of the direction and development of regime change.

be as healthy as any can be. As such, its structures will approximate those that characterize the 'city in prayer'. It will be reasonably peaceful and afford some of its citizens leisure. It will implement the sort of educational programme that is essential in shaping a well-minded citizenry. This is not to say that the regime described in Book 7 is a polity. Indeed, Aristotle is remarkably silent about the actual political constitution of his ideal city. His main concern is to emphasize its self-sufficiency, resolutely local character and ability to afford citizens leisure; in short, its substantiality.

To summarize by means of an analogy: as the polity is to the ideal city, so the body is to the soul. In other words, the polity is the health of the body politic in the real, empirically measurable world. When a city is well-balanced and healthy on that level, when faction is kept to a minimum, it can then aspire to a higher ideal: the sort of self-sufficiency, peace, leisure and consequent pursuit of real virtue discussed in Book 7.

A final formulation: the *telos* of ordinary political life is the polity described in Book 4; and the *telos* of the polity, the guiding ideal that needs to be studied by its rulers, is the city according to prayer of Book 7. Aristotle's *Politics*, then, is a unified work. The basis of that unity is the notion of city as substance, as an organic whole that is best comprehended by means of the teleology that governs the natural world.

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