ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL THEORY: METAPHYSICS AND PHYSICS MEET ETHICS AND POLITICS

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Abstract

Aristotle's political theory is the major other of modern political imagination. Unlike the mechanicism of modern political consciousness, Aristotle's apporach exemplifies the typical organicist understanding of the pre-modern era. In this respect, it is of great importance to separate Aristotle's political theory into its logical and conceptual components both in order to better understand the modern political conception and to see its traditional alternative. Aristotle is a system philosopher, that is, he has not only developed a philosophy that encompasses almost every area of human life, but at the same time, all parts of his philosophical system are built to complement each other. As a matter of fact, it is interesting to see that some concepts cut Aristotle's philoso-

phy horizontally and diffuse into almost all of its subfields. The most significant of these concepts is "nature" or "*physis.*" From Aristotle's metaphysics and physics to ethics and politics, nature has given Aristotle's thought both an uninterrupted continuity and a strong logical consistency. The most fundamental and defining aspect of Aristotle's political theory is reflected in his famous assertion that "man is by nature a political animal." Although contemporary readings on Aristotle's politics generally emphasize "sociality and politicalness" in this expression, in my opinion, the more important element here and the hallmark of his political theory is "naturalness." Thus, in this article, building on the concept of nature we will try to uncover the relationship between Aristotle's metaphysics, physics, politics and ethics.

Key Words: Politics, Metaphysics, Ethics, Nature, Good Life, the State, Essence

INTRODUCTION

European thought in the 17th century –when modernity in general and modern political consciousness in particular began to flourish—was distinguished by its radical break with the metaphysical, cosmological, moral, and political traditions of the past. The intellectual core of these rejected traditions was basically Aristotelian. "No single thinker, not even Plato," Max Lerner argues, "has had as much impact as Aristotle on the intellectual and institutional history of later centuries. … There were whole centuries when the civilized world lived in Aristotle's shadow –and not only the European world, but the Ottoman and African; not only the Christian world but the Jewish and Islamic—centuries when all knowledge was held to be contained in the writings of one man."[1] As Lerner's observation indicates, Aristotle's thought developed over time into a comprehensive intellectual tradition and dominated the "civilized" mind for about two millennia. Of course, not each and every belief, judgment, or attitude in that tradition had been formulated by Aristotle himself. But such innovations –primarily details—were developed in the spirit of Aristotle's general principles of metaphysics, physics, ethics, and politics. It should also be noted that most of the ideas defended by Aristotle, at least roughly and in principle, were not unknown before Aristotle. However, it was Aristotle who for the first time systematically formulated those ideas within a single and consistent philosophical system. Consequently, because of Aristotle's representative status in this *ancient* tradition, it is fair to call it by the name of "Aristotelianism." As such, it might be safely argued that modernity was in many ways built upon the radical rejection of Aristotelianism. That is why, as Alasdair MacIntyre notes, "[w]hen modernity made its assaults on an older world its most perceptive exponents understood that it was Aristotelianism that had to be overthrown."[2]

It is also interesting to note that, although the dissolution of Aristotelianism started with Aristotle's understanding of nature, particularly under the attacks of the undeniable and revolutionary findings of the new physics and astronomy, it expanded rapidly

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1 Max Lerner, *Introduction to Aristotle's Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1943), 16.

2 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 111.

into his metaphysics, ethics, and politics. The failure of Aristotle's physics –and, of course, his cosmology—in the face of the discoveries of the new science is quite understandable. Yet the rejection of Aristotle's account of human action cannot be explained in the same way. It seems to me that, one –indeed the primary reason— for the denunciation of Aristotle's ethico-political ideas in the 17th century was the catastrophic breakdown of his cosmology. This shows that there is a strong correlation between his metaphysics, physics, ethics and politics. Accordingly, no account of the emergence of modern conception of politics will be complete if it dismisses this close connection between cosmology and politics.

It is appropriate then to turn to Aristotle's political theory in order to better understand the mainstream modern political imagination and to see an alternative to it. Here, however, I shall not attempt to give a comprehensive account of Aristotle's political thought. Instead, I will try to identify its paradigmatic features that give it its main identity. Thus, instead of dealing with specific sections of his works, I will focus on specific concepts and presuppositions that shaped the general framework of his ethical and political theory. To this end, we will first see how the political and moral realm differ from the physical one in Aristotle's mind. Then, we will examine the formation of the state through the visible face of Aristotle's political theory, that is, "man is political by nature". Third, we will explain the main elements of Aristotle's metaphysics through the concept of "nature". Finally, we will explain Aristotle's understanding of politics and the state that emerged through the intermingling of his metaphysics with politics and morality.

1. *ETHOS* VS. PHYSIS IN ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL THEORY: *PRAXIS* AND *POLITIKE*

Aristotle is a system philosopher. He looks at the world as a systemic whole, the facts and events of which are considered to be purposefully arranged in systemic relations. In this regard, in Aristotle's philosophy all parts are more or less interconnected through a set of logical tools or conceptual rules. For instance, his teleologism and essentialism cut across his physics, metaphysics, ethics, and politics as they serve as the logical ground of all events taking place in the universe. Accordingly, reflecting on Aristotle's

political theory requires us to treat it as an integrated part of a coherent whole. It should also be noted parenthetically that since Aristotle's philosophical system appears as a coherent whole, the failure of one aspect of this system –especially a central one—may easily spread to the rest of the system and thereby result in its total collapse, which is precisely what happened in the course of the transition to modernity.

However, Aristotle is also aware of the unique character of fields involving human action such as politics and ethics. In this regard, the realm of human affairs, *ethos*, is not the same as the domain of the natural sciences, *physis*. For him, therefore, social science (*politike*)[3] is distinguished from natural science by a certain degree of imprecision in its results. As Gadamer points out, "Aristotle sees *ethos* as differing from *physis* in being a sphere in which the [physical] laws of nature do not operate." On the other hand, the distinctness of *ethos* does not imply that it is completely exempt from predictable regularities or general laws. Gadamer, therefore, completes his sentence with "yet [*ethos is*] not a sphere of lawlessness but of human institutions and human modes of behavior which are mutable and like rules only to a limited degree."[4]

Aristotle begins both his *Ethics* and his *Politics* by emphasizing the *intentional* and *voluntary* character of human conduct: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim (*Ethics*). … Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in

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3 As Stephen G. Salkever argues, what Aristotle calls *politike* seems to refer to today's social science, rather than to today's "political science": "*Politike* is clearly the equivalent of social science with respect to the subject matter it embraces. Aristotle uses the term throughout the *Politics* and the *Ethics* to refer to the consideration of topics which we would assign to political science, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and economics. It may, however, be doubted whether the method or approach to the study of human things suggested by *politike* is in any way equivalent to the current implications of social science." Salkever, "Aristotle's Social Science," *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1981): 479. It is interesting to note that by including ethics in *politike*, Aristotle's systematic study of human affairs is more comprehensive than the modern social sciences.

4 Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition, translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006), 311.

order to obtain that which they think good (*Politics*)."[5] Thus, what distinguishes human conduct from the behaviors of other animals is the ability of the human being to choose, with a view to an end, between the things that can be otherwise because the origin of action is choice and the origin of choice is reason and intellect. And intellect itself moves nothing, as only the intellect which aims at an end can be a mover. In this regard, choice comes to be the efficient cause of action, while the idea of an end (good) turns out to be its final cause. A *desiderative reason* or *ratiocinative desire* becomes the efficient cause of choice.[6] As noted in the *Politics,* "Animals lead for the most part a life of nature, although in lesser particulars some are influenced by habit as well. Man has rational principle, in addition, and man only."[7] It is this rational principle that gives human beings the ability to make choices and, depending on an individual's choices, he or she may either be "the most holy" or "the most savage of animals."[8]

Aristotle calls this particular kind of action *praxis* and sees it as uniquely human.[9] For if we look at animals species by species we see that a certain kind of good is desirable for all members of that particular species, although it differs from one species to another. For example, something that is pleasurable for dogs may not be so for horses. But it is certainly pleasurable for all dogs and undesirable for all horses. For human beings, however, this is not the case:

> So the pleasures of creatures different in kind differ in kind, and it is plausible to suppose that those of a single species do not differ. But they vary to no small extent, in the case of men at least; the same things delight some people and pain others, and are painful and odious to some, and pleasant to and liked by others. This happens, too, in the case of sweet things; the same things do not seem sweet to a man in a fever and a healthy man –nor hot to a weak man and one in good condition. The same happens in other cases.[10]

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5 Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," *The Great Books of the Western World, IX* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982),1094a, 339; *Politics*, 1252a, 51.

6 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a and 1139b, 388.

7 Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1943), 1332b, 306. It should be noted that here Aristotle uses the word "nature" in its narrowest sense, referring to the initial condition of things unchanged by human will.

8 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a, 387.

10 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a, 387; 1176a, 430.

Unlike those of animals, human actions are determined by *reason* and *habituation* as well as by instincts. Therefore, we see a high degree of variation not only in human tastes, but also in their perceptions of the good. This, however, does not mean that the human good is completely relative. On the contrary, the *form* (or nature) of human being defines a certain *telos* according to which actions are to be evaluated. Yet this *telos* is so general or comprehensive, the ways leading to it so many, and human life so complicated that the answer to the question "What is the human good?" does not appear immediately. It requires systematic philosophical deliberation as well as intellectual capacity. Indeed, it is this fundamental question that political scientists try to answer for a specific time and space. As Aristotle claims in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, political science, as a practical wisdom, is not only concerned with universals, but also with particulars. That is why it is obtained by experience and, therefore, cannot be exercised by young people.[11] In short, *eudaimonia* (happiness), as the ultimate goal of being human, is not given automatically and does not come into existence spontaneously. It needs to be learned and realized in everyday life. The ontological-moral gap between "man-as-he-happens-to-be" and "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature" is the challenge that a person is supposed to overcome.[12] Eventually, it seems that human life, for Aristotle, turns out to be a continuous struggle to achieve happiness.

Because of the difficulties and discrepancies in perceptions of the human good, matters concerning praxis are most often not fixed. Therefore, one significant characteristic of Aristotle's political theory is its methodological rejection of precision in human affairs:

> Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature. And goods also give rise to a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most

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11 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a, 387; 1142a, 391.
12 See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 50.

part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better.[13]

The human good may be one and universal, but its application to particular cases admits of much variety. In the *Politics* where he discusses the issue of the change of laws Aristotle asserts, "Even when laws have been written down, they ought not always to remain unaltered. As in other sciences, so in politics, it is impossible that all things should be precisely set down in writing; for enactments must be universal, but actions are concerned with particulars."[14] What is good in a specific case, therefore, needs to be determined by political scientists and those who are more experienced in practice are more suitable for being students of politics: "A young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life."[15]

It should also be noted that, in addition to reason, *habituation* also plays a significant role in human conduct. Indeed, as far as human relations in a political community is concerned, habituation comes to be more important than reason. Aristotle notes, "The law has no power to command obedience except that of habit, which can only be given by time." In other words, although rationality is the distinguishing mark of human beings in general, living within a political community and obeying laws is not a function of rationality, but of habituation. And habituation requires proper education of the youth, to which Aristotle devotes considerable time toward the end of the *Politics*. Due to the key role of habit, although Aristotle is in favor of changing laws in accordance with changing conditions, he suggests that this should be done with maximum care. If changing laws would destroy the habit of obeying laws, the benefit of this change would be overshadowed by its dangers.[16]

2. HUMAN BEING AS "*ZOON POLITIKON*"

The most fundamental and defining aspect of Aristotle's political theory is reflected in his famous assertion that "man is by nature

13 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b, 339.
14 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269a, 106.
15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a, 340.
16 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269a, 106.

a political animal."[17] Although contemporary readings on Aristotle's politics generally emphasize "sociality and politicalness" in this expression, in my opinion, the more important element here and the hallmark of his political theory is "naturalness." To understand this natural dimension, we have to begin first by looking at the origin of the state or political community. For, as Aristotle himself points out, "He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them."[18] The nucleus or origin of a state is a natural union between male and female.[19] This union is natural because it is not formed by deliberate purpose, but by natural desire, which is common to all animals and plants. Thus, "Family is the association established by nature."[20] The aim (the end or good) of family is the supply of men's everyday desires, the most important of which is the desire to leave behind them an image of themselves. The natural desires of men, however, do not consist merely of everyday wants. So, when these families come together and aim for something more than their supply of daily needs, a larger association, i.e. a village, is established. The village, therefore, is the first society. And the most natural form of village is an extended family that is composed of people (children and grandchildren) related by blood. What comes after the village is the state: "When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life."[21]

Outside a state an individual is not self-sufficient. This is not, however, merely in the material sense of the word. That is to say, because of their daily needs, such as biological desires, food, and shelter, human beings need the assistance of other human beings. Yet even if they would not have needed the assistance of others in fulfilling these desires, they would still have needed to live within a society[22] because of the basic "social instinct (*horme*) implanted

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17 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 54.

18 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a, 52.

19 Aristotle adds to this also the union of master and slave, which is also a natural association arising from the basic need of protection.

20 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b, 53.

21 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b, 54.

22 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278b, 137.

in all men by nature."[23] Thus, "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state."[24] Ultimately, therefore, the state is prior to the individual, who is as a part in relation to the whole –and the whole has priority over its parts.

Despite the existence of the social instinct implanted in all men by nature, however, the order of society is not assured automatically because, in addition to the social instinct, human beings are also naturally equipped with other instincts and desires, which may, when left alone, cause social disorder. As Aristotle notes, "Man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends."[25] The order of a society is thus established by the administration of justice, which is defined by Aristotle as "the determination of what is just."[26] In this regard, despite man's social instinct, "He who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors."[27] This account clearly indicates that, in Aristotle's mind, society and political society are not equal, for the coming into existence of the state or political society is not a 'biological'[28] necessity (in terms of nutrition and growth, qualities that human beings share with plants and animals). Yet in Aristotle's mind it should still be considered natural. Indeed, it is as natural as the emergence of the family, since, in the case of the family, biological necessity brings male and female together only contingently, but it does not force them to establish a *social* union called the family.[29] Thus, in the

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23 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

24 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

25 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

26 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

27 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

28 Here I use the word "biological" in its narrow sense. It refers to the material aspect of human body, displaying the functions of nutrition and growth, two features that human beings share with other animals and plants. In its general sense, however, reason may also be understood as a part of human biology. Accordingly, the emergence of the state may also be seen as a biological necessity. For such an interpretation see Bernard Yack, *The Problems of A Political Animal* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 12.

29 In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says: "Between man and wife friendship seems to exist by nature; for man is naturally inclined to form couples

establishment of the family we have a *natural* but *non-biological* transition from biological necessity to a social entity. Similarly, the transition from a society to a political society is also natural, although it is not biologically necessary. Aristotle explains this point as follows:

> And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best. Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the "Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one," whom Homer denounces.[30]

3. *ETHOS AND PHYSIS*: THE METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF POLITICS

Although *ethos* and *physis* are separate fields, the term "nature" in the above expression –i.e. man is by *nature* a political animal—is the main element that connects Aristotle's politics to his physics and metaphysics. In order to grasp the natural aspect of the state, therefore, we need to clarify his idea of *physis*.

Aristotle is sometimes promoted as an empirical observer first and foremost and only secondarily as a metaphysician. But despite his deep engagement in biological and medical studies, his social science, as well as his physics, was conditioned primarily by his metaphysics. His metaphysics, on the other hand, was determined by cultural prejudices and an intuitive epistemology. The metaphysical perspective is reflected primarily and consistently in his notion of nature (*physis*). J. D. Logan is absolutely right when he

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-- even more than to form cities, inasmuch as the household is earlier and more necessary than the city, and reproduction is more common to man with the animals. With the other animals the union extends only to this point, but human beings live together not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the various purposes of life; for from the start the functions are divided, and those of man and woman are different; so they help each other by throwing their peculiar gifts into the common stock." (1162a, 414.)

30 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b, 54.

says, "A metaphysic of reality must have been first and uppermost in Aristotle's mind; and it is quite evident from his writings themselves that his metaphysics, or at least his philosophical concept of *physis*, must have been more or less definitely before his mind in his detailed and systematic study of physics, ethics, politics, and psychology."[31] A similar thought is shared by E. Hardy, who claims, "The concept which Aristotle never lost sight of, and which is almost as prominent in the *Ethics* and *Politics* as in the *Physics* proper, was that of *physis*."[32]

The meaning and value that Aristotle attributed to nature was largely a reflection of the Greek mentality he inherited. As R. G. Collingwood underlines, the world of nature for the Greeks was "not only a vast animal with a 'soul' or life of its own, but a rational animal with a 'mind' of its own."[33] Many related statements from Aristotle, such as, "Nature never makes anything without a purpose and never leaves out what is necessary,"[34] "Nature does nothing in vain,"[35] "Nature makes nothing incomplete,"[36] "Nothing which is contrary to nature is good,"[37] "Nature like a good householder, is not in the habit of throwing away anything from which it is possible to make anything useful,"[38] "Nature is no wanton or random creator,"[39] "Even in things which have no life there is a ruling principle, as in a musical mode,"[40] "We must look for the intentions of Nature in things which retain their nature, and not in things which are corrupted,"[41] and, "Absence of haphazard and conduciveness

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31 J. D. Logan, "The Aristotelian Concept of Physis," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Jan., 1897): 33.

32 E. Hardy, *Begriff der Physis in der griechischen Philosophie* (Berlin, 1884), quoted by J. D. Logan, "The Aristotelian Concept of *Physis*," 33.

33 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3.

34 Aristotle, "On the Soul," *The Great Books of the Western World, VIII* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 432b, 665.

35 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 434a, 667.

36 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1256b, 65.

37 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1325b, 285.

38 Aristotle, "On the Generation of Animals," *The Great Books of the Western World, IX* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 744b, 285.

39 Aristotle, "On the Heavens," *The Great Books of the Western World, VIII* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 291b, 383.

40 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a, 58.

41 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a, p. 59.

of everything to an end are to be found in Nature's works in the highest degree, and the resultant end of her generations and combinations is a form of the beautiful"[42] also reveal his perception of nature as a living and intelligent reality.

In the fifth book of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle gives the following meanings of nature (*physis*): (1) "the genesis of growing things," (2) "that immanent part of a growing thing, from which its growth first proceeds," (3) "the source from which the primary movement in each natural object is present in it in virtue of its own essence," (4) "the primary material of which any natural object consists or out of which it is made," and (5) "the *essence* of natural objects."[43] Despite their differences, however, all these meanings can be reduced to a single principle that nature is the *essence* of things which have in themselves a source of movement. Aristotle explains this point as follows:

> From what has been said, then, it is plain that nature in the primary and strict sense is the essence of things which have in themselves, as such, a source of movement; for the matter is called the nature because it is qualified to receive this, and processes of becoming and growing are called nature because they are movements proceeding from this. And nature in this sense is the source of the movement of natural objects, being present in them somehow, either potentially or in complete reality.[44]

In a similar vein, in the second book of the *Physics*, having given three different meanings attributed to the concept of nature –(1) "the immediate material substratum of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change," (2) "the shape or form of things which have in themselves a source of motion," and (3) "the process of growth by which its nature is attained"[45]—Aristotle defines nature as an inner "principle of motion and change."[46] This principle, however, displays a teleological structure, for it is realized for the fulfillment of an end. Aristotle, therefore, asserts: "The

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42 Aristotle, "On the Parts of Animals," *The Great Books of the Western World, IX* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), *645a, 169*.

43 Aristotle, "Metaphysics," *The Great Books of the Western World, VIII* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 1014b, 534-536.

44 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1015a, 535.

45 Aristotle, "Physics," *The Great Books of the Western World, VIII* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 269.

46 Aristotle, *Physics*, 193a and 193b, 278.

nature is the end or 'that for the sake of which.' For if a thing undergoes a continuous change and there is a stage which is last, this stage is the end or 'that for the sake of which'."[47]

As we have seen, Aristotle describes the state as a 'natural' entity. We also learned that in Aristotle's vocabulary something is natural only if it has within itself a principle of motion and change. As Ernest Barker notes, things that are natural, according to Aristotle, "develop from within, as the result of an immanent force. As such a natural thing, the State has its own life, and it has grown."[48] Nevertheless, the naturalness of the state is rooted in the nature of the human being. In other words, the state turns out to be natural because it comes into existence as a result of the realization of the principle of motion and change that belongs to the *essence* of the human being as political animal. As Andreas Kamp observes: "In the polis a natural entity, man, reaches the complete actualization of his being. 'Polis' refers to the completed condition of a natural being, [man]. … [though] it is not an entity apart from man, but rather the actualized essence and ground of his being."[49]

Now we must explore how this "inner principle of motion and change" is actualized. To do that, however, some basic terms in Aristotle's technical vocabulary (such as substance, essence, motion, potentiality, actuality etc.) need to be explained briefly. In the second book of the *Physics*, Aristotle argues, "Knowledge is the object of our inquiry, and men do not think they know a thing till they

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47 Aristotle, *Physics*, 194a, 270. "The form indeed is nature rather than the matter, for a thing is more properly said to be what it is when it has attained to fulfillment than when it exists potentially." *Physics*, 193b, 269.

48 Ernest Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 281.

49 Andreas Kamp, *Die Politische Philosophie des Aristoteles und ihre Metaphysischen Grundlagen* (Freiburg and Muhich: Alber, 1985), 116, quoted by Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 92. On this specific controversial issue Yack's own position is as follows: "I conclude then that the polis, though it is a whole and exists according to nature, is not a natural whole. Like most wholes, natural or artificial, the polis is 'prior by nature' to its parts. But it is not itself a natural substance with its own internal principle of motion. It derives its naturalness from natural attributes of human beings, from what we might call their 'political' property. The polis is natural to the extent that it owes its end and existence to these attributes. But it does not possess its own nature and therefore does not possess its own internal principle of production and motion toward a perfected form." Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 95. As Yack himself admits, "a fair number of scholars argue otherwise." (92).

have grasped the 'why' of it (which is to grasp its primary cause)."[50] Similarly, at the very beginning of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle repeats that "wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes."[51] He then enumerates four principles and causes of coming to be, passing away, and every other variety of change. These are classically known as the four causes: material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause. Aristotle explains these as follows:

> In one sense, then, (1) that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists, is called 'cause,' e.g. the bronze of the statue, the silver of the bowl, and the genera of which the bronze and the silver are species. In another sense (2) the form of the archetype, i.e. the statement of the essence, and its genera, are called 'causes' (e.g. of the octave the relation of 2:1, and generally number), and the parts in the definition. Again (3) the primary source of the change or coming to rest; e.g. the man who gave advice is a cause, the father is cause of the child, and generally what makes of what is made and what causes change of what is changed. Again (4) in the sense of end or 'that for the sake of which' a thing is done, e.g. health is the cause of walking about. ('Why is he talking about?' we say. 'To be healthy', and, having said that, we think we have assigned the cause.) The same is true also of all the intermediate steps which are brought about through the action of something else as means towards the end, e.g. reduction of flesh, purging, drugs, or surgical instruments are means towards health. All these things are 'for the sake of' the end, though they differ from one another in that some are activities, others instruments. [52]

Out of these four causes the first and the third (the material and efficient causes) were also known and used by earlier philosophers. Yet these philosophers did not, Aristotle argues, possess clearly or consciously the notions of the second and fourth (formal and final) causes. In their thought the primary –and possibly only—component of a thing is the substratum (material cause) out of which it is made. Aristotle, therefore, claims that his predecessors failed to adequately understand and explain the phenomena they addressed because they lacked the notion of *essence* and *substance*.[53] He, on the other hand, suggests that the principle or cause of being of a substance is the form or essence that is predicated

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50 Aristotle, *Physics*, 194b, 271.
51 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a, 500.
52 Aristotle, *Physics*, 194b, 195a, 271.
53 Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, 165.

of matter.[54] In Aristotle's terminology substance refers, in its most general sense, to being: "What being is, is just the question, what is substance?"[55] Being, however, is presented in many ways.[56] That is to say, not only separately and independently existing things, but also qualities or quantities, or even things that are not actually existent are said to be. Therefore, being, only in its primary sense, is substance.[57] In a more specific way, then, substance is something to which all other categories of being are referred.[58]

In the seventh book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that the word substance is applied to four things: the essence, the universal, the genus, and the substratum. He then proceeds to discuss in detail each of these in terms of being substance. Since there is an ongoing scholarly debate over whether there are contradictions in the definitions of substance in Aristotle's thought, I will not concern myself with the apparently contradictory statements defended by Aristotle in different parts of the *Metaphysics*.[59] Nevertheless, for the purpose of our inquiry into the concept of motion and nature –and therefore into the naturalness of the state—we have to specify in what sense essence is associated with substance.

Aristotle divides substance into two kinds: primary and secondary. The primary substance is the individual thing, composed of

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54 S. Marc Cohen, "Aristotle's Metaphysics" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/, (accessed February 17, 2022).

55 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028b, 550.

56 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a, 522. "There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be'. … some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of one of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we say even of non-being that it *is* non-being." *Metaphysics*, 1003b, 522.

57 "In one sense the 'being' meant is 'what a thing is' or a 'this', and in another sense it means a quality or quantity or one of the other things that are predicated as these are. While 'being' has all these senses, obviously that which 'is' primarily is the 'what', which indicates the substance of the thing. … Therefore that which is primarily, i.e. not in a qualified sense but without qualification, must be substance." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028a, 550.

58 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1045b, 570.

59 For a more detailed analysis of these debates see S. Marc Cohen, "Aristotle's Metaphysics."

matter and form (and privation). Despite the priority of primary substance in the hierarchy of beings, Aristotle is more concerned with secondary substance, because secondary substance is the essence of that thing, which signifies simply what that thing is. In his words, "The essence of each thing is what it is said to be *propter se.*"[60] For example, being, say, musical is not being me, because I am not musical by my very nature. So what a human being is by his or her very nature is his or her essence. Furthermore, those things whose formula is a definition have an essence. And only those things that are species of a genus can be defined as such. In other words, only *universals* have a definition. For instance, a human being can be defined because the object in consideration, i.e. man, belongs to a genus of animals. Hence human being is defined by Aristotle as a "rational animal" (and, therefore, a "political animal"). The definition of human being locates individual human beings within the genus of animals, but they are distinguished from other animals by virtue of possessing reason. Thus, what makes a human being precisely a *human being* is his or her possession of reason. Accordingly, the *essence* of human being turns out to be rationality. In other words, this essence of "humanness" is a universal that is found in particulars. This essence is at the same time the *substance* in its secondary sense, the *form* and *end* of being a human being. A quality or quantity, on the other hand, cannot be defined in this way. Whiteness, for example, does not belong to a genus (i.e. color) in the same sense that human being belongs to the genus of animals.[61] Since there is no essential characteristic of whiteness, Aristotle proceeds, whiteness cannot be defined essentially.

The story does not end here, however. In the ninth book of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle maintains that "everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e. an end (for that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end (*telos*), and the actuality (*entelechia*) is the end), and it is for the sake of this that the potency is acquired."[62] In other words, everything that comes to be *moves* toward the realization of its *essence* or *nature*. Now the principle of *teleological motion* that comes up

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60 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029b, 552.

61 Aristotle, "Categories," *The Great Books of the Western World, VIII* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982), 3b, 8.

62 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1050a, 575.

in this statement needs to be addressed briefly. As we have seen, in Aristotle's metaphysics, being has several meanings and degrees. In its primary sense, being refers to individual things. In its secondary sense, however, it is used also for qualities and quantities. In a similar fashion, being can also be distinguished in respect to potency, complete reality, and function. That is to say, a thing may potentially or actually exist (or in potentiality in one sense and in actuality in another). The latter division of being brings us back to the notion of nature as the inner principle of the motion and change of things, because the fulfillment of what is potential in so far as it is potential is motion.[63] Aristotle holds that "nature also is in the same genus as potency; for it is a principle of movement – not, however, in something else but in the thing itself *qua* itself."[64]

4. THE NATURE AND END OF POLITICS: THE GOOD LIFE

Having briefly surveyed Aristotle's understanding of nature, being, and motion, we may now return back to his politics and continue from where we left off. We have mentioned that the emergence of a *family* and a *state* is natural but not necessarily 'biological.' For, in terms of their 'biological' nature (i.e. nutrition and growth), the human species belongs to the genus of animals. Yet they are distinguished from other animals by being political (at least more political than other animals, such as bees). What makes human beings political animals is the fact that they are naturally endowed with the gift of reason (*logos*). For it is by this special property that human beings possess a natural "sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings."[65] To put it differently, it is true that 'biological' necessity causes man and woman to come together in the case of the family, and all people together within a society in the case of the state, yet what leads eventually to the emergence of the family and of the state (as a political society) is *logos*, through which human beings seek what is good or just and abstain from what is evil or unjust. Thus, a political society is distinguished from other kinds of society by its pos-

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63 Aristotle, *Physics*, 201a, 278.
64 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1049b, 575.
65 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 54.

session of order, the principle of which is justice. And justice is the function of *logos*.

This last remark brings us finally to Aristotle's ethics. Unlike the modern political consciousness, in the classical and Aristotelian understanding politics was not treated as a distinct domain outside of ethics. Indeed, politics was a sub-field of ethics; and it was considered as such in all classical books on ethics.[66] Following this ancient view, Aristotle begins his *Politics* by specifying the teleological principle of this system and argues that the state is established for the sake of the good life: "Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good."[67] Similarly, he repeatedly contends that "the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life."[68] In other words, with the emergence of human society the process of the actualization of human nature/essence by no means comes to an end. For the essence of a human being is how he or she

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66 The last paragraph of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that connects the *Ethics* to the *Politics* is as follows: "Now our predecessors have left the subject of legislation to us unexamined; it is perhaps best, therefore, that we should ourselves study it, and in general study the question of the constitution, in order to complete to the best of our ability our philosophy of human nature. First, then, if anything has been said well in detail by earlier thinkers, let us try to review it; then in the light of the constitutions we have collected let us study what sorts of influence preserve and destroy states, and what sorts preserve or destroy the particular kinds of constitution, and to what causes it is due that some are well and others ill administered. When these have been studied we shall perhaps be more likely to see with a comprehensive view, 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. Let us make a beginning of our discussion." Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* 1181b, 436. "The ethics of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the ethics of and for a citizen of a polis and that the social practice articulated by Aristotelian theory is the practice of a polis. So the claim can very plausibly be made: no ethics except as part of politics and no politics except as the practice of a polis." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

67 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1232a, 51.

68 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b, 54.

is defined; and a human being is defined as a "rational animal." We have seen that *logos*, the characteristic human capacity for reason and speech, provides human beings with the sense of good and evil and just and unjust. Indeed, *logos* (as being the efficient cause) dictates that human beings strive for the *good* life (the final cause) rather than just any kind of life. Thus human nature brings about the state in order to realize its essence (or form), which is manifested in *virtuous life*. In this regard, the state is, in Aristotle's philosophy, a moral entity that exists for the perfection of human beings rather than an independent and abstract mechanical configuration. In other words, the state is neither an association for the protection of individual rights nor an end in itself. Its ultimate purpose is the development of virtuous personalities. Aristotle elucidates this point in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as follows:

> Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle. … If this is the case, (and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,) human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.[69]

Having identified the *good life* as the ultimate purpose (the *telos*) of human beings and, thereby, of the state, Aristotle identifies it as living in accordance with virtue. Indeed, political science, the end of which is the human good, is primarily the study of what virtues are and how citizens can be made virtuous. "Political science," Aristotle says, "spends most of its pains on making the citizens to be of a certain character, viz. good and capable of noble acts."[70] And "the true student of politics, too, is thought to have studied virtue above all things; for he wishes to make his fellow citizens good and obedient to the laws."[71] In the rest of the

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69 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a, 343.
70 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b, 345.
71 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102a, 347.

Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle endeavors to specify what virtues are and how a person becomes (or is made) virtuous. Accordingly the science of politics turns out to be the study of the best political order (as far as possible) for the development and flourishing of virtuous individuals.[72]

Let us now bring all of these strands together. We know that the human being is by nature a political and rational animal. Nature, in turn, is the essence of things that have in themselves, as such, a source of movement. In other words, nature is a cause that operates for a purpose.[73] Motion, on the other hand, is defined as the fulfillment of what is potential insofar as it is potential. Accordingly, human beings strive by nature to actualize their essences or forms. In the process of the actualization of this potency first family, then the village, and then the state come into existence. Due to our possession of *logos*, however, the full actualization of human essence becomes possible only in the creation of the good life. Accordingly, the *telos* of the inner principle of motion and change of human essence turns out to be the good life. And since the human good is defined as the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, politics amounts to a pursuit of virtue. Likewise, the state is also characterized by its moral value and ontological function in the making of the human being as such. Eventually, as the substance or form of the political nature of the human being, the state comes into existence as a natural being. In a word, a person is not considered perfect or complete if he or she happens to live in a society that has not reached the level of the state. Yet the state is not an end in itself. It is an instrument to

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72 Leo Strauss notes: "By the best political order the classical philosopher understood that political order which is best always and everywhere. This does not mean that he conceived of that order as necessarily good for every community, as 'a perfect solution for all times and for every place': a given community may be so rude or so depraved that only a very inferior type of order can 'keep it going'. But it does mean that the goodness of the political order realized anywhere and at any time can be judged only in terms of that political order which is best absolutely. 'The best political order' is, then, not intrinsically Greek: it is no more intrinsically Greek than health, as is shown by the parallelism of political science and medicine. But just as it may happen that the members of one nation are more likely to be healthy and strong than those of others, it may also happen that one nation has a greater natural fitness for political excellence than others." Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 87.

73 Aristotle, *Physics*, 199b, 277.

the *telos* of humanness and exists for the sake of the development of virtuous persons. If virtue were not the goal of the state, the community would be no more than a mere alliance and law would be no more than a convention. In other words, contrary to the modern mainstream political consciousness, a state does not exist for the sake of individual security, alliances, exchange, or mutual relationships:

> A state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life of free choice. Nor does a state exist for the sake of alliance and security from injustice, nor yet for the sake of exchange and mutual intercourse; for then the Tyrrhenians and the Carthaginians, and all who have commercial treaties with one another, would be the citizens of one state. … Let us suppose that one man is a carpenter, another a husbandman, another a shoemaker, and so on, and that their number is ten thousand: nevertheless, if they have nothing in common but exchange, alliance, and the like, that would not constitute a state. … It is clear then that a state is not a mere society, having a common place, established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange. These are conditions without which a state cannot exist; but all of them together do not constitute a state, which is a community of families and aggregations of families in well-being, for the sake of a perfect and self-sufficing life. … The end of the state is the good life, and these are the means towards it. … Our conclusion, then, is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of mere companionship.[74]

CONCLUSION

Aristotle's political theory, if we have to sum it up in one word, is the major other of modern political imagination. Unlike the mechanicism of modern political consciousness, Aristotle's apporach exemplifies the typical organicist understanding of the pre-modern era. In this respect, it is of great importance to separate Aristotle's political theory into its logical components both in order to better understand the modern political conception and to see its traditional alternative. Aristotle is a system philosopher, that is, he has not only developed a philosophy that encompasses almost

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74 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1280a, 1280b, 1281a, 142-144.

every area of human life, but at the same time, all parts of his philosophical system are built to complement each other. As a matter of fact, it is interesting to see that some concepts cut Aristotle's philosophy horizontally and diffuse into almost all of its subfields. The most significant of these concepts is "nature" or "*physis.*" From Aristotle's metaphysics and physics to ethics and politics, nature has given Aristotle's thought both an uninterrupted continuity and a strong logical consistency.

Based on this background, we tried to analyze throughout this article Aristotle's central statement about politics –"man is political by nature"—by dissolving it into its philosophical components. This process can be shortly rephrased in the following way: As we have just mentioned, the critical term in this famous formulation is "nature." The term "nature" primarily implies the characteristic feature of the organiscist understanding, namely assuming a self-induced movement within each thing. Thus, nature is the end and inner principle of motion and change towards that end. This movement does not stop until the potential becomes fully actualized. Nature, in Aristotle's terminology refers also to the *essence* of things, i.e. that what makes something a specific thing. Everything has a nature and therefore everything that comes to be moves towards the realization or actualization of its nature or essence. Accordingly, human being, by virtue of being human, strive for the realization of his/her essence. Actualization of the ends step by step in a hierarchical order is inherently and naturally good. The highest good is something beyond which there is no end to be actualized. This ultimate good that is desired for its own sake and not for the sake of something else is what is called happiness. So, the happiness of human being lays in the ultimate actualization of his/her essence. The essence of human being is rationality. In other words, human being is essentially a rational animal. Rationality means choosing the reasonable option and acting in a reasonable way in each and every circumstance. The reasonable option, according to Aristotle, is the human good or virtue. However being human cannot be reduced to a single act or moment. It has to spread to whole life. The actualization of human essence means having a complete life lived in accordance with virtue. This is equal to being virtuous or developing a virtuous character. Thus, human happiness consists in having a virtuous life and eventually developing a virtuous character.

On the way of unfolding their nature and striving to actualize their essences (both physically and spiritually) human beings naturally establish several different social-political units, the degree of self-sufficiency of which differ from each other: family, village and the state (*polis*). On this universal and natural path the formation of family is the first step, which is good in itself but not sufficient for the actualization of the human essence, which is, to repeat, developing a virtuous character. Then comes village, which is more sufficient than family, but does not meet all the requirements of being a full human. So, the nature of human beings continues to produce an internal energy for movement until eventually creating the state, which is thought to be self-sufficient for developing a virtuous character and being a full human. This means no social or political unit beyond the state is natural, because there remains in human nature no potential to be actualized and to produce an energy for a further movement. Given this organicist and teleological explanation, those who happen to live in a social-political unit smaller or less developed than a state should be considered less human. As Aristotle himself points out "He who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man (in another passage, a beast) or above humanity (in another passage, god)."[75] Thus, the natural social-political environment of human beings is *polis*, or in a more famous phrase "man is by nature a *zoon politikon*."

In conclusion, Aristotle's state is a natural being and an organic unity that exists for the sake of a good life and the citizens who compose the state are those who share in the honors of the state. As he notes, "A state is not a mere society, having a common place, established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange."[76] Rather, it "exists for the sake of a good life."[77]

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75 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 55.

76 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1280b, 143.

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ARİSTOTALES'İN SİYASET TEORİSİ: METAFİZİK VE FİZİĞİN AHLAK VE SİYASETLE BULUŞMASI

Öz

Aristoteles'in siyaset teorisi modern siyaset tasavvurunun en büyük "ötekisi"dir. Zira, modern siyasal anlayışın mekanizmacılığının aksine Aristoteles'in yaklaşımı modern-öncesi dönemin organizmacılığının en çok kabul gören örneğidir. Tarihsel açıdan da modern siyaset tasavvuru Aristotelesçi algının reddi üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Bu bakımdan Aristoteles'in siyaset teorisini hakkıyla anlamak, bu bağlamda da onu felsefî bileşenlerine ve önkabullerine ayrıştırmak sadece modern siyaset tasavvurunun daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlamayacak, aynı zamanda onun bir alternatifini de gözler önüne serecektir. Aristoteles kelimenin tam anlamıyla bir sistem filozofudur. Yani Aristoteles'in düşüncesi bu dünya ve insanla ilgili hemen herşeyi kuşatmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda sisteminin bütün parçaları hem birbirine bağlı hem de tamamlayıcı bir özelliğe sahiptir. Aristoteles sisteminin bu güçlü iç entegrasyonunu belli başlı kavramlar ve terimler aracılığıyla kurar. Bunların başında ise metafiziğinden siyasetine, fiziğinden etiğine tüm düşüncesini yatay kesen "tabiat/*physis*" kavramı gelmektedir. Benzer şekilde sisteminin her unsuruna sirayet etmiş olan diğer terimler (öz, gaye, bilkuvve, bilfiil, *entelekya*, iyi, mutluluk vs.) ancak tabiat kavramının oluşturduğu bir zeminde anlam kazanırlar. Aristoteles'in siyaset teorisini sisteminin diğer unsurlarına, özellikle de metafiziğine bağlayan ana unsur da yine "tabiat" kavramı olmuştur. Aristoteles'in meşhur "insan tabiatı itibariyle sosyal-siyasaldır" ifadesi bu açıdan kritik bir önemi haizdir. Hem Doğu'da hem de Batı'da genelde bu ifadedeki insanın "sosyalliği ve siyasallığı" öne çıkarılmışken, "tabiat" kavramı genelde ihmal edilegelmiştir. Halbuki, Aristoteles'in siyaset teorisini emsallerinden, özellikle de ana-akım modern siyaset tasavvurundan ayıran temel unsurlar (organizmacılık, teleoloji ve ahlakilik) ancak "tabiat" üzerinden anlaşılabilir. Bu yaklaşımla, makalemizde Aristoteles'in siyaseti ve etiği ile metafiziği ve fiziği arasındaki kurucu ilişki "tabiat" kavramı üzerinden deşifre edilmeye çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyaset, Metafizik, Ahlak, Tabiat, İyi Hayat, Devlet, Öz