Aristotle on Partnerships: Understanding the Friendless City
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All of whom, in their own way, are present in this work.
The purpose of this thesis is to move towards an understanding of Aristotle’s understanding of nature. This attempt will focus on the relation of humans to nature; it will focus on nature as a potential standard for action. If nature provides a standard for action, then this standard will reveal the best life and thus the best relation (and explain why it is best). An examination of nature will therefore require an examination of types of lives, or types of human relations. The form of these relations provides an implicit answer to what nature is, or what is by nature good. To understand nature, we must know how humans relate to nature, how humans know nature. Essential to understanding what Aristotle speaks of when talking about nature is an understanding of how humans can speak of nature; that is, it must be understood how nature is revealed to humans.

The first book of the Politics purports to focus on the natural relations between humans. Aristotle traces the development of the city from the first human couplings from necessity: man with woman, master with slave. He then discusses the naturalness of these couplings, a discussion that entails an examination of the proper function of each pair. It appears that Aristotle is concerned with providing a clear account of the proper organization of humans. This account, culminating in the city, supports the conclusion that “man is by nature a political animal.” [1253a3] The proper organization, that which is best because it is natural, results from natural urges (for procreation and preservation). Men first join together from necessity, for they follow commands beyond their control. The city is the final association to allow for the satisfaction of such urges, and so it too has its origins in necessity.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, I have used Carnes Lord’s translation of the Politics.
However, such a reading of the first book of the Politics is difficult to maintain on closer scrutiny. First, it says nothing of what nature is; it says nothing of what Aristotle means when he speaks of nature. Nature on this initial account appears linked with necessity, but a necessity that is not for itself. Men and women necessarily unite "for the sake of reproduction ... from a natural striving to leave behind another that is like oneself"; master and slave (the naturally ruling and the naturally ruled) unite "on account of preservation." [1252a27-31] The former finds a corollary in the plant and animal kingdoms; the latter, in (apparently) everything that is (extending even to music). Thus the particular nature of humans (as political animals) is seen in the development of a universal nature through a particular (in this case human) determination. That is, nature takes on particular forms, while remaining essentially constant. But this does not explain what nature is; at most, it describes appearances. Describing what appears to be by nature cannot of itself lead to an understanding of nature. Thus describing the necessity of the two pairs is not an explanation of such necessity. It therefore allows for further division of the idea of necessity (it allows for something to be necessary for something else, ad infinitum).

Second, Aristotle's opening words of the Politics call into question any understanding of human organization that exists in separation from intentional choice: "Since we see that every city is some sort of partnership, and that every partnership is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all partnerships aim at some good...." [1252a1-4] These words sit uneasily with the account of the city's growth out of necessary relations. The combination of man and woman "occurs not from intentional choice"; the master-
slave relation is seen “even in things that do not share in life…” [1252a29; 1254a33] To view the city as the necessary growth out of necessary relations (in that they occur beyond intentional choice) renders the ability of humans to act “for the sake of some good” accidental. Regardless of (human) intention, nature will guide men into families (constituted from the first pairs). The belief that men can order their lives with a view to some good is groundless; what is intentionally chosen does not affect nature’s omnipotent dictates.

If nature is objectified into an external commander whose authority could never be challenged, then the descriptive study of man differs from the study of any other existent in form alone. To study music is to know of the master-slave relation; to study plants, the relation of procreators. There is nothing essentially different between man and non-man. Such a view denies the possibility of knowledge about nature. Where nature commands man must follow: but knowledge of these commands (as commands) implies choice in obedience. The possibility of knowledge allows for men to act against nature-as-necessity, against their natural urges. Thus the possibility of intentional choice is essentially linked to the possibility of knowledge.

Aristotle indicates that there are problems with man’s relation to the natural. While the master-slave relation will always occur in music, in (human) partnerships it is often confused. This confusion is seemingly presented as a mistake of nature’s: “Nature indeed wishes to make the bodies of free persons and slaves different as well (as their souls) … yet the opposite often results, some having the bodies of free persons while others have the souls.” [1254b27-33] This unfulfilled wish of nature does not, however, make it nature’s mistake (if it did, it is difficult to see how nature could provide a
standard for anything). Rather, it is humans who make the mistake in their perceptions of what is expedient and just:

It is evident ... that if they were to be born as different only in body as the images of the gods, everyone would assert that those not so favored merited being their slaves. But if this is true in the case of the body, it is much more justifiable to make this distinction in the case of the soul; yet it is not as easy to see the beauty of the soul as it is that of the body.

It is easier for humans to make distinctions on the basis of appearances. The physical powers (strength and beauty) attributed to the gods would, in a human, merit the obedience of all of those not so favored. Physical distinctions are held to be natural, a sign of divine favour; no mention is made of the work (and thus choice) involved in building and maintaining a god-like body.

But such distinctions do not, in themselves, justify ruling. It must be known what the physique is for, to what use it is properly employed. If mere size is the standard for rule, then elephants or whales could justifiably claim dominion over man. If this claim is not held to be proper, it is because something else is attributed to the physically god-like man, something that is only suggested (and, at most, assisted) by his body. Indeed, if body alone is a guide to rule, then mountains should rule men, or (if it is fit that only those with human form rule humans) that a beautiful dead body be accorded its natural claim to rule.

Aristotle states that it is not body alone that determines the naturally ruling and the naturally ruled, but, more importantly, beauty of soul. Unfortunately, this is difficult for humans to perceive. It is because of faulty human perception then, not nature's unfulfilled wish, that the natural master does not always (if ever) rule the natural slave.
The unfulfilled wish is a human wish; it is a need for the clear perception of a natural standard.

If humans can perceive nature incorrectly, and thereby act mistakenly, it is possible that they could perceive correctly (that nature is knowable). If nature is knowable, then humans qualitatively differ from non-humans (be they animals, plants or music). If humans differ from non-humans, the study of what is naturally human, or what humans are by nature, differs from the study of non-human nature. This difference results from the peculiar relation of humans to nature; it results from the fact that humans can speak about nature (or, rather, that humans can judge between the worthiness of actions).

(Man) alone among the animals has speech ... For it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things [of this sort]; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city. [1253a9; 15-18]

Immediately after showing how the city develops from the natural urges that lead to a household, Aristotle states that both the city and the household are made through a partnership in the good and the bad, the just and the unjust. People join in families (and therefore cities) because of natural urges; a partnership in the perception of the good and bad, just and unjust "makes a household and a city." If we are to avoid presumptions concerning what we think Aristotle is saying, or what we think is constitutive of the family and the city, then we must not allow for one side of these seemingly disparate propositions to negate the other. If the description of the city as developing from natural urges ignores man's capacity to intentionally choose (because he can know of nature), the view that men order their lives through perceptions of the just and the good fails to explain how something could be just and good. Man as an animal is developed into
communities regardless of his ability to speak; man as potential participant in the divine develops communities regardless of any knowable proper order (that is, without any knowledge of the divine). Man’s relation to nature complicates his obedience to the natural order, because of his peculiar ability to speak; but knowledge of a natural order is impossible without this peculiar ability.

Thus the ambiguities in the first book of the Politics concerning nature all revolve around man’s grasp of nature through speech. It is a useful experiment to imagine men as silent. If man were never to speak of what he thinks good, or expedient, or just, could he ever live in a city? The city is a partnership; men who act “for the sake of what is held to be good” establish partnerships. The silent man could not act in this manner. He could not enter into a partnership without expressing his acceptance, and thus his view of what is good (this holds even for partnerships based upon compulsion). Man must speak to associate, and in speaking expresses what he thinks is good. But where does he find the basis of what is good? If, in speaking, man acts naturally, does it follow that all of his actions, all of his partnerships, are good and thus natural?

Now the female is distinguished by nature from the slave ... The barbarians, though, have the same arrangement for female and slave. The reason for this is that they have no naturally ruling element; with them, the partnership (of man and woman) is that of female slave and male slave.

Barbarians do not properly distinguish between women and slaves in their partnerships; but their partnerships are formed with a view to what they hold to be good. In forming partnerships they act naturally; but their particular type of organization is faulty for it does not maintain natural distinctions. It is the nature of man to speak and to distinguish, but it is not in his nature to be always correct. Man can organize his life in an unnatural
organization, while continuing to act naturally because he is organizing with a view to some good.

If all men act as the barbarians act, then no partnership will be good by nature. Men may think they act properly (with a view to what is good), but any resemblance their partnership (or speech) has to what is by nature good is accidental. Without a proper basis for judgement every association is tyrannical: what is good is what I believe to be good, it is what we say is good. If nature does not supply a standard that is knowable, the good is ultimately indistinguishable from the accepted (if the word good continues to be employed as expressive of what is quantitatively better than anything else). To establish the good I must ensure universal consent; to ensure universal consent I must convince others that this partnership is the good partnership. Any convincing in this respect can only be based on force, be it a convincing through argument or a convincing through threat of death (or threat of perceived pain, of which the greatest is death). Convincing through threat of death will not, however, ensure consent unless what appears necessary (self-preservation) also appears to be, and is spoken of as being, good.

Thus what is thought necessary is no more known than what is thought good. Resistance to force is resistance to a contrary argument of what ought to be considered good. Neither is good by nature (if a standard cannot be known): force competes with force. The success of one side over another is completely separate from justice. Nothing is just or unjust, if the good cannot be known. If nothing is just or unjust then one city participates in the good as much as another, without there being anything to recommend one over the other. When men speak (and in speaking determine what is good and just) their words will lack meaning (or, to say the same thing, their words could mean
anything). Without the possibility of a knowable (natural) standard, everyone is a barbarian: everyone is equally a slave.

Slaves apprehend, but do not possess, reason. [1254b22-23] Slaves do not simply obey their passions, as other animals do. Slaves continue to speak. They thereby posit a good, and attempt to attain that good. But their idea of what is good is groundless (for it is beyond their capabilities to discover a grounding). Slaves require masters to act properly. Without a master, nothing is proper. The good seen by slaves (where masters are absent) is a masterless good: it is a denial of the existence of masters. This denial need not be explicit; barbarians may maintain the master-slave relationship, albeit improperly. But their lack of a proper distinction between slaves and women shows that barbarians are not masters. While the idea of a master and a slave continues in their partnerships, the organization of their partnerships does not reflect an understanding of this idea. What is held to be good is not what is good: their master-slave relations are based on convention (and thus force). A master requires that slaves realize themselves as slaves, that they realize that the only proper view of what is good is the master’s view. However, so long as the master’s view is groundless, he is a slave; his conception of the good cannot stand as absolute.

Slaves can apprehend reason; they can apprehend what is against reason. If no one possesses reason, all are slaves. Slaves base justice (and thus their partnerships) on a lack of truth: but in doing so they (perhaps unwittingly) posit a truth that all are equal. Such partnerships require that no other natural standard exist; all speech that recognizes a natural standard is a threat. The distinguishing human characteristic of speech must be curtailed: all speech must recognize a standard that is against nature. In accepting this
standard humans cease to speak: to reason is no longer possible. Speech requires that it remain open to different conceptions of the just and unjust. If everyone is a slave, if speech can no longer recognize what is good, then nature is unknowable. If nature cannot be known, distinctions cannot be made: no life is better than another life. This does not mean that all lives are of equal worth; rather, it implies that no life is of any worth (for if it is, it is so accidentally; that is, it is beyond intentional choice which life to lead. All is fortune, but in such a way that no one could ever be seen as fortunate). Speech forces men to make distinctions according to a knowable standard; because they speak, men cannot not grow and wither in the manner of the plants. Speech is necessary for humans (as humans), but separates humans from necessity, from unexamined obedience to what appear as natural urges.

We are questioning concerning nature. To see what is natural in the non-human world requires that that world be laid out before us, that it answers our questions. This method cannot reveal the truth of that nature, for it ignores the relation of humans to nature. Thus it ignores the process wherein something comes to be nature for us. It ignores the basis of distinctions, the basis of laying nature before us. Questioning nature as a being outside of man asks that man be either a god or a beast. What comes to be is either wholly of human making, or wholly of natural necessity. Neither view allows for the nature of nature to be discovered, for both fail to account for the revealing of nature to (or through) humans in speech. The primary question must not be what is nature, but rather what is called nature, or what is revealed when we speak of nature.

The question concerning nature is fundamentally linked to the question concerning human relations. For the form of each partnership will allow for a particular
understanding of what is good and just, and therefore what is natural, to be revealed. If
nature reveals itself to men in speech, then the speech necessary to particular relations
will determine how nature is spoken of in such relations. This necessity of speech in
particular relations must itself be a subject worthy of questioning concerning nature; it
must describe the limitations of nature’s revealing through humans. Otherwise, such
relations appear arbitrary; and we are left with the view that humans only differ in form
from non-humans, thereby obscuring the question of how nature is revealed.3

Thus the initial account of the city’s development in the Politics describing
necessary relations does not lead to an understanding of nature. In particular, the
conclusion that man is a political animal requires more than a description of how
necessity combines humans because of certain ends. Necessity does not confer rank; that
something must be does not mean that something is good (if I said something must be
bad for something to be good, and therefore that the bad is good, I surely speak
nonsense). The question of what is good precedes the question of what is necessary
(though not always chronologically). The necessary is only discoverable in the light of
what is held to be good. But what is good must not itself be an arbitrary determination;
what is good must reveal itself through what necessarily appears as good.

By beginning his discussion with the two pairs that appear to be natural because
they appear to be necessary, Aristotle can show the limits of these relations without
endangering such relations. What is thought to be necessary hides the question of what is

2 If I want a carrot, I ask for one. Otherwise, I babble (in regards to receiving what I want).
3 That partnerships are means that they are spoken of, or spoken for (they posit a good, which is
necessarily opposed to other goods). This is not necessarily an attempt to rule by force, but becomes such
if no natural standard exists. This will be shown to be the ground upon which friendship is necessary – it
stands outside of the positing of any of the goods of other partnerships. Or, rather, it is this positing,
continually, insofar as it is guided by truth – by what is good simply.
null
good by nature, and consequently why such relations are necessary. For if the nature of these relations is knowable, then such relations are no longer binding without question. Such relations may remain necessary, but for reasons other than (or in addition to, and more essential than) the reasons presented by Aristotle in the first book of the Politics. Thus the master-slave relation may be for preservation, but this does not explain what preservation is for. While the underlying structures of the city are necessary for the sake of life, the city is necessary for the sake of the good life. The preservation and continuation of life is justified by the city, by the partnership that allows for the good life. To know of what the good life consists requires the city in part because it requires that life be preserved:

For just as man is the best of all animals when completed, when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all... This is why, without virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage [of all the animals], and the worst with regard to sex and food. [1253a31-37]

The laws of the city correct the tendencies man has towards exaggerated animal activities, towards the unbridled pursuit of the activities that make the first pairs necessary (for food and sex have their proper place in the household). Only in regards to the end that is authoritative over all other apparent ends do the first pairs find their necessity. This end, as shown in the Nicomachean Ethics, is the life according to reason. [1178a6]⁴

Partnerships, formed by men, reveal a particular understanding of nature (if unwittingly). This understanding is not, however, correct; such partnerships are not, necessarily, good. Yet they are held to be good (or else they would change). The type of city and household that a man relates to will affect his understanding of nature. The first

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⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, I have used W.D. Ross’ translation of the Nicomachean Ethics.
book of the *Politics* provides an understanding of nature that is deficient (though it does partially describe one aspect – the necessary – of nature). To fully grasp how nature is revealed to man we must examine a partnership that is not dealt with in this book: friendship. Aristotle claims to examine partnerships, including the most authoritative partnership, in the *Politics*. Yet it is in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we are given an account of the partnership that is “thought the greatest of external goods.” [1169b10] If the city exists for the good life, and friendship is thought to be the greatest external good, then the end of the city appears linked to a partnership that is not held to be essential for the city’s development. There is an ambiguity in regards to the relation of friendship to the city, an ambiguity that is clarified only if we can understand the question concerning the revealing of nature. If man’s peculiar fate is to speak, and if speech is concerned with revealing nature, then of great concern to man must be how to speak properly, or how to be in a position to speak properly. As Aristotle shows in the first book of the *Politics*, this concern is not the first concern of man’s. But it is the most important concern, for it establishes that with which men are to be concerned. Friendship is the partnership where nature can properly reveal itself, for it is (in its best form) a partnership for the best activity of men: it is a partnership in the life according to reason.

Why does nature reveal itself to men properly in friendship? What does a friend add to the life according to reason? What is essential to the life according to reason that it requires friendship? To answer these questions we must attempt to discover of what friendship consists; we must discover what separates friendship from the first pairs. This requires an examination of how the necessity of these pairs differs from the necessity of friendship (which is “most necessary with a view to living” 1155a5). If the question of
what Aristotle means when he speaks of nature is properly understood only through an examination of human partnerships, then friendship, as a partnership that differs from the first pairs (and consequently stands in a different relation to the city) could rectify the difficulties that arise when viewing nature only through the first pairs.

Before proceeding to a discussion of these things, I will mention three works that deal with similar things. Two of these works are commentaries on the Politics: Citizens and Statesmen, by Mary P. Nichols, and The Politics of Philosophy, by Michael Davis. The focus of each is therefore on a far larger body of text than that examined here; and each attempts to incorporate, or integrate, all of the Books of the Politics into an overarching whole. Still, each examines the first Book as presenting an argument that is complete, albeit problematic. It is in the drawing forth of these problems that Davis and Nichols touch on topics dealt with here. However, where they each look to place Book I within a broader examination of the Politics, I contend that it is necessary that we also look back to Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics to understand his use of nature for his account of the city’s growth, in the Politics.

In the first chapter of her work, Nichols examines the first Book of the Politics as an account of the city’s origins from necessity. The pre-political, natural partnerships, which exist outside of human freedom (choice), are the condition for political life. She thus seeks to understand the tension within man, as understood in calling him a political animal, between that which he creates, and that which he is created into, and which, in a sense, creates him. Aristotle therefore continually presents the pre-political as pointing towards something higher – the political, and the freedom this presupposes.

Michael Davis understands Aristotle’s purpose in Book I similarly:

(Aristotle seeks) to give an account of the *polis* that understands it as
growing from earlier natural associations while not denying that cities
begin differently from households. Aristotle must reconcile the *polis* as a
product of growth with the *polis* as a product of human freedom.\(^6\)

Davis discusses this problem in relation to Aristotle’s presentation of the household. The
household, which at first appears natural because it is a “perfectly teleological
association”\(^7\), in fact curtails that which is man’s by nature (speech, and so freedom), as it
subordinates the ends of its members to daily life, or preservation. Household members
become akin to slaves (living tools); and natural slaves are property, useful, but never for
themselves. Book I therefore both presents a strict teleological understanding of politics
that culminates in the household, and undermines this presentation, necessitating the *polis*
and the possibility of freedom (and philosophy) it allows.

Thus both Nichols and Davis see Book I as an incomplete account of the city, an
account showing the growth from necessity of the city. This account needs to be
balanced with an account of the free institution of cities. While both authors go on to do
so, such takes them beyond the scope of this present inquiry, into an examination of the
entire *Politics*. I have rather turned back, to the account of friendship in the *Ethics*, and
maintain that this account shows us the limits of the city, and the partnerships
culminating therein. I have done so in an attempt to understand the tension that both
Nichols and Davis outline, between necessity and freedom, and to understand how
Aristotle’s presentation of this tension can be true. That is, I have tried to understand this
tension as issuing forth from the nature of partnerships. The city comes to be for the sake

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 31.
of daily life, but continues for the sake of the good life. How are these two statements connected? How is the nature of the city such that both of these can concurrently be true? For the city, if it is for the sake of two things, would appear to have two ends. How then can the city be natural? Nichols and Davis both seek to reconcile (though not dissolve) this tension by claiming that Book I is part of an argument that extends over the whole of the Politics; I have sought to understand this tension as grounded in what is called nature by man, and thus in his partnerships. Both Nichols and Davis present persuasive arguments; I have simply tried to understand why these arguments must be made at all.

To this end I have attempted to read the account of the origins of the city in the Politics in various ways, and to understand how I could construct various interpretations of such origins. That is, I have sought to find reason in viewings of the city’s origins that do not of themselves provide verification as to their truthfulness. In chapter one I present an argument that the city is properly understood as the end result of a development, created by man in response to his natural urges. However, this reading turns out to be grounded upon an assumption concerning man’s initial state that Aristotle tells us is incorrect. I thus attempt to provide a non-historical view of the city’s origins in chapter two. And yet, once again, I cannot escape interpreting the origins of the city out of my own initial assumptions. For any interpretation of the city’s origins rests upon our understanding of nature: and Aristotle does not provide, in the first Book of the Politics, a discussion on his use of nature as a standard for the city.

To discover why such an account is lacking, I turn to the discussion of legislation and education in Book X of the Nicomachean Ethics. In chapter three, I trace the
necessity of Aristotle’s presentation of the city’s origins – that is, I present an argument as to why Aristotle continually employs nature as a standard without directly examining what it is to speak of nature in connection to partnerships. This points to the need to understand the absence of friendship from the Politics. However, before directly dealing with this topic, I return to a discussion of the origins of the city, and attempt to understand these while keeping in mind the absence of a discussion on friendship. To understand the city, we must understand why it cannot embrace friendship; to understand why it cannot embrace friendship, we must understand how it embraces all other partnerships. Thus chapter four deals with the (dual) identity of both the household and the city, and attempts to discover that which distinguishes them from friendship.

The final chapter of this paper deals with the relation of the good man to kingship and friendship. Many of the particulars for this discussion arose from a reading of Harry Jaffa’s *Thomism and Aristotelianism*. Jaffa’s purpose in this work – succinctly stated in the sub-title – is to understand Aquinas’ understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This requires an understanding of the *Ethics* on its own – apart from Aquinas’ commentary. And this requires, since Aquinas views the work as a whole to which all its parts necessarily relate, that Jaffa avoids simply drawing out ambiguities (to whom?) or misinterpretations (versus what?) of parts of the *Ethics*. Instead, he must either show how the *Ethics* is incomplete, or present an alternative understanding of the whole. Jaffa does the latter (and the former at least requires that the latter be attempted), arguing that the *Ethics* displays an “organic” structure against Aquinas’ “architectural” reading. Thus, “Thomas … seems to regard the *Ethics* as a whole of such character that each part implies the finished whole from the very beginning”; versus “What is here suggested is
that (it) may rather be like the organism, disclosing its intention and meaning through successive stages of growth …”

The general purpose of Jaffa’s work thus differs from that of the present inquiry. Yet there exists an overlap between the two, for Jaffa’s divergence from Aquinas centres around the relation between friendship and the moral virtues – between friendship and the magnanimous man. Jaffa contends that Aristotle’s account of the moral virtues, culminating in Book IV, is incomplete. Only after the discussion on friendship can this account properly reach completion.

If Jaffa is correct, then understanding the good man requires more than an understanding of the magnanimous man. Stated another way, the moral virtues, as first presented, do not represent the highest virtues for man since they cannot encompass friendship. The magnanimous man cannot love another as himself. I have attempted to extend this argument to my discussion of the absence of friendship from the Politics. For the moral virtues, when separated from friendship, are fundamentally unreflective. The magnanimous man not only does not, but also cannot truly compare himself to another. He is honoured as the best man – but this means that he is dependent upon the opinion of his public for his understanding of his virtue (dependent upon what is called, but may not be, good). He represents the best that his particular city thinks best. However, a discussion of these things must wait; first, let us turn to the first Book of the Politics.

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9 For I am neither concerned with presenting a comprehensive account of the Ethics, nor with criticizing Aquinas’ commentaries. However, my understanding of the first Book of the Politics as intentionally incomplete is akin to Jaffa’s understanding of the Ethics as “organic”.

The Historical City

"First, then, there must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another: on the one hand, male and female, for the sake of reproduction... on the other the naturally ruling and ruled, on account of preservation." [1252a27-31]

We begin our inquiry concerning Aristotle’s use of nature in the first book of the Politics by examining the first chapters of the first book. We shall pay particular attention to the second chapter, for there Aristotle describes for us the origins of the city, and claims that by nature man is a political animal, and that by nature the city comes to be. To see how nature is related to the city, we must see how man is related to the city, how the city comes to be the authoritative partnership for man. We begin then with an attempt to trace the city’s origins out of man’s first partnerships.

To gain an understanding of the city and whether ruling is one art, or different for masters, kings, statesmen and household managers, Aristotle begins with a description of the smallest parts of the city and their coming together. This coming together is “of necessity” for each element of the first pairs cannot exist without its partner.10 Nature implants beings with the natural urge to exist, both as individuals and as parts of a species. For humans, this urge combines individuals into households, for the satisfaction of daily needs. The urge for preservation compels the first pairs to come to be; to further the end of preservation the first pairs are united into a household.

Aristotle goes on to state that the household is not the final development of partnerships, but joins with other households to form a village. Villages are presented as extensions of households, with close kinship ties between each household: “the children and the children’s children” comprise a village [1252b18]. As households beget children,

10 Since they exist united, they therefore cannot exist alone. Thus it is necessity that links them, and existence that confers necessity.
children in turn beget households (for they must form man/woman and master/slave relations, because of natural urges). Villages exist to meet more than daily needs; as a partnership, they display a kind of ruling and being ruled. In this they are similar to households, where the eldest rule as kings. The households that unite into villages maintain close kinship ties; the form of rule in the village continues the rule in the household. The king of the village rules an extended household.

"The partnership arising from (the union of) several villages that is complete is the city". [1252b27] Villages unite into the city when the union is complete.11 The city suffers no further unions (that add anything to the end of the city); the city is self-sufficient. The city is the end of the development begun with the joining of the first pairs. It comes to be for the sake of living, but continues for the sake of living well. [1252b29-30]

Aristotle does not make the necessity of the growth of village into city explicit, but it seems plausible that the city stabilises an inherently unstable union (the village). The village is ruled by an elder, but this distinction into ruler and ruled is potentially acrimonious. Aristotle says that some people call villagers "milk-peers", suggesting both kinship ties and equality. [1252b17] Conflicts within villages could arise over the right to rule where equality of kinship constitutes the form of partnership. Aristotle further intimates, through his quoting of Homer, that villages are prone to strife. Homer, who could be speaking of either a village, or a household in the village, states: "each (man) acts as law to his children and wives". [1252b23] If it is a household here referred to, then such behaviour is clearly a threat to the institution of authoritative laws by the

11 I presume Aristotle means that trading between villages, for example, is not a complete partnership.
village king. Aristotle also links the kingship seen in villages with that of the gods — a partnership that began in familial strife, and continued to be a problematic union. If the organisation of the village cannot satisfy all of its members (and this means, primarily, household heads, or potential household heads), if it cannot unite all households under one law, then the natural urge to exist must compel another, more complete union. Thus the city comes to be for the sake of life. For if household heads rule as kings; and the village is ruled by a king over an extended household; then the dissatisfied household head (rejecting the village king's claim to rule) must oppose force to force. Without recognizing a claim to rule as more legitimate than his own, the preservation of the household demands disobedience.  

To view the city as the end result of a progression from sundered individuals through the household and the village is to view it as a necessary development out of primal, natural urges. "First, then, there must be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another...." The initial impetus to join in a partnership is given to man by nature: he is commanded (without, it seems, the possibility of refusal) to procreate and preserve his life. It is these commands that set the progression into the city in motion; the complete — that is, the continual — satisfaction of these commands is made possible by the city. The city exists by nature "if such also are the first partnerships." [1252b30-31] The naturalness of the city is judged by the naturalness of its origins, the naturalness of its smallest uncompounded parts.

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12 Homer is speaking of the Cyclopes; as Nichols points out, the next line of the Odyssey says that the Cyclopes "love war". (Nichols, Citizens, p. 16).
13 Otherwise the household is simply thrown aside; his bending the knee to an illegitimate claimant undermines the head's claim to rule. Now, force can be legitimate, if it is accepted as such (for the sake of preservation etc.) Perhaps the problem referred to above is best understood as a contest between twins, each with an equal claim to rule.
14 and procreation is here presented as a type of preservation — for the unions are pairs that "cannot exist without one another."
It would appear that this development is historical: progression from isolated, needy individuals to the self-sufficient city occurs over time. Aristotle is examining things "From the beginning"; from the first pairs "the household first arose"; the progression in time from village to city explains "why cities were at first under kings"; he "who first constituted (a city) is responsible for the greatest of goods". To understand the naturalness of the city therefore requires an examination of man prior to his existence in cities; it requires that his natural urges, his first needs, be seen in separation from his subsequent partnerships. The history of the city can thus be understood as the progressive solution to the first commands of nature (which commands are most clearly displayed before they find satisfaction, for they can then be viewed as impelling needs.)

It is tempting to read Aristotle's statement concerning the necessary union of the first pairs as grounding the origin of the city in intentional choice. Reproduction would thereby be chosen to leave behind an image of oneself; the master and slave relation chosen for the sake of immediate preservation. In the former case we could imagine that men, in reaction to time and their own finitude, would choose to continue themselves through their offspring. In the latter case, recognising the instability of an isolated existence, rulers and ruled would unite for protection (either against men or a frugal nature). Such a view is the psychological underpinning of the idea that the city can be seen as the result of a progressive development, from needy isolated individuals to stable self-sufficient citizens. The city so examined requires that man be posited as originally existing in a state of nature – a period (whether mythological or actual) of unadulterated natural needs or urges. As such, the city could not be natural – rather, men choose to
unite for the sake of preservation, which they understand as directly threatened before the final authoritative partnership. Thus the result of the initial impetus to unite in pairs does not satisfy their needs (now seen as fears); they further unite into households (to protect their first two unions under one authority); into villages, (to mitigate against the discord arising among households as children become adults); and finally into cities, established to overturn the insecure village/household form of rule (against questions to the legitimacy of eldest rule). Needs force men to reason; they force men to choose to unite for the sake of their satisfaction; they force men to fear.

The coherence of this reading is strengthened when we examine what Aristotle marks out as the distinguishing characteristic of man: "(M)an alone among the animals has speech...speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and unjust." [1253a8-15] Needy man recognises what is advantageous and what is harmful. This recognition allows him to unite with his fellows for their mutual benefit. The first words of the Politics inform us as to the importance of choice in the creation of partnerships. The section on speech reminds us of this, for it is people who speak in a similar manner about what is good and just who choose to form partnerships. [1253a18]

The progression from the household, through the village and into the city is a progression in man's ability to solve the problems that arise within each union. The household satisfies daily needs, but remains subject to disunity: it cannot cope with the new relations it creates (children) in time. The rise of new households forces a new union, the village, to satisfy the needs of a large group of people. The village attempts to deal with future changes and the needs that bring about such changes. However, its form of rule remains tied to the household (and is thus more appropriate for the satisfaction of
daily needs, for it came to be for this sake). The village, viewed as an extended household, cannot overcome the splintering of households from which it arose. The village over time becomes the villages; and each village is comprised of members who unite for their own advantage (the protection necessary for the satisfaction of their needs).

The final partnership in the city is chosen to protect daily needs by foreseeing problems that may arise in the future. It is to forever overcome the splintering of households and villages - it is to overcome civil strife.

This solution appears linked to the new form of rule prevalent in the city, a rule no longer strictly based on kinship ties and seniority. The form of rule in the city need not reflect the order of rule in the first pairs, the household or the village. All previous forms of rule were exclusive to one man; the need for kingly rule arises from the form of development out of the first pairs. If a household is composed of a man and a woman and a slave the person who participates in both pairs (and it is not important here to argue that this is the man/master) is the central organ of the household. More than any other part the man represents the household - the man rules the household. This form of rule comes to be out of the form of the partnership, and its end of meeting daily needs.

Repeated in the village, this form of rule creates tension between households (as indicated by the quotation from Homer). The city, aiming at something more than the satisfaction of daily needs, while still satisfying these needs, must resolve the problems of rule that dissolved the village. Hence the need for a new form of city-rule. The city is therefore an artificial creation (for man is born with the desire for preservation; it is wholly in man's power to satisfy this desire) born of need and the consequent perception of advantageous and harmful that is articulated in speech. “And hence also” is justice an
artificial creation, for it arises after the advantageous is spoken of, and consists of the rules necessary for the survival of the city (for the protection of the partnership that aims at the advantageous, that results from an understanding of man’s needy original position). [1253a14]

Our view of the city as an artificial creation finds further support in the discussion of speech: “For it is peculiar to man... that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust... and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city”. [1253a15-18] Immediately preceding this statement Aristotle tells us that speech reveals the advantageous and harmful and hence also the just and unjust. Man’s perception of good and bad replaces, in the authoritative partnership, his perception of the advantageous and the harmful. The good is the advantageous protected; it comes to be when the advantageous is actualised in the city. The advantageous comes to be known in relation to man’s initial precarious position; it comes to be known in relation to his desire for preservation. The good is no more than each man’s perception of the advantageous, of each man’s perception of what he needs. If there is an authoritative good, it is that which preserves the conditions necessary for the satisfaction of desires: the protection of the city. Because man perceives himself as in need of something beyond what nature provides if he is to survive, he “makes a household and a city.”

It should be noted that we are here told that both the household and the city are made because of man’s perception of the good and bad and just and unjust. Previously we saw that the household arose from the union of the first pairs, which pairs arose from the need for preservation. Speech, and the first partnerships created by man through speech, begins by stating the advantageous and harmful (what is good and bad for me); in
the final partnership, this is transformed into speech concerning universals (the good and bad). Since the final partnership is final (for it satisfies man’s needs most completely) it is good; and at this point the previous stages in man’s development are re-seen as absolutely good (for they were necessary for the final partnership). Hence the household, when viewed from the perspective of the city, is said to come to be as a partnership in the good as opposed to the merely advantageous.

The closing paragraph of chapter two confirms for us the correctness of this reading of the city’s development: “Accordingly, there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership. And yet the one who first constituted (a city) is responsible for the greatest of goods”. [1253a29-30] Man begins his march to the city with the need for preservation, the need to pursue the advantageous. This initial impetus, without the willed assistance of man, would remain barren. Nothing stable could grow from the confluence of needful beings, without the requisite recognition of mutual advantage. If men desire to preserve themselves, then men must unite; and recognition of their natural position is the first stage in their creation of a stable union. In the *Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle claims that neither parents nor gods could ever be repaid for the benefit of creation. Similarly the founder of a city, responsible for bestowing upon man the greatest of goods, must be praised as one of the greatest benefactors. As parents and gods are responsible for creation, the city founder is responsible for preservation; and this preservation is as praiseworthy as creation, for it ensures that the gods did not work in vain.

“(M)an is born naturally possessing arms...”: man is born free to use his arms as he believes is to his advantage to satisfy his needs. [1253a33] Such arms have a proper
use (prudence and virtue) and an improper use (imprudence and vice). The proper use of arms is that which is conducive to the satisfaction of his needs; that is, the proper use of arms is that which is conducive to the preservation of the complete union. "This is why, without virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage (of the animals), and the worst with regard to sex and food." [1253a35-37] Virtue (which in the previous sentence was linked to prudence) is a kind of foresight: it restrains the unbridled pursuit of the desire for preservation (a desire that is necessary for existence, but potentially threatening of existence). The means required for preservation (sex—man and woman; food—master and slave) must be regulated through unions for common advantage if preservation is to be effected. Aristotle seems to agree with Hobbes when the latter writes: "For the affectations of the mind, which arise only from the lower parts of the soul, are not wicked themselves; but the actions thence proceeding may be so sometimes, as when they are either offensive or against duty" [De Cive, p. 100] and:

(T)o man by nature, or as man, that is, as soon as he is born, solitude is an enemy; for infants have need of others to help them to live, and those of riper years to help them to live well... (but) man is made fit for society not by nature, but by education. Furthermore, although man were born in such a condition as to desire (civil society), it follows not that he therefore were born fit to enter into it. (De Cive, 110)

Man is not born fit to enter civil society, or the city; only through his prudent progression from his unstable needy beginnings does he gain the requisite knowledge for the preservation of advantageous unions. "The virtue of justice is a thing belonging to the city." [1253a38] Aristotle closes the discussion of the city by pointing to its artificial development. From prudence comes the virtue necessary for the continued existence of the city. Man is his own greatest benefactor, for man bestows upon himself the final union for his preservation, and for the preservation of the species.
Thus it can be seen that both Hobbes and Aristotle trace the development of the authoritative union to the prudence of man born with a desire for preservation. For each, this desire is given to man by nature; it is neither chosen nor artificial; and it makes necessary man’s first steps towards the creation of unions. Such desire may be hidden where the need is no longer immediate; to properly perceive this desire man must be viewed before the development of stable unions. The desire for preservation exists prior to the use of reason: it is a fundamental condition of man’s existence. Both thinkers employ similar language to show the necessity of this desire to man; both compare this desire to the actions of things devoid of reason. Hobbes writes: “For every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death, and this he doth by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward.” [De Cive, p. 115] The “natural impulsion” is no inclination, to be followed or suppressed at will. It is equivalent to the impulsion of a stone to move downwards. Where there is human life, there exists this natural impulsion. Aristotle writes of this compulsion in a similar manner, comparing the first unions for preservation with strivings shared by other things that exist by nature:

First, then, there must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another: on the one hand, male and female, for the sake of reproduction (which occurs not from intentional choice but – as is also the case with the other animals and plants – from a natural striving to leave behind another that is like oneself); on the other, the naturally ruling and ruled, on account of preservation.15

In discussing the first movement into first unions, both Hobbes and Aristotle compare the desires of man to occurrences in the natural world.

15 which we are told also occurs among things as diverse as animals, plants and music. [1254a31-34]
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While Aristotle does not deal with isolated individuals before any unions to the extent of Hobbes, he can be seen to imply a similar original condition. For preservation man must unite; the urge to preserve is given to man by nature (and is inalienable). That is, men are born with the need to preserve themselves (a “natural impulse”). The satisfaction of this need is only made possible in the complete union, the city. The city is made by man through his partnership in the perception of good and bad, just and unjust things. Only with the coming to be of the city does Aristotle speak of good and bad; previously, man was noted as having perception of the advantageous and harmful. The city comes to be for the sake of life, but continues for the sake of the good life. The union of the first pairs in the household serves to meet daily needs, or the needs of life (as distinguished from the good life). It is a union of advantage, a union against the harmful, against threats to the preservation of life. Aristotle therefore presents the perception of the advantageous and harmful as rooted in man’s need for preservation. Men first unite because they naturally shun the chiefest of natural evils, death.

The closeness of Aristotle’s account of the city’s development to Hobbes’ account of the rise of civil society depends upon reading each thinker’s description of the natural desire of man for preservation as equivalent. However, though the two passages examined above appear similar, each serves a different purpose. This divergence in purpose points towards the need for a fuller understanding of each passage before we proceed in proclaiming them of like content. Essential to understanding the differences of the passages is the recognition of the place each occupies in relation to the argument as a whole. Hobbes’ statement occurs within the seventh of fourteen paragraphs in a chapter entitled “Of the State of Man Without Civil Society”; Aristotle’s remark concerns
“how things develop naturally from the beginning” [1252a25-26], and is situated immediately after the introduction of the subject to be studied in the Politics. No mention is made by Aristotle concerning man’s condition before uniting into the first pairs; and while such a condition may be read into his account of the city’s development, to do so is to risk imposing unwarranted presumptions onto our study of the Politics.

To provide greater clarity in our discussion of Aristotle’s remarks on the first pairs, we will begin by examining Hobbes’ statement concerning the “impulsion of nature” in more detail. Our purpose here is not the exposition of Hobbes’ entire political thought, but rather what he refers to when speaking of such an impulsion, and why this reference to nature is used. The heading for paragraph seven is “The definition of right”. This paragraph follows a discussion wherein the origin of civil society is said to reside in fear; one cause of fear arising from equality; and another cause of fear from man’s mutual will to hurt. The paragraph immediately preceding the seventh concerns “the most frequent reason why men desire to hurt each other”, which reason is the overlapping of appetites (among many men) for a single object. The definition of right therefore follows six paragraphs detailing the condition of man outside of civil society. Apart from the introductory paragraph, those preceding paragraph seven are concerned with fear, both its causes and its effects. Man without civil society is beset by fear for his own preservation, while himself being the cause of fear in others.

This condition is not according to reason, but results from the unchecked appetites of men. The voice of reason, while seeking to serve such appetites, counsels men towards the attainment of a new condition. Thus the dictates of reason are based upon the demands of appetite: “For every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns
what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death.” Men desire what is
good for them; they shun what is evil. Death is “the chiefest of natural evils”; it is the
chiefest evil because it is most shunned. Thus, it is not evil because it is against reason; it
is evil because it is against desire. The desire against death is “a certain impulsion of
nature”, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward. It is without choice that a
stone falls; it is without choice that men shun death. But however like unto a falling
stone is man’s aversion to death his subsequent movement towards civil society is
unprecedented in the natural world. Hobbes’ comparison between the falling stone and
man’s natural aversion towards death grounds his subsequent definition of right. The
comparison to a stone points to the great difference between man and any other natural
thing.

It is in the nature of a stone to move downwards; so too is it in the nature of man
to shun death. Moving down and fearing death are not the same thing. But they are both
constants; they both always occur to a greater or lesser degree depending upon external
conditions. Even a stone seemingly at rest may be said to move downwards - if
imperceptibly - or potentially. Thus a man seemingly without fear still shuns death - if
imperceptibly. For man may live under the rule of a sovereign power within a
commonwealth, and enjoy all the security of person and property gained therein, yet still
will he shun death. However, he should not fear death with the same intensity (or, rather,
immediacy and consistency) as a man without civil society. For the optimal conditions
that give rise to the undiminished fear of death (as described in paragraphs two through
six, twelve and thirteen of chapter one) pertain to the state before government. Death is
the “chiefest of natural evils” - it will always be the end of man - but the conditions that
give rise to its immediate presence can be altered. A stone will descend with greater or lesser speed depending upon the external impediments to its movement. The stone neither chooses nor creates such impediments. Indeed, it is not certain whether the stone prefers to fall or to remain stationary — though common sense suggests that discussion of preference would be out of place in regards to a stone’s movement. Thus, while both a stone’s falling and man’s shunning of death are constants, only man can change the conditions that affect his constant.

Paragraph seven is a turning point in chapter one of *De Cive*. While previously concerned primarily with the appetitive nature of man, the following eight chapters deal with right reason (as grounded in “natural impulsion”). The beginning of paragraph seven compares the desires of men with falling stones; the close refers to natural right based on right reason.

Neither by the word of *right* is anything else signified, than that liberty which every man hath to make use of his natural faculties according to right reason. Therefore the first foundation of natural right is this, that *every man as much as in him lies endeavour to protect his life and members.* [De Cive, p.115]

Through comparing man with stone, Hobbes forces us to recognise what is peculiar to man. Stones move downwards — but so too does everything with mass, under certain conditions. In contrast, we would not say that a stone shuns death as the chiefest of natural evils. Perhaps other animals besides man shun death — but Hobbes does not here tell us this. Moreover, that stones move downwards is not an absolute rule (even granting the view that all rest by stones is illusory). Stones can be made to move upwards, for a time — if man wills it to be so. Man can affect the “impulsion of nature” that controls a stones downward movement. The stone moves downward because external forces
compel it to, because of its inability to desire or to do otherwise. Man shuns death because he desires what is good for him and shuns what is evil. That is, he desires what is good for him as this particular man, and shuns what is evil for this particular man. His external environment may increase the intensity of such desire, but it does not on its own create this desire. Death is a natural evil; it will exist as an evil even for a man in idyllic conditions. Man can affect his conditions because he is not strictly dependent upon his conditions. Man can employ his faculties “according to right reason”; he can therefore “as much as in him lies endeavour to protect his life and members.” In paragraph seven Hobbes both shows how the desires of man appear similar to falling stones, and leads us to discover what is distinctly human.

Aristotle makes no such distinction in his description of the first pairs. On his account men do not choose to unite into the first pairs. Hence the absence of fear from chapter two: the natural urge to exist is not presented in relation to fear. Men are compelled to unite in order to exist, as oak trees are compelled to grow towards the sun. The natural unions are not explained by linking them to preservation; rather, they are described. Men unite because of natural urges; their first unions find corollaries in the world of non-man. As beings they exist, and continue to exist so long as they are. To say that they unite for the sake of existence is to say that they exist as united pairs. Existence seems to be both the necessary condition of beings which unite, and the end for which such beings unite. To say that something exists it is necessary to say how that existence remains, how that existence continues (which is to say how that existence exists). Because men exist (as men) they unite; because men unite (as men) they exist. Thus the description of the first pairs provides scant explanation of why men exist as men, but
rather describes how this existence may appear when separating the city into its smallest parts.

Only by assuming at the start of our discussion that the city is the end result of an artificial development can we reasonably equate Aristotle’s teaching with Hobbes’. That is, we must assume that the city is an unnatural union; that man exists by nature in (potentially hostile) separation from his fellows; and that from out of this conflict he develops the necessary conditions for his preservation. We are therefore not justified in saying, as stated earlier, that man may never have existed in a state of nature, that it makes no difference whether such a state is mythological or actual. To claim that the state of nature is mythological, or the result of a mental exercise, is to develop the content of this state out of our method. For it is taken from the outset as a given that man enters into the city (or whatever name one wishes to apply to the final state), and that this entrance can be relived through thought. To understand the city such a thinker must invent his own; the origins of this city are indissolubly linked to its artificial creation (its creation in the mind). The form of the question already (in part) answers the question as to how man could enter the city – only the details of the development need be provided. Asking ‘how could man enter the city?’ concurrently posits the question ‘how could man not enter the city?’, or ‘what keeps man from entering the city?’ The condition of being in a city is from the start contrasted with being outside a city; and since being in a city is given as the goal of this mental exercise, the question of paramount importance is the latter – ‘what keeps man from entering the city’? To ask this it is necessary to assume that man could not enter a city – it is necessary to assume that all men are potentially city-less. Indeed, it is to assume more than just this – it is to assume that men are
originally, or naturally, city-less. The city must therefore be an artificial creation. This conclusion was already implicit in the method, and so casts no new light on the true origins of the city.

But it remains possible to assert that the city actually does develop historically — that man progresses from an original state of isolation and need to the security of the city. Man has a beginning — or rather the history of man has a beginning\(^\text{16}\) - in which he is sundered from his fellows, and desirous of preservation. To discern the why of the city, we need merely to understand its history. The history of the city’s development begins with needy individuals — for why else would they unite? If we can remember the need that initially underlay the desire to unite, then we can state what the city is for, we can state why the city ought to be authoritative. Knowledge of this development can be had in two ways: first, through the examination of historical records and contemporary primitive societies; and second, by examining oneself, and the origins of one’s fears and desires. For such concerns, muted though they may be, provide a psychological history of man. If we can discover what men are commonly desirous of, and what men commonly shun, we can determine how the lack of a city will affect these concerns. The city’s growth then is necessarily related to the satisfaction of man’s first needs — which needs, while perhaps not as evident within the security of a city, can be reconstructed by this mental exercise.

This viewing of the city’s origins thus looks to be the same as that previously described, where it was stated that a mythological account of the state of nature does not differ from an account of one that is actual. This congruence is not accidental, for the

\(^{16}\) For man could have a pre-history in a stable state, only to lose this state, and effectively have to begin anew. The pre-history must be either completely forgotten, or the nature of man must suffer a change, or man’s relation to nature must change, for this pre-history to not be history.
historical study must partake of artifice to establish its own veracity. However, to say that the state of nature could be a myth, yet still an effective tool for understanding the city, is to obscure any claims as to the city’s origins. Such a state must be – or have been – in existence. Otherwise, the entire study is, at best, fruitless; at worst, it renders impossible any true account of the city’s origins, and thus actual knowledge of the city’s end.

To understand how Aristotle understands the origins of the city, we must return to our examination of the second chapter of Book I of the Politics. While his description of the first pairs does not appear to cohere with Hobbes’ account of the union of men, it remains possible to ascribe to Aristotle the view that the city results from an historical development. However, if the origins of the city differ from those related by Hobbes, so too will its end. And if the ends differ, than the meaning of ‘historical development’ may be different when applied to Aristotle than it is when applied to Hobbes. Indeed, the entire method of our inquiry thus far as it pertains to Aristotle’s notion of the first pairs may obscure what Aristotle is attempting to relate to us. For our speech on historical development has served to separate man from nature – to set man against nature in his struggle to preserve himself. To gain an understanding of nature through our present use of historical development would be impossible; from the outset, we have built up artifices against nature to preserve our argument. We must therefore return once more to where we began, namely, the first pairs.
The Authoritative City

Before we can listen attentively to Aristotle’s understanding of nature, we must free ourselves from our historical understanding of the city’s development. It is not without uncertainty that we make this attempt – it is not without fear. For it may be correct to state that the city develops in time, that man creates the city in time. We are asked then to begin our study with a rejection of the potentially true account of the city’s origins.

It would appear that Aristotle does not begin with a rejection of this account – that we are not asked by him to reject this account. For chapter two begins with what seems to be praise for an historical understanding of not just the city’s origins, but of an undisclosed number of topics. “Now in these matters as elsewhere it is by looking at how things develop naturally from the beginning that one may best study them,” [1252a25-26] Immediately the words “develop” and “beginning” stand out for us – immediately we are reminded of our historical analysis. The city develops from out of a beginning; the end is best studied as a result in a process. The best study of things asks how such things come to be, asks how such things develop into such things. ‘How does the city come to be the city?’ we ask; and respond: ‘by developing from its beginning, by developing from the potential city.’ We continue our inquiry and ask: ‘what is potentially a city, but not as yet a city?’ We search for an answer: ‘trees are not potential cities, neither are bears or wars – it is partnerships that become cities, and men that become city partners!’ And so we

17 It may be said that some animals do have partnerships, such as ants and bees. But if ants have partnerships, surely we cannot study the development of these partnerships out of any beginning: to know of an ant is to concurrently know of its partnership, for in the beginning, as at the end, ants exist in partnerships.
conclude that the city develops from partnerships, from man’s ability to enter into partnerships. We turn then to the beginning, to men without partnerships, and ask: ‘why would men form partnerships?’; and respond: ‘because they need to, because something is lacking if men do not form partnerships, something that is necessary for men to be men’. How do we know that men need to form partnerships? Because men form partnerships. How does the city come to be the city? From the development of isolated needy men into partnerships, from the need for the city. But surely to speak thus is absurd.

This is no answer; this is no insight. For this study of the city’s development presupposes knowledge of what the city is — and thus proves nothing but its initial supposition, or rather says nothing beyond a restatement of that supposition. Cities are things that develop from a beginning; this beginning is the potential city, it is the parts that will form a city. The city is a partnership of men — men form partnerships because that is what they do (they need to form partnerships). To discover what the city is we ask why do men need to form the city? Thus, we must already know that the city develops in time out of the needs of men, that the city serves to meet these needs. But such an understanding comes too soon; such an understanding begins and ends with what we think we already know. We prove the seeming correctness of our initial opinions because we fail to examine what may be mistaken in our opinions. The origin of this error lies in the assumption that men must develop the city for the city has a history; the origin of this error lies in the assumption that men exist prior to the city.

The opening sentence of chapter two, if read as a call to the study of the city as an artificial union, brings us no closer to an understanding of Aristotle’s understanding of
nature than that with which we began our discussion. Thankfully, Aristotle has not
provided this sentence alone as insight into the proper method of study for the city. For
chapter one also contains a reference to the method Aristotle wishes us to take when
looking at the city:

This will be clear to those investigating in accordance with our normal sort
of inquiry. For just as it is necessary elsewhere to divide a compound into
its uncompounded elements (for these are the smallest parts of the whole),
so too by investigating what the city is composed of we shall gain a better
view concerning these (kinds of rulers) as well.... [1252a16-20]

The normal sort of inquiry will reveal the answers regarding kinds of rulers and the
appropriate art for each. Where there are ruler and ruled there is a partnership (though,
perhaps, there is not necessarily ruler and ruled where there is a partnership); the city is
the authoritative partnership (because it embraces all the others, and aims at the most
authoritative of goods). To discover what is like and unlike about different kinds of
rulers, and whether a different art is appropriate for each, we must examine partnerships,
and in particular the most authoritative partnership (for it embraces all the others). The
most authoritative partnership embraces the others as subordinates; the partnership
aiming at the most authoritative good subordinates other partnerships (and thus goods) to
its end. But, by embracing the subordinate partnerships, the city maintains them, secures
them. Our inquiry must start with the city as a whole that embraces its parts; the parts of
the city are the subordinate partnerships, given security by the city. In examining these
partnerships, uncompounded in speech with the city and one another, we must not lose
sight of the whole in which they are necessarily embraced.

It is with this thought – that the city is a compounded whole consisting of
compounding parts – that we must begin anew our study of chapter two of the Politics.
We thereby move away from the historical examination, wherein the city results from a progressive development of half-realised, partial cities, towards an examination which treats the city as a whole consisting of parts divisible in speech, but not in being. The subordinate parts of the city necessarily relate to an authoritative whole; that is, the parts of the city are always, and have always been, subordinate (have always been parts), and never themselves authoritative wholes. We can separate these parts of the city, and tentatively treat them as wholes; but this method must not mistake itself for the truth of the parts, it must not obscure the basis of the separation (occurable only in speech). If the city is not remembered as the whole to which its examined parts are continually referred, we risk falling back into our now discarded historical analysis.

Indeed, the meaning of ‘whole’ from the historical viewpoint is irreconcilable with that which is now being advanced. For the whole city which results from a progressive development out of needy individuals comes to be from out of other wholes; that is, the city is a union of wholes (needy individuals), which continue their existence while being subjugated to the city. Such needy individuals are also parts who together form a whole, but without any one part being necessary to the whole. Thus each man, as a part, stands in an absolute relation to the city, while every other man is seen as accidental to the city. It matters not what the other individuals are, what they desire or think good and just; rather, they are of importance simply because they have existence – simply because they impinge upon my existence. The sovereign power alone is a necessary whole – but only insofar as he is the author of my will against others. To me, it must be vanity that allows others to believe themselves anything but accidental, while I alone am necessary (so too may others view me – but no matter, for I know better). If the
city is a whole it is so only because I am a whole, only because I authorise the actions of
the city. In tracing the origins of the city to an initial (past) consent, I am really recalling
why I consent, why I allow the sovereign to be the author of my actions. My lack of self-
sufficiency is itself accidental, for it arises in relation to others who might not have been
(it just so happens that they are) with me in the world. The city is an artificial whole – it
is a whole because I make it a whole. In abstraction I can examine this artificial whole
through examining natural wholes, or the whole existing in the state of nature: individual
man.

Thus men, on the historical account, are parts of the city insofar as they choose to
unite. Their relation to the whole is based on choice, or artifice. The whole that is the
city is an artificial whole, and rather than being a reproduction of a natural whole, it
arises in opposition to nature. The city is a result, of which the cause lies in man. To
know the city it is necessary to know the intent of the founders. But every individual in
the city is a whole – every individual is a founder. The purpose of the city is therefore
the purpose every individual has for the city. All manner of purposes, it seems, could be
ascribed to the city, all manner of ends. However, for the city to be authoritative, for it to
serve any ends, it must judge between the ends of each of its component parts (which are
whole individuals). If individuals are wholes without the city, then their ends do not in
themselves necessitate the city.

So it is not correct to state that the city has as many ends as it does citizens, for
each end is incidental to the city’s development. To discover the authoritative end of the
city we must return once more to its formation. We must ask why an individual whole
would authorise the sovereign to act in his name. Man without the city has ends – but
such ends as are unlikely to be attained without opposition. Such opposition occurs from
the proximity of others – from accidental beings. The whole requires protection only
from the accidental. The city comes to be to protect against accidents – or, to be more
precise, the city comes to be to protect against those accidents which can be protected
against. This end, common to all men, is the one thing necessary for every city. The city
is a whole only by artifice, only by its participation with the natural whole, man. Man is
not a part among other parts that comprise the city; rather, the city is part of every man
(who authorises its existence). Man is by nature prior to the city. Thus, to repeat, the
historical analysis from the outset opposes nature to man, nature to the city’s
development.

If Aristotle’s remarks concerning the proper method to be followed when
examining the city are kept in mind, then we must abandon viewing the city as a result
stemming from intentional choice in reaction to need. We must also return to the opening
words of chapter two, words that seemed to resonate with the historical viewpoint. “Now
in these matters as elsewhere it is by looking at how things develop naturally from the
beginning that one may best study them.” We must pay particular attention when reading
this statement to the words ‘develop’ and ‘beginning’, for they both are suggestive of the
historical analysis of the city, an analysis which we now wish to avoid. To what does
‘beginning’ refer, if not to a point in man’s history? To what does ‘develop refer’, if not
the growth in time after this beginning?

Proceeding with care we start with the beginning of the sentence: “Now in these
matters....” What matters are we looking at?

(B)y investigating what the city is composed of we shall gain a better view
concerning these [kinds of rulers] as well, both as to how they differ from
one another and as to whether there is some expertise characteristic of an
art that can be acquired in connection with each of those mentioned.

[1252a19-23]

'These matters' refers to a number of things: first, what the city is composed of; second, kinds of rulers; third, how rulers differ; and fourth, the possibility of each kind of rule being guided by a separate art. These matters are all to be investigated, and point towards a fifth matter: the supposition that types of rule differ only in the size of the ruled, or the number of rulers. The first and fifth matters are of particular importance, for they each guide our subsequent studies (and the questions we shall ask). But the manner of this guidance is different between these two matters. For the fifth matter is a matter only when taken as a given argument, that is, only as a separate argument which, on its own, possesses a particular form. This form is concerned with a matter, but in such a way as the matter is now hidden, or transformed, by this form. The matter that we label fifth is different from the matter with which the supposition that kinds of rule differ only in numbers is concerned.¹⁸ This supposition is the form of an argument, or explanation, regarding unformed matter (unformed by the argument until the argument is given).

And so the first matter appears to stand alone as primary, or as that from which all other matters derive. However, closer examination reveals that this is not strictly the case. For "what the city is composed of" refers not to an unformed matter, but to the form of the argument which is to stand in opposition to the fifth matter. By following this form, we shall see that the form of the argument that is placed on the matter with which the fifth is concerned is erroneous – is a mistaken form for the proper viewing of

¹⁸ That is, by taking this argument as a matter to be investigated, we are no longer directly concerned with the matter that it claims to make sense of, but with the claim itself against other claims. Of course, what this argument is concerned with will affect how we view it – but its concern is not primary (rather its presentation).
its matter. The fifth matter does not distinguish between kinds of rule in kind, but in multitude or fewness. Thus it does not allow for a viewing of the city as composed of these kinds of ruler/ruled relations, or rather these kinds of partnerships. It does not view the city as essentially composed of different partnerships at all. Instead, the city and all other partnerships differ only in numbers – that is, the parts of all partnerships are the same: men. By proclaiming that partnerships differ only in the numbers of their like parts, we are left wondering why different partnerships exist at all. Or rather, we must question the necessity of subordinate partnerships. If partnerships aim at some good, then the ruler/ruled relation is for this good. If all ruler/ruled relations are of one kind, then the good aimed at, or end of each partnership, is of one kind. If this is so then the existence of subordinate partnerships is by convention; that is, their ends could be completely subsumed under that of the authoritative partnership – and the purpose of subordinate partnerships is made redundant. Asking of what the city is composed equals asking of what partnerships are composed. And we have already been told of what partnerships are composed: differing numbers of men. Thus, to gain an understanding of the city in this manner, we must not ask of what it is composed (for the answer is obvious: men) but rather why men compose such a large partnership, or what motivates men to form different sizes of partnerships. We thus must ask what is the function of the city?

It is against this form of analysis that Aristotle asks: ‘of what is the city composed?’ This question sets on us a task: to enumerate what is essentially part of the city, without simply being reducible to the city. We ask: ‘what kinds of partnerships exist in the city, without which the city ceases to be whole?’ From the outset we are told to examine the city, not as the largest but as the authoritative partnership. It is to the city
that all other partnerships are to be referred. It is authoritative because it is complete, self-sufficient, because it “embraces all the others … and aims at the most authoritative good of all.” To speak of a most authoritative good is to recognise other goods, goods that require an authority. To require an authority is to refer to an authority, to take one’s bearings by the authority. But for the authority to be an authority, it too must refer itself - to what is not authority. It must be distinguished from subordinate goods, while remaining connected to such goods. This connection cannot be incidental to either rank of goods. Thus the authoritative good embraces the other goods – it sustains them, holds them in being – while itself remaining in being because it embraces them. The authoritative good is then the most necessary good, for it is the preserving good. It is not, as such, the greatest or noblest good – but the condition for the existence of these goods. Thus its justification comes from beyond, comes from the goods it embraces.

In preserving goods it abandons things that are not goods – it ranks what is good and not good. This ranking is in no way separable from the authoritative good – it is, in a sense, the authoritative good, or the activity of the authoritative good (ruling). But this good cannot thereby rank itself; it cannot number itself as one good amongst the many that it preserves. The greatness of the authoritative good lies not in its ability to preserve – for as an authority this ability is inherent, the lack whereof changes the quality of this good – but in what is preserved. To ask of what the city is composed is to ask of what is preserved in the city, not as to how the city preserves things. The primary question concerning the city, if this form of argument is followed, does not concern the function of the city (which, as the primary question, may be related to any partnership) but what is good in the city, or how is the city good?
Thus, of the five matters which we attributed to the phrase ‘Now in these matters’, the first and fifth stand apart as forms of inquiry which will determine the subsequent revealing of matters to us. No longer are these matters for us, as numbers two through four are; rather, as forms, they set on us distinct ways of viewing these matters. That is, they determine what will matter to us, what will come to be matter, how matter will be revealed. And so Aristotle’s next words take on a new meaning, a meaning that divests them of historical overtones. “(I)t is by looking at how things develop naturally from the beginning that one may best study them.” The best study reveals the natural development of something from the beginning. This beginning is not an historical beginning, is not (primarily) descriptive of the beginning of the development of the city. Rather, the beginning is our initial question, the form of which will determine the form of our analysis, and the subsequent revealing of matter. We are given two possible beginnings with which to study the Politics: the first, questioning what partnerships are composed of (and thus why men would compose different partnerships); and the second, of what the city is composed (and thus what relation do the parts of the city stand in towards one another, and towards the whole).

We are not told on what basis the judgement in favour of the second form is to be made; Aristotle simply associates it with “our normal sort of inquiry.” But we can follow him in his examination of the partnerships that comprise the city; we can study the development of this argument from its beginning. At the same time we can study the development of the contrary argument, that all partnerships are reducible to one kind. For, while both sides present radically divergent views as to what is the city, they are both concerned with similar matter – political things; or, rather, they are concerned with
what could or could not be distinctly political – they are concerned with the discovery of what politics consists.

But studying “how things develop naturally from the beginning” seems to have a further implication. For Aristotle does start his examination of the city at a given point; and this point is the smallest (necessary) partnership. It must strike us as puzzling that, after dismissing the idea that partnerships differ only in numbers of ruler and ruled, Aristotle would list the pre-city partnerships in order of numbers. In listing them in this manner the movement from fewest to greatest could give the impression that the city takes over the functions of the previous partnerships – that the city is the only necessary partnership once it comes to be (and so all other partnerships may, with some justification, be referred to as failed cities). And so once again we are reminded of the historical analysis, which traces the development of the city from out of the needs of individuals. Such development here passes through stages, none of which can satisfy the needs of men, none of which need remain once the city comes to be.

It should not surprise us to find, once again, this form of analysis that we had hoped to abandon. It continues to present itself to us as a possibility, as the potentially correct way of viewing the city. But our trouble in looking beyond this perspective is much graver than it would be were it only one possibility amongst others. For even while claiming it to be just one possibility, we continue to accept the underlying presumption that gives rise to this view of the city. We could, at this point, describe the city as a whole; we could accept that partnerships differ in kind; we could even assert that man is political by nature: but we would be no closer to knowing why we should make these claims, why this possible way of examining the city is best. To make these
assertions here would be rash, for in doing so we continue to discover what we already know, or rather what we already believe that we know. With two possible methods of analysing the city laid out before us, we can reconcile our subject matter to either. That is, we can see how our viewing of the city develops out of these beginnings. But the question remains to be asked as to why we ought to choose either viewing.

If we proceed in our discussion without examining this question, then we have already accepted the truth of the historical, or conventional, analysis. For in choosing between each viewing, while acknowledging the other as a separate possibility, we concurrently acknowledge that our viewing is a function of an undisclosed purpose. Thus our viewing is subordinate to our purpose; and our purpose, forever unexamined, is proven to us in our viewing. If this is the case, then we are not allowing the city to reveal itself to us, but rather are forcing from the city the revelation we wish to receive. Thus it is that our examination continues to labour under the historical analysis: we continue to invent our city, to found our city, before knowing the city. Our city continues to come to be (or continues to result) from an artificial beginning. We continue to confuse our beginnings with our ends.

This confusion renders the task of discovering the nature of something impossible. Indeed, it keeps us from ever understanding something as natural, except insofar as it is external to us.19 But what could be external to us if we, from the outset,

19 It may be objected that earlier we stated man was a natural whole, and to maintain this proposition here requires us to say that man is external to himself. But this is so far from being an objection that it actually reinforces our present statements. For, if it is true that man cannot know himself except as he creates himself, he can gain knowledge of this position. Such knowledge is the extent to which man can know of nature, it is knowledge of the limits of his knowledge. Something is created out of something – man creates himself from out of himself – but what admits of knowledge is only that which is created by man, not the need which forces knowledge to be revealed in this manner. This need is the beginning of all knowledge; it is the conditioning of all knowledge. Such need is the origin of man as he knows himself – it
force an already known answer from the matters we investigate? What is nature becomes that which we cannot know, that which is not ours, that which is hostile to our knowing. Our knowing lies in our freedom from nature. We know things as they are functionally ours, as they serve us. Thus are they products of artifice; and as such, they share in our history. As artifice they are created, they have a beginning. But we only know of this beginning because we know they are an end – we know they are produced. This end is our end for them; it is their existence as functions of other ends (the totality of which comprises man). But our ends are also produced, and so we can constantly uncover new ends. To halt this process we have to create an absolute end – or rather, we have to uncover the end that is authoritative because it is not contingent upon further ends.

And so the absolute end, alike with other ends, is created, it comes to be for us through artifice. But the absolute end differs from all others, for it is not contingent, but makes everything contingent upon it; it is no function, but the grounding of all things as functions. Its coming to be cannot therefore be as a function but as the condition of everything as function. Thus its coming to be, its beginning, is the beginning of everything for us – it is the beginning opposition of man to nature, his freedom from nature. As a beginning, it comes from what cannot be known – it comes from out of nature. The authoritative end is grounded in nature, in an absolute beginning. This absolute beginning cannot be known by itself, only experienced as need, as necessity. But if knowledge comes from freedom from nature, it is only at the end that man can have knowledge of this beginning – it is only with the reconciliation of his freedom with nature (if knowledge is to have a grounding). For we know the beginning of something

is the origin of man in nature. We can only know that this need exists; we cannot know why this need exists.
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only when there is a something to which a beginning could be ascribed, only when that something has come to be. The beginning we now know of is the beginning of all knowledge, or rather the condition of all knowledge. If our freedom conditions our knowledge it cannot be arbitrary, but must show itself as developing necessarily from out of its beginning. Only when freedom – or the history of man – can be viewed as necessary does it ground itself in the needful opposition to nature for us. And so freedom’s final state recognises all previous history as composed of necessary stages, and itself as grounded in the opposition to nature – and thus grasps the truth of man’s relation to nature. But this truth is precisely that supposition with which we began, and so what revealed itself at the beginning as the end reveals itself at the end as the beginning.

I do not wish here to refute this view – nor indeed do I know if it allows for refutation. I do, however, wish to emphasise that the historical analysis cannot provide us with an understanding of nature beyond its initial proposition – and may indeed do greater harm than good in banishing once and for all any possibility of viewing nature. And so, if we are not to flatter ourselves as exceedingly wise, we ought perhaps to avoid so bold an assumption as acceptance of this view would necessarily entail. If Aristotle leads us to a consideration of this analysis, he is nowhere explicit as to its correctness. But if we are to entertain a contrary analysis, we must first discover to what purpose we may do so. For this we must examine what Aristotle says as to the purpose of the Politics – not the purpose presented in its first chapter, but that which makes necessary this purpose, that which makes necessary the study presented in the Politics. We therefore turn our attention away from a direct examination of the Politics, towards that which suggests its coming before, towards the final book of the Nicomachean Ethics.
The City Fathers

We leave our discussion concerning the origins of the city to discover why we should discuss the origins of the city. Two forms of analysis presented themselves to us when we examined the beginning of the Politics. The first form, which Aristotle tells us is improper for our study, reveals the city to come to be from the needs of man, and the subsequent creation of partnerships to meet these needs. This form we have called the historical analysis, for it shows the city to be a result, developed over time by man, in reaction to his original (natural) position. The second form of analysis is that which Aristotle presents as evidence that the first form is incorrect. This form, which we could call the natural analysis, does not reveal the city to be a result of artifice but nature, a whole which gives forms to, and is formed by, its parts. Such parts are separable from the whole only in speech; to trace the city out of these parts is therefore to risk obscuring the truth of the whole. However, if Aristotle presents a plausible alternative to the historical analysis, he does not thereby prove the correctness of his alternative.

Indeed, we are led to wonder of what correctness consists; we are led to wonder how we could view the city in the correct manner. This wonder is itself a result of the historical analysis, an analysis that extends beyond the unveiling of the truth of the city to all realms of thought. For this analysis requires of us to first construct our object of analysis, and then to examine what is necessary in the connection of its parts to the whole. By so doing our initial construction will be of paramount importance; it will be the authority to which all subsequent matters are referred. This secondary act of referral, hiding the initial form of questioning as itself formative of subsequent matters, discovers meaning in such matters only as they are revealed within their proper form. But proper
here cannot mean correct; or rather, such revealing is both correct and (potentially) incorrect. This revealing, as it comes out of its form, is correct in relation to this form. But we are left to determine the correctness of this form (which requires another prior form). This constant need for new forms, each of which will assert itself as primary, must end in an absolute form for any other form to be correct. The form which grounds all other forms is the one thing necessary to this analysis; its coming to be, while necessarily last in time, must be first in thought. That is, all thought must result from this first form. And this form must be; it must not result; it must not be chosen. But this ‘must be’ will forever remain beyond our thinking, even while being the answer to the grounding question. And yet, if it remains beyond our thinking, how do we know it as an answer? How do we know it as some thing at all? Only by our already deciding upon the correctness of our beginning, of our historical analysis, do we know that this analysis points to this necessary answer. In choosing between either one form or the other of analysing the city, we have already decided upon where the grounding of such an analysis will occur.

However, there is a difference between the two forms of analysis now called historical and natural. For, while the holding forth and selection of either form may result in the tacit acceptance of the historical analysis, we must, within such an analysis, recognise the incorrectness of the natural form. Or rather the incompatibility of the natural form with the historical analysis, the denial of the truth of the historical analysis even while remaining within such an analysis, can be recognised. For the natural analysis denies the separation of the city from nature, or from what is natural; it denies that all that is knowable is artifice. Thus, while we cannot here deny the truth of the historical
analysis, we can bring into question the purpose Aristotle has for presenting the natural analysis of the city.

The final words of the *Nicomachean Ethics* call for “a beginning of our discussion.” [1181b24] This future discussion refers to the topic(s) to be discussed in (presumably) the *Politics*. In particular, it refers to the questions coming after the beginning focus of the *Politics*, which questions are: “which constitution is best, and how each must be ordered, and what laws and customs it must use, if it is to be at its best.” [1181b22-23] We are attempting to discover then the absolutely best constitution; the best organisation for particular (not absolute) constitutions; and the habits and laws that should be found in both (the absolute and the secondary constitution). This is here presented as the goal of the inquiry, which goal must have a beginning. This beginning seems to be presented at 1181b16-17: “First, then, if anything has been said well in detail by earlier thinkers, let us try to review it.” Before deciding what is the best political system, Aristotle would have us examine what is worthy of review in the remarks of others on particular topics, as they relate to his stated goal. This seems to be in accord with what is said in the *Politics*:

Since it is our intention to study the sort of political partnership that is superior to all ... we should also investigate other regimes, both those in use in some of the cities that are said to be well managed and any others spoken about by persons that are held to be in a fine condition, in order that both what is correct and what is useful may be seen. [1260b25-33]

However, this seeming beginning is not the first beginning but a “natural beginning”; Aristotle already regards the first beginning as complete. [1260b23] So there are two beginnings to the *Politics*, and the first is completed (at an end) in Book I. Thus the first
beginning does not seem to be that which is referred to at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Indeed, keeping in mind the final words of the *Nicomachean Ethics* the first beginning in the *Politics* must strike us as quite odd. After recommending at the end of the *Ethics* that “if anything has been said well in detail by earlier thinkers, let us review it”, Aristotle quickly opposes himself to his predecessors: “Those who suppose that … do not argue rightly...” and “But these things are not true.” Our first beginning arises in opposition to what has come before. This opposition does not, however, appear as a sustained attack upon Aristotle’s predecessors; instead, we are shown a different view of the city, we are told that the city is not what his predecessors believed it to be. Such predecessors were mistaken for they did not argue rightly. The correction to this is thus methodological: “This will be clear to those investigating in accordance with our normal sort of inquiry.” Book I, we are told, shows the city in the light of “our normal sort of inquiry”; in Book II it becomes necessary to “make a beginning that is the natural beginning to this investigation.” The normal sort of inquiry comes before the natural beginning.

Immediately after calling for a new, natural beginning, Aristotle states where this beginning will start: “It is necessary that all the citizens be partners either in everything, or in nothing, or in some things but not in others.” [1260b37-39] To be partners in nothing is subsequently shown to be impossible: at the very least, members of a city must occupy a single location. So the natural beginning starts by asking for a judgement: “(O)f the things in which there can be participation, is it better for the city that is going to be finely administered to participate in all of them, or is it better to participate in some but
not in others?" [1261a2-4] To answer this question, Aristotle seems to do what he said would come first at the end of the Nicomachean Ethics: he turns to an examination of the sound remarks of his predecessors.

The first predecessor to whom he turns is Socrates as presented in Plato’s Republic. Socrates holds that in the best city children, women and property should be held in common. Looking at the sound remarks of his predecessors, while starting from the natural beginning (and these two things are not necessarily exclusive – looking at the remarks of predecessors may be part of the natural beginning), Aristotle re-phrases his beginning question: “Which is better, then, the condition that exists now or one based on the law that is described in the Republic?” [1261a8-9]

We are asked to judge between conditions: one condition holds that it is better for the city to participate in some partnerships but not others; the other condition holds that it is better for the city to participate in the partnership(s) concerning women and children and property. This second condition is a restatement of the position that the city should participate in all partnerships, thereby replacing the need for such partnerships. Women and children and property were shown in Book I to be the concern of the household. The underlying concern common to both conditions involves understanding the relation of the household to the city. The second condition, in obliterating the distinction between these two partnerships, reduces the ends of all partnerships to one. The city is therefore able to take over the functions of all partnerships.

We saw that Aristotle in Book I rejected this view of the city. But we are told that the second, natural beginning will examine previous views of the city to find what is good and useful in such views. The natural beginning will combine a rejection of the
form of argument grounding previous views, while seeing what there is in these views that is compatible with the natural beginning. The natural beginning rests on a judgement made in favour of the view that distinguishes in kind between partnerships (notably between the household and the city). It should come as no surprise that Socrates is criticised for aiming at too extensive a unity in the Republic. [1261a30-b35] Even while turning to the soundness of his predecessor’s views (and it is noteworthy that Aristotle speaks of this soundness at 1181b16 as residing in particular details – not comprehensive or whole topics) Aristotle continues to ground his argument in a prior judgement.

We remain in wonder then at the first beginning, a beginning that is not the natural beginning for the Politics but somehow necessary to that beginning. This wonder can only increase when we examine the final words of the Nicomachean Ethics, and their relation to the Politics – a relation that becomes clear only in the second Book of the Politics. However, before we leave our brief discussion of Book II, we ought perhaps to give thought to another beginning – namely, Aristotle’s choice of Plato’s Socrates for the first predecessor to be discussed.

It is not difficult to imagine why the proposal that women and children and property ought to be held in common in the best city should be discussed – the excessive unity of such a city seems a strong representative argument for that to which Aristotle wishes to object.20 Rather, the questionableness of this choice concerns the relation of Socrates to Plato, or, more generally, of Plato to his dialogues. Plato is only mentioned twice in this discussion, once at the outset as the author of the Republic, once at the close as the author of the Laws. Aristotle immediately alerts us that the focus of his criticism

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20 And, of course, this one reason is not exhaustive; but to list as many possible reasons as I could possibly imagine seems positively pointless.
will not be Plato, but the Socrates of the Republic. On its own, this change of focus need not surprise us – if nothing else, it is surely more convenient to speak only of the man in whose mouth such words are placed. However, the Republic is not the only Platonic dialogue discussed in Aristotle’s examination of predecessors: chapter six is devoted to a brief discussion of the regime outlined in Plato’s Laws. That is, it is devoted to a discussion we assume to be of Plato’s Laws – but Aristotle does not tell us of Plato’s authorship until the discussion is ended. Again, this may be for the sake of convenience: Aristotle does implicitly link the works, and even without knowledge of the Laws we could guess as to its author. But there exists another, explicit link given by Aristotle between the two dialogues, a link that causes us to pause when approaching the discussion of the Laws so long as we have even just a passing acquaintance with the work. For Aristotle continues to discuss Socrates as the source of the ideas he wishes to examine; Socrates, not Plato, is the predecessor Aristotle first examines. If we turn to the Laws, we come across a problem with Aristotle’s presentation that is so obvious we are forced to give thought to what Aristotle is doing. For the most prominent character in the Laws is not Socrates (though perhaps a similar character): it is the Athenian Stranger. And so Aristotle’s persistence in speaking of Socrates, combined with his omission of both Plato and the Stranger, forces us to examine Aristotle’s procedure.

Our puzzlement can only increase when we turn to what Aristotle writes of the ability of Socrates. After a brief introduction concerning the subject matter of the Laws, and its similarities and differences to the Republic, Aristotle digresses from his examination to praise and excuse Socrates: “All the discourses of Socrates are extraordinary: they are sophisticated, original, and searching. But it is perhaps difficult to
do everything finely.” [1265a10-12] Especially difficult for Socrates is the consistent presentation of his discourse – for he can have no (direct) control over what he is made to say. Aristotle hides that it is Plato who has given us the discourses attributed to Socrates. Perhaps the discourses of Socrates were extraordinary and sophisticated, original and searching. But the discourses of Socrates are no more – and the epithet ‘original’ serves only to highlight Aristotle’s omission. The originality of Socrates’ discourses lies in the presentation of these discourses by Plato. In turning to examine his predecessors for what is good and useful for his inquiry, Aristotle first examines a character of a predecessor as though this character were the author of the ideas ascribed to him (some ideas of which are only ascribed to him by Aristotle). So we are led to ask why Aristotle’s natural beginning that is a second beginning starts with an examination of the original discourses of an imaginary Socrates.

We are not told by Aristotle why he proceeds in this manner: it is left to us to attempt to think through this puzzle. We would be well advised then not to profess an absolute answer, not to assume that we have discovered the one and only key that will unlock for us this mystery. Instead, we should direct our focus to what is foremost in presenting itself to us when examining this problem: its character as a problem, as a puzzle. Thus, while it may admit of a solution, such a solution remains hidden from view. To proffer a solution requires more knowledge than we ought to be willing to admit. A solution may require knowledge of Aristotle’s conception of the relation of Plato to his dialogues, and the function of Socrates within such dialogues. It may require that we know how Aristotle believes we should read these dialogues. It may require that these questions be answered – and many more besides. But we cannot know what the
solution requires until we know the solution – and it remains far from clear that such
knowledge is necessary for our present purpose. Indeed, such knowledge may be
dangerous, for it would conceal what first presents itself to us on approaching this puzzle:
its status as a puzzle. So we would be well advised to set to one side any attempt at
solving this particular puzzle, and instead outline just what is puzzling about Aristotle’s
first turn to his predecessors.

We know that this puzzle arises immediately after Aristotle tells us he is making
the natural beginning to his inquiry. This beginning is not the first beginning – the first
beginning comes to an end with Book I. But it is the first beginning that Aristotle tells us
he will make at the end of the Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle is examining his
predecessors to find sound remarks on particular topics. The first predecessor to be
examined appears to be Plato. But Plato is mentioned only twice in this discussion: at
1261a6, as the author of the Republic, and at 1266b3, as the author of the Laws. Plato is
therefore mentioned as the author of the two works that are discussed: once at the
beginning of the discussion, once at the end. In between, Aristotle speaks of Socrates as
the predecessor whose ideas, as presented in the Republic and the Laws, are examined for
sound remarks. When Aristotle examines the latter work, a small part of this brief
examination is devoted to first praise and then excuse (within which is necessarily
implied a criticism) of Socrates’ discourses. Our problem arises when we reflect on what
Aristotle says against what we know of Socrates and Plato. Socrates was a man executed
after legal proceedings in Athens, for (to speak generally) his discussions (and their
corrupting influence on the young); Plato gives us an account of this legal proceeding,
and other discussions of Socrates, in the form of discourses; the only discourse in which
Socrates is wholly absent is the *Laws*; Socrates himself wrote nothing. Thus, in examining what Socrates said, we are always examining what someone said Socrates said (which separation from Socrates Plato further increases in some of the dialogues).

Like the *Politics*, Socrates has two beginnings. The first beginning is that of a man – his existence as a human being, who was born, grew and died. The second beginning comes to be from an act of creation by another man (or men) – by the author (in this case Plato) who re-creates for us some of Socrates’ discourses. As an object of analysis, as a predecessor (for Aristotle’s purposes in the *Politics*), it is the second beginning that is of importance. Not as a man but as a character does Socrates present himself as a predecessor. But this of course sounds absurd: Socrates as a character cannot present himself. Rather Plato presents Socrates as a character, and it is this presentation that Aristotle examines. The natural second beginning taken by Aristotle starts with an examination of the artificial second beginning of Socrates.\(^{21}\)

This beginning, obscuring as it does the artificial character of Socrates (by not discussing Plato, by substituting Socrates for the Athenian Stranger, and by calling Socrates original) starts with a covering-up. By hiding his first beginning Aristotle is able to find what is good and useful in his predecessor’s remarks. That is, he avoids judging the parts of Plato’s dialogues as they exist in relation to the whole of such

\(^{21}\) Or is it actually more accurate to say that Socrates has a third beginning? For the second beginning, as a creation of Plato’s, is not the same as is his use by Aristotle. This is intimated by the latter’s substitution of Socrates for the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*. It is not simply as Plato’s creation that Aristotle examines Socrates, but as his own creation of that creation. Thus as an object of analysis Socrates has two beginnings: first, his creation by Plato, and second, by Aristotle. His first beginning, as a man, does not present itself to us as of interest for our (and Aristotle’s) analysis. The first beginning for us is as a part of Plato’s dialogues; the second, as the first predecessor Aristotle examines (and in examining transforms). But we can reject this view of the predecessors: for it must lead to recognition of an infinite number of Socrates’, or anyone else – which is no recognition at all. Rather, we should adhere to our first division, and separate Socrates the man with Socrates the Platonic character (and recognize that any subsequent speech on Socrates will usually refer to one of these two beginnings, if not otherwise stated). Thus the substitution of Socrates for the Stranger is not intended to create a new Socrates after the manner of Plato, but to provide a clue as to what Aristotle is doing in this discussion, and in the *Politics* as a whole.
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dialogues; instead, he judges their goodness and usefulness as they relate to the natural beginning of his own discussion. What is of immediate importance for Aristotle in this examination is therefore not what is good in his predecessor’s remarks, but what is useful. Anything found good is so only in reference to something else (contained in the natural beginning); what is good is thus here indistinguishable from what is useful (for it points beyond itself: it is a good-for something). If anything is to be found good, it will do so only in the light of Aristotle’s natural analysis. But this analysis is itself predicated on the first beginning, a beginning that forces us to make a judgement between two types of analysis. We must therefore return to our questioning of Aristotle’s purpose in the Politics by returning to the Nicomachean Ethics, to discover on what basis we are told to choose the natural analysis.

Before we make this return, it must be made clear of what our problem consists. We do not immediately turn away from the Politics to discover why it must be written. For we remain too far removed from this question to answer it directly. Attempting to answer this question here would not lead us towards an understanding of the Politics: quite the contrary – we risk forever barring our access to such an understanding. This question jumps to the origins of something, before we know to what that ‘something’ refers. In so doing, we risk revealing the contents of the Politics as dependent upon our opinions of what such contents ought to be. That is, we do not think, but collect; we do not experience our matter as a problem in need of our discussion, but as the solution in need of our clarification. This need to clarify the solution for others is presumptuous – for why would we need to clarify the solution, how can we be the ones to clarify the solution, why does this solution need clarification? The Politics is no longer a problem
for us, but for others: and we are to provide these others with a convenient solution. This is not to deny that the question is of great importance. But so long as we ask the question without knowing how it comes to be a problem, so long as we ask it without first thinking through the problem leading to it, we can never ask the question as it needs to be asked.

And so we must restrict our sights when turning to the Nicomachean Ethics to that which caused us to turn. We came to a stop in our examination of Book I of the Politics when we asked why we ought to follow Aristotle in saying that partnerships differ in kind. In keeping with this question, we ask another: why does Aristotle start the Politics with the first beginning that is not the natural beginning, the former of which he considers at an end with the close of Book I? It is to answer these questions that we turn to the Nicomachean Ethics. But we must not directly pose these questions to the Ethics, for these are our questions, not Aristotle’s. If we can claim that he forces us to ask these questions, still can we not take them to be those questions that guided Aristotle throughout Book I of the Politics. Instead, we must take Book I (and the questions it leads us to ask) as the proper solution to a problem questioned by Aristotle before the Politics. What we therefore hope to discover in turning to the Ethics is the problem that leads Aristotle to compose Book I of the Politics in the form that he does.

The problem to which Book I provides an answer seems at first to clearly present itself. By the end of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle has dealt with “these matters and the virtues, and also friendship and pleasure ... sufficiently in outline.” [1179a34] The aim of these studies is not simply knowledge, but action based upon such knowledge. Two related problems arise out of this: how can we be in a position to act on this knowledge? and how can we put others in such a position? Aristotle seems to drop the
first of these problems and the related problem of why we would want to teach others. Instead, his focus is on how to proceed in regards to educating people towards virtue. To do this, we need knowledge of law. Law can compel people into acting correctly (it can habituate them); its prescriptions are not burdensome (for people are more hostile to others who oppose them than they are to laws); and knowledge of it grounds the education of individuals in the community. [1180a22-24] We must study law then to become experts in our knowledge of virtue, and, since such knowledge aims at action, we must gain this knowledge to teach others: "And surely he who wants to make men, whether many or few, better by his care must try to become capable of legislating, if it is through laws that we can become good." [1180b24-25]

This endeavour necessitates a further endeavour: to gain knowledge of political science. For a system of laws is worthless without comprehension of such laws, and the proper judgement comprehension provides. Comprehension of law involves experience: to know the goodness of a law, we must know why the law was formed. To know political and legislative science, we must combine experience with thought. Indeed, proper experience seems to be prior to comprehensive knowledge: proper experience seems to be the necessary condition for comprehensive knowledge. The Politics appears to be necessary for those who are already in the proper state of experience, if they wish to be experts in political science, and if they want useful knowledge for assistance in law making. Aristotle thus concludes the Ethics by offering himself as a teacher of politicians. Just as the complete doctor must "try ... to state not only the treatments, but also how particular classes of people can be cured and should be treated", words which are of use to the experienced but useless to the ignorant, so too will Aristotle show how
different regimes (and thus different collections of laws) might be cured, and must be treated. [1181b1-16]

But if this is to be our conclusion in regards to the Ethics, we must admit that we have thrown no new light onto Book I of the Politics. We have not uncovered the question to which Book I supplies an answer, but continue to present to ourselves the connection between the final book of the Ethics and Book II of the Politics. For Aristotle claims to supply collections of laws and political systems that are useful if we can study and judge of what is fine in them. This he seems to do starting with Book II, culminating in the final Book’s discussion on education. Those with the proper state of experience will judge finely when going through these collections with Aristotle; for those lacking the proper state of experience, such collections will be useless. [1181b6-7]

Yet perhaps we are too hasty in making even this conclusion. A brief glance at Book II supports this hesitation. As we saw, Aristotle first talks of Plato/Socrates when turning to his predecessors; and this discussion puzzles us with its excessive focus on Socrates, a focus that has Aristotle substituting Socrates for the Athenian Stranger in the Laws. We are shown that Aristotle, when collecting laws and political systems for us, alters such things in their presentation. He does not simply gather information to study and judge with us; rather, he already studies and judges this information before presenting us with an altered version. That is, Aristotle must teach us about laws and political systems before we can study and judge finely such things. He also partially hides this role as teacher: we are instead flattered to sort through the material presented in the Politics with Aristotle, the correct judgement of which “will be clear to those investigating in accordance with our normal sort of inquiry.” [1252a17] It is not Aristotle
we follow then, but a method; it is not Aristotle who teaches us, but we ourselves armed with this method. The proper method replaces the proper state of experience as the condition for the proper judgement on things political. Thus we are confronted with two more questions: why does the teacher hide his role as teacher? and why the substitution of proper method for proper state of experience? To answer these questions, we must discover how they relate to Aristotle's matter in the final book of the Ethics.

Political science, we are told, differs from the other sciences, for the practitioners and (apparent) teachers are separate only in the former science. It is apparently the practitioners with whom Aristotle is concerned to speak. The apparent teachers, the Sophists, are not actually teachers of political science:

But those of the sophists who profess the art seem to be very far from teaching it. For, to put the matter generally, they do not even know what kind of thing it is nor what kinds of things it is about; otherwise they would not have classed it as identical with rhetoric or even inferior to it ... [1181a15-18]

The Sophists teach that political science is rhetoric, or can be subsumed under rhetoric; it consists of making fine speeches in the law courts or the Assembly. Their basis of judgement is reputation: a law with a good reputation is taken to be a good law. Thus the Sophists appear to teach a kind of experience, or rather an adequate substitute for experience. They teach that what is best is what is held to be best; they teach how to make what is held to be best appear as absolutely best.

Whom do they teach? Not the politicians, for these "seem to (act) by dint of a certain skill and experience rather than of thought." [1181a2-3] Instead, they teach the non-experienced, they teach the friends and children of the experienced. For the experienced take no interest in teaching their political knowledge: "they are not found
either writing or speaking about such matters ... nor again are they found to have made statesmen of their own sons or any other of their friends.” This sweeping generalisation is followed by a criticism of such practises, “for there is nothing better than such a skill that they could have left to their cities, or could prefer to have for themselves, or, therefore, for those dearest to them.” [1181a4-9] Politicians not only fail to teach their friends but fail to understand why they ought to teach their friends. They have knowledge from experience, but do not decide to produce the political capacity in themselves. If they understand how to speak in the law courts or Assembly, still they do not properly understand political science. This failure results from their low ranking of the worth of the political capacity and the concurrent failure to grasp its significance outside of direct action in the law courts and Assembly.

Political science therefore differs from all other sciences because of its lack of teachers. No one teaches political science because no one seems to know what it is in its entirety, no one has progressed to the universals of politics (to knowledge of politics as a science). Perhaps of most concern, no one who is thought to be concerned with politics rates it correctly. But if the Sophists and the politicians are alike in their failure to grasp politics as a science, they differ as to their relation to politics. For the experienced activists (politicians) do not claim to concern themselves with study, but act on a familiarity with particulars. In contrast, the Sophists advertise that they teach about politics, that they articulate a method for acting politically. Since they teach a method they implicitly claim knowledge of universals: they teach all that needs teaching concerning politics. This teaching amounts to the teaching of rhetoric, or a type of rhetoric; it is teaching as a tool for success in particulars. Thus the Sophists do not
oppose the politicians, do not attempt to teach them about politics. Rather, they teach the would-be politicians how to act as politicians: they train potential politicians. This training is a training in power; it is a training in how to effect what is held to be good by the student.

But for this reason the Sophists provide a teaching that is potentially destructive of the political capacity. This teaching is not of the political capacity, but for it; students are not trained to be political activists, but successful in the law courts and Assembly. The purpose of such teaching is left for the student to decide; the comprehension and correct judging of laws is only of importance to one who deems it so. The political capacity, continually developed through the experience of politicians, is characterised by this comprehension and judgement. Comprehension and judgement do not first arise at the bidding of the politicians; politicians cannot teach their capacity to themselves or others. But experience substitutes for study and thought the ability to “judge rightly the works produced ... and understand by what means or how they are achieved, and what harmonizes with what...” [1181a20-21]

The products of political science, Aristotle tells us, seem to be laws. [1181b1] Political activists become better politicians through acquaintance with law (not simply law courts); they become better politicians through working with law. For working with law to be the means whereby politicians are improved, such laws must not be created by these politicians, but exist prior to such politicians (as politicians). The continuance of law over generations (of politicians) is the condition for the improvement of politicians. The creation of new law is tempered by the existence of old law; the improvement of law is effected through comprehension of “what harmonizes with what”, that is, how new law
relates to old law. Educated under the old laws, the judgement of politicians is thus grounded in the community, for “public concerns are brought about by means of laws...” [1180b1] The political capacity develops from an education in “speech that comes from a certain thoughtfulness and intelligence.” [1180a23] The political capacity is trained within an order that aims at a good beyond that perceived by each individual (that is, it is for the sake of the community, or for the individual-in-the-community, and never strictly for the individual). Training in the political capacity thus potentially stands in opposition to the teaching of the Sophists, who claim to teach success in politics regardless of the community and the temperance of old law.

It does not follow that one educated by the Sophists, and desiring to be a politician, will therefore destroy old law and the political capacity. For the young will receive a prior education in such law through the constraints it imposes on their activity. Even where no legislation exists expressly for the purpose of educating the young (and Aristotle tells us this is usually the case), they learn what actions are permitted and what proscribed in the community. However, law (and the habits it engenders) is not alone in determining the character of men, but acts in conjunction with nature and (direct) teaching. [1179b20-27] Habits formed in youth will therefore differ between people; and students of differing character will receive the teaching of the Sophists. As a tool, this teaching heeds not the character of the student, but rather is laid for use before any who so desire. Thus, while it may be hoped that most students will continue to act within the limits set on them by the old laws, it is possible for a student to overstep such limits, and with the training in rhetoric supplied by the Sophists, alter the law to serve a different

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22 I have followed Sachs’ translation here. Ross substitutes “public control” for “public concerns”; he thereby over-emphasizes the sense of laws as standing in opposition to citizens.

23 Again, I have followed Sachs’ translation.
end. The Sophist’s teaching potentially breeds a tyrant; and a tyrant will educate the young of the community, willingly or not, through his law. The threat of the Sophists is to the political capacity, and any threat to the political capacity is a threat to the community.

While the Sophists may ultimately undermine the political capacity, this threat is neither explicit nor, presumably, intended (for it is likewise a threat to their livelihood). And it may be that this threat must not be brought too clearly to the attention of the politicians: for a legislated education may prove as great a threat to the community as the Sophist’s. "(Law is) speech that proceeds from a certain thoughtfulness and intelligence," and has the power to compel; while "educations tailored to each person are better than those that are given in common." [1180b8-9]24 In establishing an education by law politicians may make impossible the presence of what ought to be best in the city. For they can produce a compelling power, and imbue it with intelligence and understanding of a sort, and yet still they cannot establish an education in virtue. For the virtue of understanding found in study is the most blessed and the happiest state of man; and this is the virtue fit for the gods. [1178b22-23] But "But such a life would be greater than what accords with a human being" [1177b26], and can only be partially lived to varying degrees by different men. Only one of god-like intelligence could thus legislate the best education; but only the gods can be gods. The fully legislated education aims too high, presumes too much. It cannot therefore be to the politicians that Aristotle appeals to counter the Sophists, for the danger lying there is equally as great.

24 Once again this is from Sachs’ translation. Ross contrasts public with private education, which may mistakenly imply that the contrast is in sources of funding.
Not to the politicians then does Aristotle turn — or rather not to the politicians as politicians. Instead, he must speak to another source of education to protect against both the Sophists and the politicians. He must turn to fathers as heads of the household. Not that his intent ought to be the complete education of fathers; rather, he must show to them their necessity as fathers, and the danger to what is theirs. For the danger inhering in the particular education provided by fathers is still less than that given by the city, or no education but that of the Sophists. If the best education would be one correctly legislated by the city, the safe education is that of the fathers. Thus Aristotle tells us that the community must provide the correct education when it makes such education law, but fathers must only decide to educate their children and friends:

Now it is best that there should be a public and proper care for such matters; but if they are neglected by the community it would seem right for each man to help his children and friends towards virtue, and that they should have the power, or at least the will, to do so. [1180a30-34]

Aristotle acknowledges that an education by fathers is not without its drawbacks; and such drawbacks are potentially so great as to appear to be supportive of a legislated education:

(T)he paternal command indeed has not the required force or compulsive power (nor in general has the command of one man, unless he be a king or something similar), but the law has compulsive power ... (a)nd while people hate men who oppose their impulses, even if they oppose them rightly, the law in its ordaining of what is good is not burdensome.. [1180a20-24]

A father’s instructions risk the hostility of the child; unable to perceive the reasonableness of education, children may only feel their father’s opposition to their impulses. Without the city attending to upbringing a father’s rule over the household is akin to that of a Cyclops: rule through force, isolated, and cannibalistic. Opposition to a
kin-eater (or to an impulse-led father who threatens the impulses of his children) comes from the children so opposed, and no one else. This education (if it can even be called such) thus continually breeds the dissolution of the family, and more Cyclopes.

However grim this description of the father’s rule may initially appear, Aristotle is quick to temper it. Shortly after telling us that a father’s instruction lacks influence, and implying that his cyclopean rule must undermine itself, he tells of the benefits of fatherly training: “(T)he father’s words and habits have strength ... on account of kinship and the good that is done, since his family members are already loving and obedient to him by nature...” and “educations tailored to each person are better than those that are given in common.” [1180b4-7, 9] While these words seem to stand in direct contrast to the father-as-Cyclops description, the two can be reconciled. For the exhortation given to fathers to at least attempt to educate their children (and friends) is not given to advocate any sort of education, but only that which “help(s) his children and friends towards virtue.” It is not an accidental education, gained only in relation to a father’s cyclopean habits, which Aristotle has in mind. However partial, it must proceed from some sort of understanding on the part of the father, some sort of opposition to impulse that is for more than the sake of mere opposition or dominance.

To effect this education a father requires some sort of understanding: “he must try to become capable of legislating.” The acquisition of legislative science comes about through experience. It requires adherence to established laws, and participation in the law courts and Assembly. It therefore requires a different type of rule than that held over an isolated household by its head (which is potentially as a Cyclops). It requires a sharing of rule, a concurrent ruling and being ruled, amongst equals. It requires the city,

25 From Sachs’ translation.
and a certain type of political participation within the city. If education by fathers ensures against the potentially tyrannical education system established by politicians, such fathers must first be educated as politicians. Household heads must preserve the household while participating in a partnership of which the household forms a part.

Book I of the Politics can therefore be read as an attempt to secure the ground upon which the possibility of education is preserved. It is an appeal to fathers, or at least to potential fathers, a statement of the necessity of households. Such necessity cannot, however, be seen as antagonistic to the city, for both are necessary for an education towards virtue. Rather, the household is necessary for the city; it is a necessary part of the city. No less an authority than nature hallows this connection: and if the meaning of this authority remains obscure, that it is seen as good exists independent of Aristotle calling it such. Without providing an explanation for nature he employs it as a standard, and proceeds to show how the parts of the household are by nature. The city is also shown to be by nature, something we come to know through its relation to the family (this is the proof of the city's naturalness for us – not that which makes the city natural). The first pairs that are natural – man with woman, master with slave – are parts of a whole – the household – that in turn is part of a whole – the city.

The household would seem to have a dual identity – or an ambiguous one – as both a whole and a part. To be both a whole and a part is to have two different ends. But as Aristotle tells us in regards to women, "Nature makes nothing in an economising spirit ... but one thing with a view to one thing." [1252b1-2] The household, which is by nature, appears to be for two things: for itself, and for the city. But nature does not act in this way. We are left to wonder if one of the ends of the household is not by nature, but
convention. Indeed, we could wonder if both these stated ends are conventional, if the household itself is conventional, or if a third true purpose exists for the household. Aristotle does not explicitly answer these questions for us. However, the ambiguity he leaves us with is itself instructive. For it forces us to question why this problem must be left ambiguous, and to continue questioning as to the purpose of the household and the city. In particular, we must continue to ask about a partnership that continually recurs in Aristotle’s discussion on education at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but which is almost wholly absent from Book I of the *Politics*: friendship.
In the first Book of the *Politics* Aristotle combines the household with the city so that the former is both subordinate to, and necessary for, the latter. Integral to this combining is his insistence on the naturalness of both partnerships, and his avoidance of a sustained discussion of what naturalness consists. To say that Aristotle uses the word ‘nature’ for the purpose of combining the household and the city, while preserving distinctions between the types of rule evident in each, is to say that he does not primarily speak of nature to define nature. Nature is not examined for its own sake, but for the sake of partnerships; which partnerships may be by nature, but do not of themselves limit what is meant by nature. The discussion in Book I may therefore show how the household and the city are natural, and thus what we mean by nature when we speak of the household and the city, but it does not provide us with knowledge of the whole of nature.

That this is the case need not surprise us: to thoroughly discuss nature may be out of place (or unnecessary) in a discussion of politics. That is, it may be necessary to regard nature in relation to physics, and zoology, and other fields of study that do not appear to directly pertain to a discussion on human partnerships, in order to complete our understanding of nature. However, we presumably must first ensure that our studies of the parts of nature are consistent with one another, or realize that we speak confusedly by employing one name to discuss contradictory ideas. And second, we must ensure that our study of each part of nature is complete in itself (that it does not contain contradictory or incomplete ideas in regards to its own parts). As we have seen, Aristotle begins the *Politics* by stating that all partnerships aim at a good, and that the city is the partnership...
that aims in the highest degree at the most authoritative good. The city thus contains all other partnerships. This ‘contains’ is further revealed to be descriptive of the relationship between a whole and its parts: just as saying ‘man’ contains the idea of hands and feet, so too does saying ‘city’ contain the idea of partnerships. The Politics is an examination of the city (the whole) as well as an examination of partnerships (as they relate to this whole). We may assume then that the whole contained in the general name ‘partnership’ is the same as that contained in the name ‘city’.

Yet this attempt to clarify the subject of Book I leads us to question the completeness of our understanding of Aristotle’s discussion. For the Politics does not contain a discussion on friendship, which we are told in the Nicomachean Ethics “is most necessary with a view to living”, and “seems … to hold states together”. [1155a5, 22] In examining partnerships Aristotle appears to have left out - or included elsewhere - what is necessary for a complete examination. It is possible then that this study of a part of nature is incomplete. If it is complete, we must assume that friendship lies outside of politics - that knowledge of friendship is part of a different study of nature than that of partnerships that culminate in the city. It may be objected that friendship is dealt with in the appropriate place, in a study that seems to necessarily precede the Politics. For to understand how men ought to live together, we must first understand how a man ought to live - and a discussion of friendship must involve a discussion of the character of each friend. Yet this objection is obviously flawed: for friendship is a living together to the greatest degree. To raise this objection we still must understand the reason for the position of the discussion on friendship. Thus it is still necessary to question concerning
the relation of friendship to the city to complete our knowledge of the nature of partnerships.

Still, we ought to proceed with caution to a discussion on friendship. For we risk embarking upon a new beginning, without first bringing to completion what is necessarily prior in our discussion. If we remember friendship, and note its absence while reading the Politics, we can further develop our understanding of the nature of the household and the city beyond what first presented itself to us. For we now can examine these latter two partnerships not as constitutive of the whole of partnerships, but rather as the whole of political partnerships. Nothing as yet is revealed to us as to why the city and its parts are limited by the word ‘political’, as distinguished from the unencumbered ‘friendship’. This term is here employed only to designate where we find their fullest discussion - in the Politics. But unless we state that this division by Aristotle is arbitrary we ought presumably to find of what this limit consists.

What does Aristotle examine in the first Book of the Politics? The first paragraph tells us that partnerships are to be examined, in particular “that … partnership that is the most authoritative of all and embraces all the others …” – the city. The first paragraph thus tells us that the city embraces all partnerships, including friendship. It does so for it “aims at the most authoritative good of all….“ Aristotle examines the city because it is the most authoritative partnership aiming at the most authoritative good. We can say that examining partnerships requires us to examine the partnership that is most authoritative, or which authorizes all other partnerships.26 The good aimed at by the city, at least in

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26 Two notes are in order here. First, in matters of authority, ‘most’ essentially means ‘absolute’, for only one can rule. Second, a question may be raised as to what ‘authorizes’ refers? The city authorizes other partnerships – it permits them to be. In permitting them to be can it therefore create and destroy partnerships? No and yes – men create partnerships, even if the city appears to (with what could the city
part, is authoritative because it allows the goods aimed at by other partnerships to be, for it allows other partnerships to be.

Aristotle proceeds to take exception with people who do not distinguish between types of rule. He claims that a king, a household manager, and a master of slaves differ not only in regards to the number of people ruled, but in the type of rule appropriate to each. And he tells us that this will be shown to be true in the discussion that follows. The Politics claims to be an examination of the most authoritative partnership; and examining the most authoritative partnership requires us to examine types of rule. If we are to advance to knowledge of the nature of partnerships, we must understand what it is to rule and to be ruled. We will understand partnerships by understanding what it means to rule and be ruled within partnerships. Understanding rule within partnerships allows us to compare partnerships in regards to what rules in them. But this does not exhaust the importance of the study of ruling as regards partnerships. For the city is said to be the authoritative partnership, or the partnership that rules the others. Thus we need also look at the relationship between partnerships - how the city rules, and others are ruled.

Indeed, we need to examine this most of all – for that different types of rule can be seen in the other partnerships depends upon the rule of the city. The city must rule in such a way that it does not make itself the sole partnership. It must correct the barbarians’ mistake of treating women as slaves, who thereby collapse the family into a different form of partnership. Yet we still do not know why the barbarians are mistaken, or why the city cannot collapse the subordinate partnerships into itself. We must discover the purpose of these partnerships, which seems to be found in our understanding partner? Rather, the city can only ever reduce the number of partnerships – it can only take on the functions of other partnerships.
the different purposes of different types of rule. In particular we must understand the
difference between household rule and the rule of the city, for the household is the
partnership with the greatest claim for embracing subordinate partnerships without
recourse to the city.27

Searching for the limit implied by adding the seemingly arbitrary term political to
partnership requires us to remember what it is with which Aristotle is directly concerned.
Partnerships are spoken of in the first paragraph; examining partnerships requires us to
account for a particular form of partnership, the city, which is authoritative — it embraces
all others. It is authoritative: nothing can be added to the city, no further partnerships can
be devised which will not be embraced by the city. The city aims at the most
authoritative good; it aims at the good that will order all other partnerships (and the goods
at which they aim).

We examine the city to gain knowledge of man. Men form partnerships for the
sake of some good. The city allows for the existence of other partnerships; it can
condone or take on the functions of its (potential)28 parts depending on how it is
authoritative, or, to say the same thing, depending on what the city is for, or what the
good is at which it aims. That is, the function of the city lies in ordering partnerships.
Ruling thus appears to be the defining characteristic of the city. How it rules shows what
it is, for it shows how its parts are ordered, how its parts are able to participate in a whole.
It thereby shows us characteristics of partnerships, but only in a qualified sense. For it
will obscure some partnerships, and highlight others. It is the partnership that can subvert

27 The village could likewise make this claim, but it does not seem to differ from the household in
anything beyond number ruled. It is thus more like an extended household than a miniature city.
28 Potential parts — for by not allowing space for these parts to be, or by rendering these parts superfluous,
the parts cannot be parts of this city.
all other partnerships, to the point where it seems to directly rule individuals. The whole (the city) thus precedes its parts - its parts are dependent upon the city for their particular characters.

However, the rule of the city (the good it aims at) has a different pedigree than Athena. Men form partnerships for the sake of what they hold to be good. We return here to the problem with which we began this paper: how can man know a standard for this good? That this is a problem seems obvious; but that it is the problem that guides the discussion of the first Book of the Politics, and helps to explain its apparent omissions and inconsistencies, requires further examination. That men make mistakes means that the city will not always (if ever) be reasonable - the city may aim at a good that is against reason. The unreason of the city must be protected against. But the city is an end - it cannot be protected against. There is within the city no other reason but the city's. If it is the nature of man to form partnerships, and this nature is fully actualized in the city (the self-sufficient and therefore ruling partnership), then the end of man is found in the city. He will live in the city, which will determine how he lives (what partnerships he will form).

But if the end of man is actualized in the city, does it follow that all cities are natural? And if all cities are natural, must we then conclude that different men have different ends (for different ends are allowed in different cities)? The rule of the city seems to be an end - but such that it does away with this 'seems to'. The tyranny of cities must be checked, their ends must not be final, if man is to have an end beyond that allowed to him within faulty partnerships. If the city is an end it must be made possible to judge this end, to know the true end or right standard that is not to be found in this city;
it must be made possible to know an end not arbitrarily chosen, as all ends may appear to be by the diversity of cities. This need to oppose the city, to maintain an end within the city not taken on by the city, is provided by the family. By maintaining the distinction between city and family, Aristotle seeks to oppose the unavoidable tyrannical tendency of the city.  

Partnerships are not properly constituted for the sake of ruling. That any component of a partnership may be motivated by a desire to rule, it does not follow that the partnership is for the sake of ruling. Ruling is an activity; partnerships are constituted for the sake of an apparent good (an end); an end is not an activity (or, if it is, it is an activity that points beyond itself, it is for the sake of a further end - and is therefore not an end itself). But as a continual ordering, ruling can appear to be an end; that is, it can obscure what the partnership is properly for. Thus we can interpret the statement “man is by nature a political animal” to mean that man is the animal who rules and is ruled, but such an interpretation mistakes a process (ruling and being ruled) for a purpose. If we ask why man rules and is ruled we must either find reason in his activities or despair at the purposelessness of such activities. If we retreat into limiting ourselves to naming this activity, still we do not understand it, for on the strength of this limitation there can be nothing to understand. We cannot even describe it as purposeless - it instead remains an impenetrable mystery. Indeed, this too is a mistake - for we can know it neither as

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29 That this tyranny is necessary needs further elaboration. To state this negatively, the city is not potentially tyrannical. To be potentially tyrannical is to be at the same time potentially not tyrannical. But to not be tyrannical the city must not be an end - it must in no way order all partnerships, or be authoritative. But if this is the case, it ceases to be a city. Some other organizing principle rules, and what is called city is superfluous. The city is not as such a whole, for it is without parts, it is content-less. For the same reason the check on a city(’s tyranny) cannot come from other cities, if we understand cities as exclusive of all other organizing principles. In so far as cities attempt to check one another, they must war, or foment dissent within the opposing city - that is, they can only work to destroy the opposing city, or hope for the parts of the city to change. But a city cannot change without becoming a different city, and so it cannot allow itsf to be changed except where such changes do not collide with its organizing principle.
impenetrable nor as a mystery. It is nothing for us. To deny that partnerships are constituted with a view to a good (for an end) is to deny the possibility of discovering reason in them. It is not ruling that shows us the nature of partnerships; it is not the noting of the ruling of the city alone that brings us to an understanding of man. It is rather the appearance of ruling and being ruled that obscures what it is to say that man is political by nature if we fail to look beyond this activity.

Yet we must be wary of overemphasizing this point. For if we fall into error by taking ruling and being ruled as what is essential in partnerships, so too do we lose our ground by ignoring its presence. It is not by accident that this aspect of partnerships forces itself into our view. Ruling and being ruled seem to relate to all aspects of our lives. Our problems arise from this very universality. For we speak of the ruling of laws, likewise the ruling of a king, or the ruling of the strong, or the ruling of necessity. And we perceive that all of these forms of rule depend on some thing - a subject - ruled by something else - a ruler. That is to say we conceive of ruler and ruled as two distinct things, so that that which rules stands outside of that which is ruled. Ruling describes a relation between separable things; it suggests that such things are potentially opposed. Thus a king rules his subjects, who may or may not desire his rule, but even in desiring recognize a limit on themselves. Or we say that the law of gravity rules bodies, so that if we could conceive of a unified body existing in a true vacuum, such a law would cease to hold sway.

But this latter example highlights our difficulties in discussing rule, in that we apply a common term (ruling) to diverse relations. We thus separate in speech what is

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30 If all partnerships arise from necessity such that all choice is absent, we could know nothing of partnerships. However, in the light of the chosen good, reason in the necessary - the necessary as necessary - is illuminated. Conversely, the necessary is essential to ever knowing a ground for the chosen.
inseparable in nature. We separate out of different things that which appears to be ruling and being ruled, and compare the appearance of ruling as something common between things differing in kind.

Again, we speak of the rule of reason within a man, and understand this to refer to a division within the man whereby one part controls, or determines, separate, (subordinate) parts. But how are we to perceive such a separation, how are we to be sensible of this ruling and being ruled? For if we say that the appetites perceive their thralldom, we seem to speak of two men in one (and such divisions may be unlimited and thus arbitrary). Or we say that reason tells us what we ought to do, but our appetites stand opposed – that reason presents an unfulfilled wish, that we desire to act differently than we desire to act. What we mean when speaking of reason here blends into what we mean when we speak of desire, and so this reason seems to be another appetite. If reason as we speak of it here is to avoid this in its rule we must maintain faith in its external existence - we must believe it to come from outside of us. But then the rule of reason no longer refers to relations within a man, but to something external, something opposable - and that which perceives this external reason does not rule, but merely wishes to rule, desires to rule. To oppose the rule of reason here means to oppose what is believed to be reason, but may not be. It is to oppose desire to desire, while separating such desires into those that arise internally, and those that come to us from outside. Such a distinction must remain groundless, for we cannot know on what it is to be based (except on faith). Thus we cannot come to clear knowledge of what we speak if each part is apart: separate, and therefore (potentially) opposable.
So too is the city separable in speech, but this separation must not be taken as constitutive of the whole of the city. Aristotle can speak of the city and the family as ruling in different ways. But standing in opposition the city and the family are each parts of another whole: the city. As a part of the city, the advantage of the city is the advantage of the family, and so opposition is meaningless (for it would follow that a part opposes itself - which is to say that it separates itself from itself, and therefore is and is not itself). But if the city is conceived of as a part that participates in a whole along with the family, both can be said to rule, and each is thus potentially opposed to the other. Just as ruling is spoken of in different ways, such that both what is and is not separable in nature falls under this term, so too can the city be conceived of in two ways: as a whole, and as part of this whole (to which whole we apply the same name - city - but refer to something more than the part).

Because the city can be spoken of in two ways the family can appear to oppose the whole to which it belongs. Aristotle can also thus avoid contradiction when praising the first lawgivers: "(T)here is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership. And yet the one who first constituted (a city) is responsible for the greatest of goods." [1253a29-31] The city is prior to the individual; men create cities. These statements seem to contradict one another, but do so only if we fail to recognize that the city is spoken of in more than one way. The priority of the city in nature is not a chronological prior-ness. As Aristotle previously states, the first pairs make up the family, not the city. Rather the city's priority issues from the logic of partnerships. For the positing of any partnership presupposes the existence of a function separate from that partnership - a function that defines the city by nature. This function is the true rule of
the city, a rule that is always and everywhere unopposable so long as man remains man – so long as men form partnerships. The function of the city lies in the ordering, or ruling, of partnerships. Ruling and being ruled can thus appear as an unadulterated end only in the city. Wherever there are partnerships there is a city.

How are we to understand this statement? Are we to say that the city is prior to all other partnerships for it is their end, and is their end because the purpose of each partnership is only fully realized in the city? This view seems to be sound, and in accordance with Aristotle’s remarks about the naturalness of the city:

Every city, therefore, exists by nature, if such also are the first partnerships. For the city is their end, and nature is an end: what each thing is - for example, a human being, a horse or a household - when its coming into being is complete is, we assert, the nature of that thing. Again, that for the sake of which [a thing exists], or the end, is what is best; and self-sufficiency is an end and what is best. [1252b30 - 1253a1]

The city is the end of all partnerships; the city is the self-sufficient partnership. The city is prior to humans because the latter are not self-sufficient, rather must unite to satisfy their needs. This uniting may not first be a uniting into an actual city; but that for the sake of which we unite (self-sufficiency) is fully realized in the city.

However, we once again appear to tread down the path of historical development when we understand the city in this manner. The reasons set forth by Aristotle for the city’s naturalness may be correct, but we persist in speaking of the city as though it is the final, absolute part. That is, we continue to view the city as a potential to be fulfilled in time, when we state that it is the realization of an idea incipient in the first partnerships. The city then is akin to its parts for in it is perfected the means of continually fulfilling the functions incompletely realized in each of its parts. The city is the most fully realized partnership, or the partnership that could sustain itself indefinitely. It is the largest
partnership, and differs from other partnerships only in size. No other partnerships need to exist: the city can make itself a whole because it can absorb all parts. Thus its wholeness consists in its tyrannical potential. It is whole when no other parts exist, indeed, when the desire for other parts is no more.31

We are again speaking of the city confusedly; we are again speaking of two things with one term. For the city we here speak of can never be a whole except insofar as it does away with opposition; and doing away with opposition will only make it a whole once such events occur. In the meantime we may continue to object to this view, and maintain that wholeness might be something that a part can never attain; that wholeness is not created by man, but describes that which already exists; and that the city that comes to be (the actual city) allows us to understand the city that is always.32

A more careful reading of the passage asserting the naturalness of the city ought to force us to question our first interpretation. "For the city is their end, and nature is an end: what each thing is - for example, a human being, a horse, or a household - when its coming into being is complete is, we assert, the nature of that thing." We can maintain our view of the city as the final partnership that perfects what is imperfect in prior partnerships only by ignoring what Aristotle tells us. For if we are to assert that the household is a part of the city, understanding its part-ness to be indicative of its

31 This accords with Aristotle’s comments on the Republic in Book II. First he distinguishes unity from wholeness, something the historical city does not; and second, he relates what appear to be minor objections to Plato’s communism. These objections rely upon our accepting things for true that are unknowable, though plausible. Thus we acknowledge that Aristotle may be correct when stating that direct relatives might still recognize one another, but we feel that this observation is nothing more than quibbling, ignoring the greater issues. However, it may be that Aristotle chooses such a quibble to highlight the immensity of the task Plato sets before his city - a task that will have to take into account such minor quibbles if it is to succeed. The city must not only control partnerships, but every detail of each individual’s life, even to the point of altering how they are to recognize anything. The city that wishes to make its part-ness into a whole must do away with chance.

32 Since we can see contractions between parts of the city (and the actual city is a part of the city that is always), we can speak of a better (and worse) city. Thus if tyranny ever were to be complete, we are done for as humans.
subordination, then we err in speaking of it as an end, if by end we mean self-sufficiency (being for the sake of no further end). The household is for the sake of the city; the household can only be understood in relation to the city by which it is ruled; the nature of the household is knowable only after we know of the nature of the whole. But to understand the whole we must first understand its parts, and this means recognizing these parts as parts, which in turn means recognizing the whole.

But that this is a monstrous problem does not seem to affect us greatly; and there is perhaps more understanding in our regular speech then is here implied. Aristotle emphasizes that we assert that the complete coming into being of some thing is the nature of that thing. What we see as the end of a process we name the nature of that which came before. But this is not the only indication of the nature of something: for we also say the nature of something is its end, or that for the sake of which it exists. That these two statements are similar seems obvious; our task is to discern why Aristotle separates them, that is, to understand the difference between the two. So long as both are descriptive of a process we equate the two; and if we equate the two, we cannot maintain that the household is both a part and a whole - both for itself and for the city. Yet the two are clearly linked in some way.

What is it then that we assert? We name at the end of a process that which something is to be its nature. In light of what has come to be, what was coming into being is illuminated. This illumination casts what has been into a process for the sake of something. From this we can say that the purpose of what came before is seen in what has only now completely come into being. But how do we know this as completely come into being? Either we state this conditionally - it is complete until some further change is
forthcoming - or we turn from naming the process to naming the purpose. The end is what is best; it is the best of something remaining in its bestness - it is self-sufficient. It no longer participates in a process. But to no longer participate in a process something must have always been, or never have participated in a process. For to stop will always appear arbitrary, will always be risking another start. We assert that we know the nature of something when it is complete; but to know what is complete we must know why it is now complete, or know why we before could say it is not complete. We must know what has reached completion.

The household is complete: what does this mean? Households will come and go - what part of them remains? That Mr. and Mrs. X, with children and ox, form a household, is not what we look to when speaking of the nature of the household. Any process must be viewed in the same light. Certainly these particulars are of primary significance - for the household must have actuality. But they are accidental to the nature of the household, and thus all process appears accidental. We must not look at what changes, but what is always; and to see what is always, we must know why it must be always, must always have been. And this must be true even if we have no natural household at which to look - that is, no household which is completely without accident. Strip away what is accidental, and we are left with what holds the accidental together. We are left with what endures.

Indeed, Aristotle seems to highlight precisely this as the purpose of the household: “The household is the partnership constituted by nature for (the needs of) daily life.” [1252b13] The household is structured so as to allow its members to endure.

33 We have households ‘by nature’; nature is an end; must this end be actualized if we are to speak of it, or can we not reach it from what is ‘by nature’ in speech?
But what endures in the household, what is of importance to the household, are the members of the household. So it cannot be true to say that the members of a household are accidental to the nature of the household. The household meets their needs; it is concerned with their daily life. But precisely because it is concerned with their daily lives, it is not concerned with life simply, or daily life simply. The household stands against the world - but also against its own members, insofar as its members participate in a different sphere. The whole that is the household is comprised of members who concurrently comprise the whole that is the city. The household demands the highest passion.\(^{34}\)

But this passion cannot be satisfied with the household - for the household is accidental once we move beyond it.\(^{35}\) And that we move beyond the household is related to the structure of the household. This ought not to be understood as the moving beyond, or out, by the children - for this is just so much more accident, and perhaps many forever remain children. In the household are combined the conjunction of male with female on the basis of a natural striving, with the naturally ruling and ruled for preservation. How are we to understand this - which "must of necessity be" [1252a27]? Do I not live alone? I was born - had parents - did I have a master or slave? I miss the nature of the household if I look at it from this narrow perspective. What is this union of male and female? It is nothing but the rule of necessity, that which rules completely: that which masters. What

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\(^{34}\) The household is concerned with (it is because of) the accidental, or changing – it is concerned with particular individuals (their lives). Thus justice is not the concern of the household; rather, the household promotes its particular interests against the commonweal. Insofar as its members assist the commonweal, or are part of the public realm, it opposes them too. The household demands the highest passion – it demands that all of its members be satisfied with it. For it too, like the city, is unreasoning, and thus tyrannical.

\(^{35}\) The household demands all that its members are; but what is all in relation to the household is not, in fact, all. For the household is always concerned with the particular, and can never raise itself to the universal.
is the rule of masters? human mastery, rule of humans as humans over slaves, who are so far from being men that they are interchangeable with oxen. In the household we therefore find united the most complete human ruling with the most complete being ruled. In the household we see the rule of masters and the rule of necessity - we see masters ruled by necessity.

Is it now any clearer why the household is not the end of partnerships? I think not. For Aristotle quickly appears to contradict himself: after telling us that these two types of rule constitute the household, he states "every household was under the eldest as king, and so also were the extensions (of the household constituting the village)…" [1252b20-21] Kingship then describes the rule within a household, not a ruling and being ruled, or household management (which we were earlier told is distinct from other kinds of rule). How are we to make sense of the multiplicity of forms of rule apparently present in the household? We must once again inquire into the relation between ruling (and being ruled) and partnerships.

Partnerships are not formed for the sake of ruling. However, ruling is attendant upon all partnerships. How does ruling relate to partnerships? It is not the good aimed at by partnerships; it is not chosen for its own sake. But it is necessary for that good; it is necessary for all partnerships. Without ruling (and being ruled) there is no order; without order, there can be no partnerships. Not the good then, but the necessary, is the preserve of ruling. But we name the end of something its nature; and all partnerships aim at a good. Again, nature as end is the best; and the best of something is good. Ruling and being ruled is not therefore the end of partnerships, for it is not the aim of partnerships.
However, it is necessary for all partnerships - it is a part of all partnerships, or of what we mean when we say 'partnership'.

Ruling and being ruled is necessary, for all partnerships are an ordering. But it is not the ordering, taken by itself, which is descriptive of the nature of any given partnership. However, though we called this ordering necessary, it also could appear as a good - for it remains necessary so long as only one ordering alone is possible for any given partnership. If more than one form of a single partnership is possible, then it is possible to compare, or judge between partnerships. That is, it becomes possible (and, indeed, necessary if we are examining them) to rank them. And all ranking must take into account the good of what is being ranked. Thus there can be a good of ordering. But if there is a good of ordering, we seem to have found a second good within any given partnership (besides what is aimed at by the partnership). Have we grown confused in our discussion of the nature of partnerships - which must have one end? Or does precisely this reveal to us the nature of the city?

Ruling and being ruled is necessary; the city comes to be from the necessary. Good ruling and being ruled - or the end of ruling and being ruled - is only realized by the (note: not 'in the') city. This is the good of the city: proper ordering. That ruling and being ruled are attendant upon all partnerships does not mean that it is descriptive of the nature of these partnerships. Thus good household management properly rules the family; but without the development of the city households must take on the form of kingly rule. The household cannot be unadulterated without the fully developed city, but rather contains within itself something that makes it appear to be (part) city (and thus must appear to be ruled by a king). We thus return to our assertion that the end of the
city is proper ordering, and re-state this as the nature of the city. The city aims at the proper ordering of partnerships. But because the city is spoken of in two ways, this proper ordering encompasses the city itself - and points to the great danger represented by the unopposed, secondary city.

"(The city) is the most authoritative (partnership) ... and embraces all of the others." It does so because all partnerships contain a ruling principle, which finds its realization in the city. The danger presented by the city lies in its potential tyranny.36

For partnerships are ordered by the city (or ‘the city’ is descriptive of the ordering of partnerships, which contain overlapping elements), and this ordering necessitates that the city be actual. The caretakers of the city are concerned with preserving the city - not just any city, but their city. They are concerned with making actual the end of the city (proper order). Now this end may demand to be instituted once known. However, the actual city cannot wait for this ‘once known’: for partnerships are, and the city therefore is, and consequently this city is, and that city is. That is to say - the nature of the city, the end of the city, never comes fast enough for the city concerned with daily life.

The city “while coming into being for the sake of living ... exists for the sake of living well.” How are we to understand this sentence? “(W)hile coming into being for the sake of living ...”: the city continually, constantly, comes to be of necessity wherever there is partnership; the city continually comes to be (is continually coming into being) in ordering partnerships. “(I)t exists for the sake of living well”: it continues - not changes, or becomes, but is - for the sake of living well. The city that always is where partnerships are is realized in the good life - where its ruling is good - where partnerships are properly

36 The city-as-end appears, perhaps, tyrannical - but to call it this would be akin to claiming to possess too much of the good. The secondary city is potentially tyrannical - because it is potentially not tyrannical. That is, it is always undetermined.
ordered. But partnerships are continually ordered by the city by necessity (or else they would never be) - and this city claims to establish the good life. Thus the city in the secondary sense - the city that is constantly ordering partnerships (and thus altering its ordering when necessary) - claims to be the final, or primary, city. The city claims to establish its own end (and is thus inevitably in conflict with nature).

But if the city opposes itself - opposes its end - by claiming to establish this end itself, what is left for us to discuss? We are left with a frightful problem if we cannot state more than this. For the potentially tyrannical secondary city claims to be its own end. Moreover, this claim is not made solely (if at all) by those who govern, or are governed by, the city. Rather, the city always and everywhere appears as its end - until this is shown to be mere appearance (until the city changes). As Aristotle states: "what each thing is ... when its coming into being is complete is, we assert, the nature of that thing." This being complete that we assert is the nature of something is not necessarily the being good of that thing (or else everything that is, is good), but it does necessarily appear to be good (for we assert that what is complete the nature of something, and the nature of something is the good of that thing). The city exists, and as such, appears as an end - for if it did not, it would change, and this changed city would then be the end.

Perhaps we ought to pause here lest we begin to speak too poorly of this city. For, although we may sound critical of the unreasoning potential tyranny of the city, still we must recognize the necessity of this unreason. And it bears repeating that this is not a conscious unreason (for cities do not reason - men do), if that be possible; it is not a wilful lie that the city engages in. The actual city can be in no other way.37

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37 And it may be that this very tendency of the city is healthy; that is, it may be that it preserves for the imperfect city the possibility of containing within itself the recognition of its end. For if it fails to make the
Our final questioning concerning the nature of the city must take us beyond the actual end - positing city, in order that we may return to the city with an uncreated end.

To say that the city obscures its end - the proper ordering of partnerships - is to say that we must understand what is not of these partnerships to describe the limits of the city.

We have identified ruling and being ruled as the necessary connection between what we called political partnerships. Our next task is to discuss that which we exempted from these partnerships because it was not dealt with in the Politics: friendship. But we can now separate friendship from political partnerships not just by its placement outside the Politics. We can examine friendship against ruling and being ruled, and the authoritative partnership that finds its good therein.

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correct claim as to this end, if it fails to recognize (and thus actualize) the proper order, still it recognizes an order - it recognizes something higher than something else. Thus the city knows itself as a city. Far worse would be the city that denies its city-ness - the city that contains within it a conscious assertion of its ultimate unreason - and concurrently claims this as the height of reason! To deny a better city is to deny any possible knowledge of cities. Our secondary city that calls itself final tacitly admits such things as finality. Both cities are, ultimately, the same - for how could they change their own nature? But it is precisely this that the end - denying city attempts. And this attempt is far more dangerous than the potential tyranny of the secondary city.
Friendship and the City

Having identified that which underlies the partnerships discussed in Book I of the Politics, our next task is to turn to that great unmentioned partnership, friendship, and its treatment in Books eight and nine of the Nicomachean Ethics. That this task should present as great an endeavour as that which precedes it needs hardly be mentioned; the prejudices we brought to the Politics may continue to answer the questions these Books demand us to ask. And the beauty of these Books – be it a result of Aristotle’s treatment of friendship, or the subject matter itself – presents a further difficulty. For we must now speak of that which is held to be “the greatest of external goods”, without which “no one would choose to live, though he had all the other goods”; we are to speak of a partnership that appears inextricably bound with our strongest desires. If our funeral mounds be built for one, still we can commiserate with Achilles’ wish never to part from our friend; and if we have no such friend, yet we may flatter our pride that we too would “win a death so fair” with Nisus. Truly it is spoken that in the presence of friends noble acts are sweetest. But this very sweetness threatens to bar us from reaching any understanding of friendship; and it seems equally true that “his study will be vain and unprofitable” to one who “tends to follow his passions…” [1095a3-4]

Having completed our analysis of political partnerships, and determined the importance of ruling and being ruled therein, we now turn to the Books dealing with that partnership which receives scant attention in the Politics. Were this absence not guidance enough, on turning to these Books we discover the term ‘political friendship’, and a surprising discussion relating friendship to regimes and justice. It is here where we shall
begin then, in our continuing efforts to understand the absence of friendship from the *Politics*.

If the absence of friendship from the *Politics* surprises us, then we ought to be utterly baffled at the amount of space devoted to a discussion of community and justice in the Books on friendship. How are we to understand friendship’s absence when faced with the claim that friendship is of greater importance than justice to legislators?

“(F)riendship would seem to hold cities together, and legislators would seem to be more concerned about it than about justice … and the justice that is most just seems to belong to friendship.” [115a24-29].

While the meaning of these statements is not difficult to discern – legislators aim at concord and therefore friendship, which presupposes concord – what is of interest here is the relation that justice, and by extension the city, has to friendship. For friendship contains justice, such that justice is a part of something greater. What then is left over in friendship, when we subtract the part to which justice pertains?

The next line tells us that part of friendship to which justice relates, and that that remains: “However, friendship is not only necessary, but also fine.” [1155a30] The necessary part of friendship, as highlighted by the “However”, is that which holds cities together (concord); along with this ‘necessary’ friendship is that which is fine. It appears that friendship is analogous to the city: for the city comes to be for the sake of daily needs (it is necessary ...) but is for the sake of the good life (... and fine). To come to an understanding of friendship’s relation to the city we must first determine the relation.

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38 From Sachs’ translation. Ross replaces “belongs to friends” with “thought to be a friendly quality.” I use Sachs’ translation throughout this chapter (although I do retain “magnanimous man” instead of “great-souled man”); his translation of the Books on friendship avoids many of the ambiguities with which Ross’ is encumbered (as above).
between necessary friendships and politics (as seen through their combination in political friendships); second, the relation between this aspect of friendship, and its fineness; and third, how the fine in friendship relates to the city, which is ultimately to say how friendships relate to political partnerships.

Of what interest is friendship to the legislator? "(F)riendship seems to hold cities together, and lawmakers seem to take it more seriously than justice, for like-mindedness seems to be something similar to friendship, and they aim at this most of all and banish faction most of all for being hostile to it." [1155a25-6] The meaning of this statement appears to be clear; however, the phrase "seems to be similar" ought to give us pause. Not friendship strictly, but an aspect of friendship, or a type of friendship (that is necessarily inferior to the whole of friendship, if the whole is always superior to its parts) finds reflection in concord (like-mindedness) – which presumably opposes civil conflict (faction), and is therefore of concern to legislators. Thus the friendship that is reflected in concord is that which prevents civil conflict, and nothing further.

We do not seem to be getting very far with this line of inquiry: for surely it is obvious that friendship, as soon as we recognize it as such, cannot allow us to simultaneously recognize conflict? That is, the minimum required for our recognition of a state of friendship presumes the existence of concord. Perhaps we would be well advised to focus on what legislators seek to avoid: civil conflict. Conversely, if we begin by assuming a state of conflict, then we will never get to friendship; rather, we may need to inquire into that which provides a bridge between conflict and friendship, or concord. However, if we begin with civil conflict, then our discussion shall focus on the movement away from concord into conflict – the reasons why conflict may arise. And if concord is
But if we are to name only this as friendship, albeit of one type, and associate this

type with the city (and in so doing speak the truth) then it surely would be a very unstable

world in which we live. The constancy necessary here will likely often be tested; not

what is, but what appears to be good for each partner is the basis of the city; what appears
to be good now may not appear to be good later (and recognition of this may itself spoil

enjoyment); and the greater the number of people involved, the greater the number of

potentially conflicting interests.39 Indeed, Aristotle does not explicitly combine the

useful friendships with the city, but with partnerships between cities: “(P)eople use the

word ‘friends’ for those who are allied on account of what is useful, just as with cities

(for alliances between cities seem to come about for the sake of advantage …” [1157a26-

28]

Cities aim, in partnerships with other cities, for what appears good to each of

them. The city aims at advantage – its advantage – regardless of the advantage of other
cities. Its advantage is the “common advantage” of its citizens, which is said to be just.

While the city is concerned with securing the useful, the useful is not always the same

thing for all citizens. The city aims instead at their common advantage (not the satisfying

of what appears good to each). Unlike partnerships between cities (aiming at the

advantage of each particular city), the common advantage within a city is guided by

considerations beyond each individual component’s desire.

The necessary in friendship that is equivalent to justice is for advantage – for
gaining what one does not have, and appears to need. However, this friendship does not

39 Moreover, partnerships made for the sake of some definite thing break up once that thing is gained. A
city constructed as stated would witness a continue in and out flux of citizens – like Hobbesian covenant
breakers, but free not by breaking law, but by gain.
alone characterize the city; it is rather characteristic of relations between cities. And yet Aristotle continually speaks of the city and its members as joined for the advantage of each (for the advantage is common); and men form partnerships of utility for what appears as the advantage of each. And it would indeed be an odd city that is partnered for pleasure; and an exceedingly fine, too fine city that possess the good. So we shall turn our gaze from the former (where all are without shame) and hope for the latter (where all is good), while keeping before us the idea that cities are formed and endure for utility. While pleasure and the good exist in cities (for they exist in men) the basis of cities appears to be in utility, and justice seems to arise wherever there are mutual arrangements in the useful: "for there seems to be something just for every human being toward all those who are capable of sharing in law and contractual agreement, and so there is friendship too." [1161b6-8]

Keeping in mind this association between justice and friendship for utility helps to explain an ambiguity in the text. There appears to be an inconsistency in the Books on friendship. The best form of political community is kingship; a kingship is the rule of one person, self-sufficient and superior in goods. [1160a35-1160b5] The best form of friendship is between good people; the best friend is related to a friend as another self. [1157a31-32; 1170b6-7] The best king must rule the best kingship; the best king must be virtuous and superior in goods. It seems then that a king is alone in his position, and therefore unequal with all of his citizens. The king cannot therefore find another self.

The relation of a king to his subjects is comparable to the relation of a father to his sons, or a god to mankind. [1160b26-27] The highest friendship appears comparable to that of brothers or companions, for friends hold everything in common, and brothers
and companions do this most of all. Thus kings cannot share in the highest friendships, for neither they nor fathers nor gods can hold in common all goods (lest they remove their claim to rule). [1159b31-35] The king must benefit his subjects; to do so, he must give something that is not held in common, and receive only that which is common (honour). [1163b5-8] A king does not hold everything in common (by virtue of being a king); friends hold things in common; therefore, a king cannot be a friend (of the best kind).

The only friends of kings must be inferior: "(a person of serious stature) does not become a friend to a superior unless he is also superior in virtue ... But it is hardly customary for such people to show up." [1158a32-35] The relation of a king to his friends is that of a superior to an inferior, in all goods (including virtue). Friends are a good; a king must have friends (for they are superior in all goods). But a king cannot be friends with an equal in virtue; therefore he cannot share in the highest friendship.

Why would one desire to be king without friends? "(N)o one would choose to live without friends, despite having all the rest of the good things." [1155a5-6] Kings can participate in kinds of friendships, but not the greatest kind. The timocratic regime seems to resemble the highest friendship, for the relation between rulers is similar to the relation between brothers. [1161a27-31] Yet we ought to remember that the happiness of the ruler(s) may not determine the worth of a regime.

Why is kingship the best regime? "Tyranny is opposite to (kingship), since the tyrant pursues what is good for himself. And it is more apparent in this case that it is the worst; the opposite of the best is the worst." [1160b7-9] Why is tyranny the worst deviation? The tyrant looks only to what he believes is his advantage. [1160b30] The
The tyrant looks only to his own (apparent) advantage. There is therefore no recognition of differences in worth among the citizens. The tyrant will benefit citizens only as this benefits him. There does not appear to be any justice in a tyranny. Why then is their no friendship? Can the tyrant not be friends with the useful or pleasurable? Indeed, of all men, he seems to do this most.

What is the virtue of kings? If a king is to have a good friend, then his virtues must be the same as any man’s. The good king is a virtuous man primarily, and a virtuous king because of this. To have a great friend, the king needs a man alike in virtue. But a man alike in virtue deserves to be king. If kingship is the rule of one man, that man cannot have the best of friends and remain king (for both must rule, if the regime is to be just – and Aristotle claims kingship is the most just regime). The highest friendship does not appear possible for the (true) king.

Perhaps, then, it is not the best friendship that determines the goodness of a regime, but that type of friendship that coincides with justice, and is the aim of legislators (and the city). Indeed, Aristotle distinguishes communal friendships that are not for utility from those which are, suggesting that justice requires only useful friends:

> Every sort of friendship ... is in a community ... though one might separate out that of relatives or in a fraternal association; but those of fellow citizens or tribesmen or shipmates, and all those of that sort seem more like communities, since more they seem as if they result from a certain kind of agreement (and one might rank a friendship with a foreign guest among these). [1161b12-17]

As we have seen, Aristotle associates the friendship resulting from timocratic rule with the friendship of brothers, and both these with that found in fraternal associations [1161a26-28] The relation of brothers is characterized by equality, and a likeness in feeling and character (that is, virtue); and equality, and a likeness of character (and,
following, of feeling) is necessary for the highest friendship. On a ranking based on friendship, therefore, a timocratic regime would seem to rank higher than a kingship.

But "kingship is the best (regime)." [1160a35] On what basis is kingship best?

(A) king looks to (the advantage) of those who are ruled. For someone who is not self-sufficient and superior in all goods is not a king, and such a person has no need of anything in addition, so he would look to things beneficial not to himself but to those who are ruled. [1160b3-6]

A king rules best because he alone can claim to rule; he alone can claim to rule, because he is superior in all goods and self-sufficient. A king is in need of nothing – has no need to benefit himself – so can thus look to benefit the needy citizenry. This seems clear.

However, it must be asked why kingship is superior to aristocracy and timocracy? 40 Could not more than one member of a city be self-sufficient and of great wealth, without need of anything, able to look only to the benefit of the citizenry?

A king is distinguished by his superiority – not by absolute wealth. If two men were so great as to be kings, one must be expelled from the city, or the city must become two. For the king is not just self-sufficient as a man, but as a ruler. The king makes the city self-sufficient. It would therefore be absurd to question why kingship is best. A kingship is the only regime with a man so great as to be able to only confer, never receive, benefits. If such a man arose in the lesser regimes, the regimes must become kingships. 41 This argument focuses our attention on the basis of concord (the perceived reason for regimes) in mutual advantage, and the relation of this to justice and political friendship.

It would appear then that Aristotle equates political friendship with the friendship for utility, and the presence of these with justice and citizenship. Yet we should be wary

40 Why it is superior to the deviant regimes need not be mentioned.
41 That is, a kingship is best because a king is best.
of leaving off this discussion with this conclusion, for Aristotle does not explicitly state this. Indeed, he seems to undermine it through his equating the friendship for utility with the relation between, not within, cities. That this type of friendship exists in cities (between citizens) is obvious; that it is descriptive of the basis of their partnership is questionable.

This questionableness is made evident by Aristotle’s ranking of kingship as the best regime. Justice is the common advantage; a king has no need to advantage himself at the expense of others; citizens receive all that they need from a king: a kingship is just. Why is a kingship just? Is it just because all citizens receive all that they want? Justice is then the result of accident – or the divine gift of an abundant land. Now, it may be true that justice can only be hoped for, never attained, in this world: must we speak of ‘justice in an inhuman sense’? But perhaps we are over hasty to make this qualification, as though Aristotle’s kingship is in need of our disclaimers. For he does not say that all citizens receive all that they want in the best regime. Rather, “a king looks to (the advantage) of those who are ruled.” A king does not make every citizen self-sufficient, but continually looks to the advantage of all citizens. And he does this not because he is externally restrained from claiming everything for his own, but because he is king. That is, to say ‘king’ is to say ‘good man’.

Thus the tyrant “pursues what is good for himself.” Presumably the king too pursues what is good for himself; indeed pursues this more truly than anyone. But this ‘for himself’, in the case of the tyrant, is meant as a qualification to what is good simply. The tyrant pursues what he thinks good, but is not (simply) good, or good in itself. The king pursues what is good, both for himself and simply (and it is good for himself
...
because it is good simply). \(^42\) If the king does this (and only if he does this is he properly called a king) then he is a good man; and if he is a good man, he will possess good judgment (because the virtues are concerned with action, and action with judgment).

Kingship is therefore the best regime because a good man – a good judge (which is to say the best man – the best judge) – rules.

If it is correct to say that kingship is best because the (one) best man rules, then we must qualify our equating friendship for utility with the city. For it may be that such an equation appears to be true to those who are not self-sufficient; such an equating appears to be true for those who pursue what appears good for themselves. That is, to those in want, those who desire something, justice is equated with the possible obtaining of that thing. That this will involve justice in contradiction, that it destroys the idea of a city, needs hardly be mentioned. Suffice it to say that such wisdom raises each citizen into an absolute relation to the sovereign, who is because any given citizen says he can be. From this perspective, a part assumes wholeness, assumes to judge that which is necessarily greater. But this job can never be accomplished by a part; it can only be accomplished by the whole. The end of the city is higher than the particular ends of its citizens. The end of the city is justice – and justice requires the judgment of the best man.

It would seem that our next topic of discussion is the relation between friendship for the sake of utility and the good man (which seems to be akin to the relation between subjects and king). And we ought to begin by questioning whether the good man will need these friends at all? "(M)ost people think of friends as being for use.... Of such friends ... a blessed person will have no need, since the good things already belong to

\(^{42}\) See Book 9, chapter 8, for a discussion of good and bad self-love.
him.” [1169b25-27]; and “those who are blessed have no need of useful people.”

[1158a23-24] However, “life is difficult for one who is alone, since it is not easy by oneself to be at work continuously” [1170a6-7] and “(friendship) is more necessary amid misfortunes – which is why one needs useful friends at those times…” [1171a24-25] Perhaps these statements can be reconciled: “As fellow citizens it is possible to be a friend of many people and not be obsequious, but decent in the true sense; but it is not possible to be a friend to many people on account of virtue and for themselves …”

[1171a17-20] That is, it is possible for a good man to relate to all citizens as citizens without needing them (for use). If this is so political friendship cannot strictly be based on utility – or, to be more precise, friendship for the sake of utility cannot be based on itself.

Indeed, friendship for the sake of utility (or pleasure) is friendship only by a similarity to the friendship between the good. This latter friendship (for the sake of virtue) is the only partnership rightly called friendship. The others resemble this friendship in part because what they offer (utility and pleasure) is contained in the friendship of the good. And yet in Aristotle’s first presentation of this resemblance the possibility of the secondary friendships being at least partial friendships is not clearly denied:

(I) it is necessary that we too call such people friends, but say there is more than one species of friendship, and that, while friendship in the primary and governing sense is between the good insofar as they are good, the remaining kinds are friendships only by a likeness, since the people are friends only in that respect in which there is something good and some likeness in them; for even the pleasant is good for people devoted to pleasure. [1157a30-36]
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However, the disclaimer at line 36 leaves us with a rather immediate objection: the good for pleasure seekers, while appearing good for them (for all we do aims at - that is, appears to be for - the good) is groundless (it is without good). If we are to say that it is good (if we are to say that all that appears good is good) we will quickly fall into contradiction. Friendship for the sake of utility (or pleasure), while appearing similar to the friendship of the good, is not friendship at all. This is made apparent in Aristotle’s discussion of goodwill:

(I)t is impossible for those who have not become good-willed to be friends .... (O)ne might say that goodwill is out-of-work friendship, but when time has passed ... it can get to be friendship, though not the sort that is for use or pleasure, since no goodwill comes about in those cases.
[1167a7;10-14]

Friends must be good-willed towards one another; goodwill is unnecessary for friendships (or, rather, partnerships) for the sake of utility or pleasure; partnerships for the sake of utility or pleasure cannot be friendships.

What then is properly called friendship? “It is between the good insofar as they are good.” Understanding the best friendship requires that we understand the good man. The greatest friendship involves self-sufficient, happy men. Let us therefore return to our discussion of kingship. A king rules the best regime, for he looks only to advantage his subjects. His subjects return what is held in common – honour – to their benefactor. Now the king, as we said, is the best man – he is the good man, self-sufficient and superior in all goods. In Book IV of the Ethics the best man, we are told, is the magnanimous man; the magnanimous man is in possession of all the moral virtues. It would seem that the well-ordered city is such because it is ruled by a well-ordered soul.

43 The prudence of the king – necessary for the proper ordering of himself – properly orders the ends of the city (of its citizens).
With what is a king concerned? As king, he benefits his subjects; as king, he receives honour for his benefactions. The man in possession of the moral virtues, such as we saw a king to be, is considered magnanimous. The magnanimous man is concerned with honour:

Worth is spoken of in relation to external goods, and we would set down as greatest of these the one that we assign to the gods, and at which people of high standing aim most of all, and which is the prize given for the most beautiful deeds; and of this kind is honour, for this is the greatest of external goods. So the great-souled man is concerned with honours.

A king looks to benefit his subjects; subjects return honour for benefits received. Men form partnerships for some advantage; a king most fully looks to the advantage of his subjects; a kingship is the best partnership for men. But this does away with the need for other partnerships. The best king most fully benefits his subjects. If benefit need be further supplied by other partnerships, then we do not rightly name this king best (we are not examining the best kingship). Subjects are thus akin to children in relation to the best king, and he to their father.\footnote{Of course, this is true only if the king strives to raise his subjects to his level — if he tries to make men out of his subjects/children. But this means that a true kingship continually seeks to undermine itself — and thus points beyond itself to something better (and so is not the actual end of partnerships). If we do not take this into our account — if we take the actual kingship as absolute — the relation of king to subject is that of master to slave.}

It is evident that the most common advantage is ultimately grounded in the preservation of life. Life is mostly keenly felt in need of preservation when it is most acutely threatened — in war. A king will be honoured most when his action is the greatest — when the advantage that he provides is the greatest. For all benefit for advantage supplies what men apparently need. Need is spoken of in regards to daily life — in regards to the preservation and generation of life. The greatest benefits overcome the
greatest threat to preservation. A king is thus the great protector. What does he protect (for what is he honoured)? Apparent goods.\textsuperscript{45} A king protects daily life so that the satisfaction of apparent needs through the provision of apparent goods gains him honour. A king, concerned with honour and the concomitant giving of benefits to his subjects, is primarily concerned with the greatest honour for the greatest given advantage. This is gained in war – which is to say, is gained in protection of his subjects.\textsuperscript{46} That is, subjects are protected and thus so too are their apparent goods. Since they form partnerships for advantage, the king must supply an advantage with his action (he is concerned for their advantage); the king protects the apparent goods of his subjects. What is honoured grounds, on Aristotle’s initial account, what are seen as the moral virtues.\textsuperscript{47} The virtue of the king is the (highest expression of the) virtue of his subjects. The best regime, led by the single best man, depends for its justification on the opinion of its subjects. There can be no truth in this regime.

The magnanimous, self-regarding man is self-sufficient; he is, apparently, happy. However, if he is necessarily in possession of good practical judgment [1144b], still his appears to be a tragic life. For honour is due to him for the performance of the greatest deeds; and honour is best when it is not shared; so the magnanimous man (like the king – and we are really speaking here of the same man) must be without equal. But to be honoured by inferiors gives scant satisfaction; the magnanimous man must be his own best judge. Thus we find that he contemplates his own virtue, his own actions. This man, who most fully possesses what is honourable (virtue) to those by whom he is

\textsuperscript{45} Which could also be goods simply.

\textsuperscript{46} I owe this particular observation to Harry Jaffa, in \textit{Thomism and Aristotelianism}, (University of Chicago Press; 1952), p. 128.

\textsuperscript{47} Jaffa, p. 141.
honoured, spends his time contemplating himself. (And this means contemplating public opinion – contemplating his virtues, for which the public honours him, because these are also their virtues).

Such also is the relation between a king and his subjects. And, such also would be the relation between the actual city and its parts, were the former to contain all partnerships. That this is not the case ought to be clear. Friendship is not in the city such that the city can claim to satisfy it (rather the city alone moves towards the creation of master and slaves). Thus the Books on friendship, so far from being contained in the Politics (in the work on the city), in fact themselves contain a comparison and evaluation of regimes. This is also indicated in Book IV of the Ethics: “(the magnanimous man) is not capable of leading his life to suit anyone else, other than a friend....” [1125a1] Friendship is beyond the ken of the description of this man. The account given of the magnanimous man as the highest type of man cannot incorporate friendship, but only point towards it as something greater.48

After showing that the friendships for utility and pleasure are not properly called friendship at all, what is left? The magnanimous man, the account of the highest type of man, is without friendship. Stated another way: the moral virtues do not seem to require, and may actually be undermined by, friendship. And the relation of the actual city to friendship parallels this – thus kingship can be the best regime, but the king cannot have a friend. The moral virtues come to be seen in action. But, after seeming to link the action and life of a man who could enjoy the highest friendship with the magnanimous man (“he would choose to perform one great and beautiful action rather than many small ones”

48 Jaffe p. 125.
Aristotle goes one step further, and thereby does away with all comparison: "And it is possible that he would even give up actions to a friend, and it would be a more beautiful thing to become responsible for the friend’s performing them than to perform them himself." [1169a34-36]

Friendship stands above the performance of virtuous acts. Why? What actions befit friendship? Aristotle does not explicitly state what the proper activity of friendship is. He mentions that friends must love one another as themselves, that they must share in one another, in the truth of each other. That is, friendship seems to have to do with understanding. To fully develop the necessary connection between philosophy and friendship is, however, beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Let us leave off by negatively stating that friendship cannot properly be associated with any activity beyond the shared contemplation of truth, for the simple fact that no other activity can be truly shared.

Perhaps we would be remiss to leave off here, however, even if a full discussion of these things is too great for the present inquiry. For Aristotle does directly speaks of the relation between the good man, friendship, and contemplation:

(H)appiness is a certain way of being-at-work, and it is clear that being-at-work is something that happens, and not something that is present like some possession. But if being happy consists in living and being-at-work, and the being-at-work of a good person is serious and pleasant in itself … and if what is one’s own also belongs among things that are pleasant, and we are better able to contemplate those around us than ourselves, and their actions better than our own, and the actions of serious people who are their friends are pleasant to those who are good … then a blessed person will have need of friends of this sort, if indeed he chooses to contemplate actions that are decent and his own, and the actions of a good person who is a friend are of that kind. [1169b30-1170a4]
In the activity of the good man lies happiness; the good man must "contemplate actions that are decent and his own." Contemplation exists through reason; reason is the man; the philosopher is more fully man than anyone (for the philosopher is distinguished by his greater use of reason). Since reason is the man, and happiness lies in living, then man's living is through reason: man's nature is reason, and thus it is in man's nature to be happy.\(^{49}\) Reason is man's own for it is man; and contemplation is the most virtuous action for it employs what is highest in man (what makes man man).

"(W)e are better able to contemplate those around us than ourselves, and their actions better than our own." We require friends to live the life of reason, but why should this be so? The contemplative life is the most self-sufficient. It would seem that it can exist without friends, but friends allow for 'better' contemplation. Only the contemplative life may unconditionally call the life of another it's own. Acts of justice or acts of bravery are similar to one's own acts and thus pleasant: but they are never one's own. The only activity that occurs in an observer of these acts is contemplation, and it is this contemplation that is pleasant. Were contemplation absent, the actions of another could never be taken for one's own; if anything, the acts of another should cause despair (for the greatest non-contemplative action can only happen once; one must wait for their own opportunity). Contemplation does not bar others from the same action. It is never completed and never one's own at the expense of another. Reason is the man, but at the same time it is all men, it is Man. It is proper for God to contemplate himself, for God alone is God. Man is not God; man is not alone.

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\(^{49}\) Ideally this is so; however man's nature is not reason alone but is composite. Reason is man because it controls the lower elements, but these always remain if only to be controlled. Thus a child is not a man, for its reason is not in control of its passions. If passion were man then all would be arbitrary, or at least neither good nor bad, and thus akin to the life of animals, devoid of happiness or unhappiness.
Man is political by nature. By contemplating another friend, the best man (the philosopher) contemplates the reason of another. He thus no longer contemplates himself and his own nature, but the nature of Man. This nature is his own (for it is reason); but it also leads to the contemplation of Nature in the widest sense (that is, the nature of all that is, God or reason as a whole). Contemplating the nature of Man requires contemplation of what nature is. The philosopher can contemplate non-friends (non-philosophers) insofar as everyone possesses reason. However, this contemplation must deal at times with “human thoughts ... and mortal thoughts” which “one should not follow”.

[1177a32-33] The truly philosophic life requires friendship of the highest type if contemplation of the highest things is to be sustained. As such both philosophers and the greatest type of friendship are extremely rare.

The city is the (proper) ordering of what can be ordered. If we are to know of the city, we need to know what the city orders. The city orders men, yes, but men form partnerships, men aim beyond themselves. The city orders the varied ends of men, or the apparent ends of man. The city orders all partnerships. The city does not order stars, or rain, or death (though, perhaps, it continually attempts to do so). The city orders – rules – what can be ruled by a city. Everything that is, is ordered; the city orders what can be ordered; not everything is for the city.

The city comes to be continually from necessity. It is a continual ordering (and therefore re-ordering) of partnerships – of the apparent ends of man. Men form partnerships for the sake of some good; and we “give something else in return, aiming at that which (we) happen to lack.” To obtain what we lack is an apparent good. We aim at
some advantage, some advancement from our current position. The city orders our partnerships formed for advantage. Indeed, the city itself appears to be just one more (if the greatest) partnership formed for advantage. And it is this in part.

For the city is wherever partnerships are, and continues to be; but if it will continue to be it must care for itself. The city that comes to be continually from necessity is concerned with ordering the apparent ends within it – which concern is its end. The city is concerned with ruling itself.

The city rules itself, continues itself, for it is held to be good. The city embraces and authorizes all partnerships; partnerships are formed with a view to an apparent good; the city embraces the apparent goods of its parts. To do this the city must rule – and to do this must have rulers. Rulers are not the city, but are necessary to the city, are a necessary part of the city. Rulers rule as the city is – that is, the ordering of the city is seen through the ruling of its rulers (and its rulers extended in time through laws). The city is concerned with maintaining itself through time, continually (and is thus concerned both with its past and future). To do this it must appear to be good – and so it reasons its goodness. Thus ‘the city is good because …’ becomes justification for the city. But the city justifies itself in this manner because it is not good; and it is not good because it is not the proper ordering, but a particular ordering professing to be final. This ‘because of’ reveals an historical account of justification that must remain (on its own) groundless. Or rather, the city attempts to ground itself in itself – in its particular ordering. And this

50 Actually, the word ‘apparent is unnecessary here – if we are discussing partnerships. Only men have ‘apparent’ goods – or aim at what appears good. Any partnership, no matter how faulty it seems, no matter what the end at which it aims (what the apparent good), aims at this as its good. Men may form faulty partnerships (an example being the barbarians) but such partnerships taken by themselves are moved towards some good, or end, that cannot be qualified with ‘apparent’ – else the partnership be just ‘apparent’.

51 Again – this professing is necessary, else the city changes.
this account of the city involves justice in constant contradiction. We thus must abandon use of the word justice (and, really, despair at finding any motive for action) and never rank cities or regimes – never call one action good and another bad. For all that is seen, on this account, is good, for it is the end and thus the nature of that thing. The city is authoritative; the city is an end. However, because the city is both of these things, as the former it conflates itself with the latter. Everything ordered by the city is ordered for the sake of the city; what is for the sake of the city is for the sake of the apparent good of the city. Thankfully, this is not the whole of the city.

Standing above the city is the city; the city that continually comes to be is grounded upon the city that is always. And the city that is always reveals the nature of the actual city that continually comes to be – it is the end that we truthfully assert is the nature of that thing. But if the actual city is wherever there are partnerships – wherever there is a ruling and a being ruled – we can never know of the city as end. For all partnerships will be guided by the truth of the city (will be ruled by the city such that their ends are met by the city such that all men are satisfied); which is to say unreason will rule as the one reason of the city (and there will never be a second). Now this is not the case. The city is un-philosophical, not anti-philosophical. It always is its end, and the end of those partnerships that it embraces. And it embraces all partnerships.

“(R)uling and being ruled belong not only among things necessary but also among things advantageous”; “whatever is constituted out of a number of things – whether continuous or discrete – and becomes a single common thing always displays a ruling and being ruled element.” [1254a21-22; 28-31] Friendship is a partnership; friendships aim at “things advantageous”. Friendships are constituted out of a number of things; friendships
display a ruling and a being ruled element. But what rules in other partnerships takes two forms: the (derivative) necessary rule by rulers, and the natural rule, or end of the partnership. The ruler is for the sake of this end, but may not know how to achieve this end, or know if this end ought to be achieved (if this end is good). Thus the ruler appears to be the most important component of the partnership – indeed, appears to be the partnership (thus the father is the head of the household, and thereby determines how the household acts – which is to say, how the household is). Friendship, however, if it is properly so called, is never ruled by man. It is always directed towards truth; truth is the end of friendship. Thus “it is a sacred thing to give the higher honour to the truth.”

[1096a16]

Friendship therefore differs in kind from all other partnerships. It is ruled by truth; it ends in death or perfection. All other partnerships are ultimately ordered by the actual city – it is authoritative. The actual city ends in perfect(ed) order – complete order, or full satisfaction – not necessarily good order. It appears to reach its end (or it reaches its end if there were no higher city – but this is ridiculous) when it is no longer questioned (when no contradictions – and this means partnerships – remain). Friendship is not ruled by the city, for the city can never claim to satisfy it (though perhaps, by chance, the city will reach natural completion – at which point we will all be like gods, and the city, and friendship, and this paper, will all be dreadfully dated) – can never claim to be the fulfillment of friendship. Rather friendship, in a way, rules the city (which unknowingly resists such rule by nature). That is, by claiming to be an end – by making any claim – the city must speak – it must offer reasons to be – it must be guided by a notion of truth (risk being guided by truth). Unlike the city, which constantly opposes itself (and thus
never sees its end) friendship continually opposes itself (and thus sometimes glimpses its end). It is questionable whether it could ever be, always and everywhere; but it is on occasion (and thus its action is repeatable: whereas the actual city can only be now – it is always in flux – friendship can repeat itself). Friendship, in the highest sense, pursuing the highest things, begins and ends – it never stops, but is repeatedly.

Friendship, as guided by truth, always looks beyond the actual city, towards the city that is always. But this is not to say that it stands opposed to the actual city, that the actual city receives none of the benefits of truth-directed friendship. For, while the actual city cannot of itself ever satisfy this partnership (cannot annul it into itself), still it remains necessary for such partnerships to be. Now this seems paradoxical, if we focus too much on the tyrannical tendencies of the actual city. For the actual city is, relatedly, the one great danger for friendship (that is, for philosophy), for it alone can claim to actualize truth (that is, the just regime). Friendship passes judgment on any given regime simply by its existence.

The actual city, by nature, severs men off from grasping nature – severs men off from ever coming to an understanding of the end of the city. Speech indicates purpose (use) and so also the good and the just. Men form partnerships through speech for an apparent good. They thereby establish the end of their partnership – fulfilling the purpose of the partnership is the good of the partnership. All partnerships therefore establish a truth concerning what is good, or what is by nature, man (for they are established for an apparent good of man’s). However, no partnership can examine its own purpose – no partnership can make itself into a problem for itself. None, that is,
except for friendship. Friendship, truly called, is the very problem that all other partnerships hide: it is a constant searching after the truth of itself.

Indeed, it is more than this. In examining itself, it must become aware of the unphilosophical nature of all other partnerships; it must become aware of its great difference from all other partnerships. No other partnership continually exists as a problem to itself. Thus the speech necessary for other partnerships can be raised beyond its locus within such partnerships. Only through friendship can the city come to know itself. Only through friendship can man continually be a problem to himself. If we are to come to an understanding of what is called nature, we must come to an understanding of the relation between friendship, speech, and truth. The city may be the authoritative partnership, but friendship is the primary partnership. The city aims at the greatest good, but concurrently closes itself off from ever attaining this good. Thankfully, friendship keeps opens the path.


