

Teleology in Aristotelian Tradition

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Faculty
of Arts

Thursday (October 6)

Peter Haskett (The Catholic University of America)

Natures Do Nothing in Vain: A Note on Organic Synergy in Aristotle's Natural Philosophy

Aristotle frequently makes the claim that nature does nothing in vain.¹ What does he mean? Does nature, broadly construed, have some kind of "demiurgic" character? Is there a "Mother Nature" at work in Aristotle's cosmology and natural philosophy? Lennox, Gotthelf, Balme, and others have sought to dispel the idea that there exists for Aristotle a demiurgic "Mother Nature." While I generally agree with this view, in this paper I argue that recent scholarship at times construes Aristotelian nature and teleology too narrowly, thus glossing over elements of it that are ineluctably "demiurgic." By "too narrowly," I mean that recent scholarship tends to make Aristotelian natures static and self-contained rather than dynamic and cooperative. I argue that Aristotle indeed speaks as though there exists a telic synergy among certain natures. Discussing passages from *Politics*, *PA*, and *HA*, and elsewhere, I argue that the individual natures of some organisms, especially social animals, seem to act towards the end of larger natural wholes. Indeed, on my reading, it's these individual natures working in symphony that create the appearance of "Mother Nature" in Aristotle's world.

Jacob Frank de Jonge (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Aristotle on the Origin of Species

Modern commentators have failed to appreciate that, in his biology, Aristotle is only interested in living beings in so far as they are in motion. It is only for this reason that he here assumes they possess their teleological features to reproduce their form and to thus approximate God's Eternity. As is clear from his ethical and metaphysical writings, however, Aristotle does not believe this assumption explains why they possess their teleological features in the first place, because, like the revolutions of the heavens on which it models their motions, it is circular. Living beings only 'desire' to reproduce their form, he rather believes, to preserve what they 'desire' for its own sake: to engage in their activities and to thus approximate God's Activity. It is for this Reason that they possess their teleological features in the first place and in this way that God is the Origin of species.

¹ *PN*. 476a12; *Pol*. 1253a9; *GA*. 741b4, 770b17-18; *DA*. 432b21, 434a30-32; *DC*. 271a33, 291b13; *PA*. 661b24-25, 691b5.

Mary Katrina Krizan (Bilkent University, Ankara)

Ends, functions, and inanimate materials in Aristotle's *Meteorology* 4

In *Meteorology* 4.12, Aristotle identifies inanimate materials, including simple sublunary bodies such as fire and compound materials such as metals, among those that have 'functions'. On a standard interpretation of the chapter, inanimate materials only have functions when integrated into a complex substance such as a living thing or an artefact. An alternative interpretation suggests that inanimate materials can have functions in virtue of their dispositional qualities, even if they are not integrated into the teleological structure of a complex substance.

In this paper, I focus on complex inanimate materials without a clear biological function, such as metals. I argue that the alternative interpretation is partly right: inanimate materials have functions independent of any relationship to the teleological structure of a complex substance (or artefact). Nonetheless, the alternative interpretation is incomplete because it cannot adequately identify when an inanimate material performs its function for the sake of an end. Inanimate materials are essentially passive and only perform their functions when acted upon by an external efficient cause, which may act either by chance or for the sake of something. Thus, I argue, the activity of an inanimate material for the sake of an end is not determined by its integration into the teleological structure of a complex substance, but rather, by the nature of the efficient cause that acts upon it.

Pavol Labuda (Catholic University in Ruzomberok, Slovakia)

Aristotle on the Aim (Telos) of Human Speech

According to Aristotle, speech (*dialektos*) of both humans and songbirds is the result of their ability to articulate. Speech articulation (*diarthrosis*) is a two-way process: a disconnection of the voice expression and a re-connection and re-ordering of vocal units which are the results of the former disconnection. The process of articulation follows certain rules that are socially acquired in the process of learning (*mathesis*) and habituation (*ethos*). Seeing it from this point of view, speech is a composite voice-sound expression which necessarily occurs in a local variant, and which is meaning-making only by convention (*kata syntheken*). However, in the case of human speech (*logos*), it is also an expression of the ability to think. It is thinking that enables us to think impartially and modally about the images (*phantasmata*) that are the objects of our senses and desires. And so far as our speech is the expression of our ability to think, it allows us to transcend the immediate communicative goals of achieving pleasure or avoiding pain, it allows us to reason publicly. By public reasoning, I mean that *via* our speech we engage in a dialogue with others (of the same linguistic community) about what is good and bad not only for ourselves, but for the whole community of which we are a part.

In his *Politics* (1253a9-19) Aristotle states that the aim of human speech is not merely to communicate social proximity in the form of expressing pleasure and pain. The species-

specific aim of human speech is a kind of communication in which there is a distinction between right and wrong, just and unjust. Aristotle points out that it is the community (*koinonia*) in these matters that constitutes both a household (*oikia*) and a city-state (*polis*). In my paper I focus on two important moments of this statement. First, I try to explain why Aristotle formulates the specificity of human speech through the category of aim (*telos*), second, I attempt to reconstruct Aristotle's account of the social dimension of human speech in a comprehensive way. In doing so, I start from the assumption that to expose the proper aim of human speech is to make visible its species-specific social dimension.

Kryštof Boháček (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

Aristotle and Protagoras on the aim of reasonable man

The central character of Aristotle's practical philosophy is *phronimos*, the reasonable man. His basic dianoetic competence, *phronesis*, consists in the ability to make the right decisions in the changing and always somewhat unique situations of everyday life. Aristotle characterizes this ability more closely with the Protagorean term *euboulia*, the art of knowing one's advice. Does Aristotle return to Protagoras' concept of civic excellence, *politike arete*? I will try to show that one key difference is based in Aristotle's teleology.

Pavel Hobza (Palacký University, Olomouc)

Teleology and Language: A Lesson from Socrates' Second Voyage

One of Aristotle's most important achievements is often considered to be his teleology, which is closely related to his famous doctrine of four causes, final cause being one of them. In addition, he often contrasts the teleological explanation with the mechanical one, thus stressing its novelty and superiority. In contrast to the mechanical explanation which he commonly combines with the thought of, e.g., Empedocles, Anaxagoras, or Democritus, Aristotle never mentions anyone whom he would see as his predecessor in developing teleological explanation. One might of course immediately think of his teacher, Plato, and his Forms. The problem is, however, that Aristotle himself nowhere interprets the Forms teleologically. According to him, the Forms are only substances or essences (*to ti esti*) but not purposes or the causes for the sake of which. In my paper I will examine an important passage from Plato's *Phaedo*, which Plato's Socrates presents as the so-called Second Voyage (*Phd* 95e-101e). Here, Plato conceives of the Forms not only as essences (cf. his claim that 'all beautiful things are beautiful by (the presence of) the Beautiful itself, *Phd* 100d7) but especially as *logoi*. Only as *logoi* the Forms can be construed teleologically. So I

will argue that the Second Voyage passage is strikingly similar to how Aristotle treats and conceives of teleology, which means that he could be inspired by it.

Friday (October 7)

Blythe Greene (Providence College, Rhode Island)

The Teleological Before and After in Motion

In *Physics* IV.11, Aristotle identifies time as “the number of the before and after in motion.” This definition has been criticized as circular, on the grounds that Aristotle defines time using temporal notions. Before (*proteron*) and after (*husteron*) are commonly understood as being *temporally* before and after, leading to a definition of time in terms of the earlier and later in time.

However, I argue that Aristotle makes use of a richly defined language of before and after – laid out in the *Categories* – and that it is not the temporal sense of before and after he has in mind. Rather, Aristotle is thinking of a *teleological* before and after, in which every motion is inherently ordered and directed towards some end. This would give an independent sense of before and after in motion, saving the definition from circularity and fitting it neatly into Aristotle’s teleological physics.

Kyoungmin Cho (University of Illinois at Chicago)

On Aristotle’s Test for *Energeia*: The Teleology and Temporality of *Energeia*

Some interpreters argue that Aristotle’s test for *energeia* in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 is about the inference from an action statement in the present tense to the same action statement in the perfect tense. According to this reading, the test is supposed to reveal the important *temporal* feature of *energeia* that its temporal parts are homogeneous. On the other hand, other interpreters argue that Aristotle’s test must instead be of the inference between an action statement in the present tense and the same action statement in the *perfective aspect*. According to this reading, Aristotle’s test is meant to disclose the *teleological* structure of *energeia* that it completes its end whenever it is present. Despite their disagreement, however, their readings are alike in focusing exclusively on either tense or aspect, but not both. Consequently, their readings narrowly interpret the test as illustrating either the temporal or the teleological nature of *energeia*. In this paper, I will argue that if we properly understand the temporal and teleological nature of *energeia*, we can find that

these two readings are indeed not incompatible. It will turn out that for *energeia*, an action statement in the present tense entails the same action statement in the perfect tense *and* the perfective aspect. This is because, I will argue, although *energeia* goes through time, its *completion* doesn't take time: *energeia* is timeless in the sense that its end is realized instantaneously. Aristotle's test is supposed to illustrate both the temporality and teleology of *energeia*, not merely one of them.

Vojtěch Linka (Charles University, Prague)

Why does it hurt? Teleology of pain in Aristotle and its relation to the 'Hippocratic corpus'

In contrast to disease, which has no *telos*, pain can fit into the teleological structure of both Aristotle's biology and ethics. Even though he describes pain as something to be avoided that destroys our nature and is opposed to pleasure, pain is nonetheless a necessary and natural component of human (and animal) life, playing an indispensable role in its preservation, recovery of health, human education, cultivation of virtues etc. In contrast to the majority of the treatises collected in the so-called 'Hippocratic corpus' where pain plays a role only as a symptom of a disease helping the doctor with the diagnosis without any intrinsic sense, Aristotle attempts to integrate pain to his teleological conception of nature and human action, in which he is possibly inspired by the dietetic tradition of the 'Hippocratic' medicine, especially by the treatise *On regimen*, where one of the central theses holds that (potentially) painful exercises contribute to the maintaining and restoration of health.

Tomáš Nejeschleba (Palacký University, Olomouc)

Teleology in renaissance anatomy on the example of Johannes Jessenius

Renaissance anatomy, which is a renaissance of ancient anatomical concepts, takes from ancient texts and further develops the doctrine of purposefulness. Teleological thinking in Renaissance anatomy will be presented in this paper by the example of the Wittenberg anatomist Johannes Jessenius, who performed the first public dissection in Prague in 1600 and published a description of it in Wittenberg in 1601. Following mainly Italian Renaissance anatomical authorities, Jessenius also works with teleology, which he both uses to justify anatomical practice and incorporates into his own interpretation of anatomical acts. Special attention will be paid in this paper to the anatomy of the hand, in which Jessenius follows specifically Andreas Vesalius, who adopts a teleological understanding of the hand from Aristotle and Galen.

George Karamanolis (University of Vienna)

Plotinus' Criticism of Natural Teleology

In *Ennead* VI.7 (*How the Plurality of Forms came into Being*) Plotinus strongly rejects natural teleology, namely the view that nature creates every single thing in the world with purpose and according to a rational plan. Plotinus' criticism rests on his conception of nature and its causal role, outlined in *Ennead* III.8. There he argues that nature cannot possibly qualify as the world's main principle because nature does not have awareness of its own creation and does not possess the relevant knowledge that accounts for its creations. Plotinus argues that such a knowledge comes from higher principles, which count as the sources of a rational plan, of intelligibility and wisdom, namely the Soul, the Intellect, and ultimately the One. It is the Intellect, he argues, that has designed the world as a whole, and for that reason it is pointless to ask which part exists for the sake of what (the eyebrow for the sake of the eye; VI.7.315-23). There is a reason (in the plan of the Intellect) why the whole exists and why it is made in the way it is. The Intellect is the source of *logoi*, which account for both the "what" and the "why" of things. Plotinus does not deny teleology but rather puts it at a different level, at the level of the Intellect.

A.Hakeem Yousuf A Alkhelaifi (Qatar University)

The concept of teleology in al-Fārābī's thought

One of Aristotelian philosophical ideas that influenced Islamic philosophers was teleology. When al-Kindī (801-873 AD) first introduced Greek philosophy into Islam, Aristotle's four causes and teleology were part of his explanatory method in physics: man and nature. As al-Kindī was still under the influence of Islamic theology, God was not part of his teleological system. With al-Fārābī (870-950 AD), organic unity was developed between God and the world. By combining teleology with the concept of Good as the ultimate purpose of the cosmic order, al-Fārābī developed teleology into a metaphysical principle that bound God, the world, and society into one necessary and universal system. The paper is divided into three sections. First, I deal with al-Kindī's employment of Aristotelian teleology in physics. Next, I examine al-Fārābī's view of teleology as the bases of God's relation to the world. Finally, I consider al-Fārābī's concept of teleology in physics and society.

Andrei G. Zavaliy (American University of Kuwait)

Teleological Definitions of Courage in Aristotle and the Problem of Motivation

The presentation seeks to illustrate Aristotle's teleological approach to ethics, using his definition of the virtue of courage as primary example. The thesis that *courage consists in overcoming the fear of death for a worthy or noble cause* will be analyzed by exploring the implications of such "overcoming," as well as the psychological and cognitive resources needed to counter this powerful instinct. The normative aspect of the present study aims at making sense of what could qualify as a worthy or a noble goal of a fearless action for the Aristotelian model of the ethical world. Reference to the intended proper goal of a courageous behavior is one of the constitutive features of the Aristotelian holistic account of this virtue and it will be argued that this normative provision is the most challenging aspect of the Aristotelian view. It is reasonable to suggest that the common good of the *polis*, rather than one's own happiness, should be the aim that justifies the ultimate sacrifice, which a courageous warrior must often make. This, in turn, raises the question of motivation for a courageous behavior, which will of necessity be different from the traditional incentives for virtuous living.

Manuel Knoll (Turkish-German University Istanbul)

Teleology in Aristotle's Practical Philosophy

An important controversy in Aristotle scholarship concerns the relation of his practical philosophy to his theoretical philosophy. Many scholars claim that Aristotle's practical philosophy is independent of his theoretical philosophy (e.g., J. Ritter, G. Bien). Others claim that his practical philosophy is connected to his theory of substance '*ousia*' (A. Kamp) or his philosophy of nature (e.g., D. Keyt, Fred D. Miller, Jr.).

This paper is a contribution to this debate. It claims that Aristotle's practical philosophy depends to a considerable extent on his teleological conception of nature. This is not only true for his *Nicomachean Ethics*, but also for his *Politics*. The paper examines the most important references to Aristotle's teleological conception of nature in these two works such as the 'human function argument' or '*ergon*-argument', the claim that the human being is 'more of' or 'rather' (*mallon*) a political animal than other herd animals because it possess *logos*, and the claim that animals exist for the sake of human beings. It examines the connection of these references and also discusses the question whether Aristotle's teleology is anthropocentric (cf. D. Sedley).

Saturday (October 8)

Lu Jiang (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou)

Aristotle's Teleology and Modality

Aristotle's teleology provides the theoretical framework for his investigation of motions and changes especially in form of natural growth. Research on Aristotelian teleology has been mostly focusing on his natural philosophical and metaphysical writings, notions like potentiality and necessity are treated as metaphysical terms. But they are also crucial for the interpretation of Aristotle's modal logic. Semantic interpretation of modal terms like possibility and necessity is dependent on the choice of the underlying ontological model. 'Necessary' as a modal term in Aristotle's philosophy has a plurality of meanings. Among them natural necessity and hypothetical necessity are closely related to Aristotle's teleological ontology of the natural world. The metaphysical term 'potentiality' is not merely related to the modality 'possible' but in a much more essential way relevant to natural and hypothetical necessity. This paper shall therefore explore how these two modal terms are to be interpreted basing on Aristotle's teleology and how this interpretation works out for Aristotle's formal modal logic.

David Peroutka (J. E. Purkyně University, Ústí nad Labem)

Subordinate and Ultimate Ends in the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas

Both Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Thomas Aquinas's treatise on ethics (the Second Part of the Summa Theologiae) start with the vision of a hierarchy of purposes topped by an ultimate end. My inquiry concerns Aquinas's view on the relationship between subordinate ends and the ultimate one. Do we value our immediate ends just as means, that is, only because they lead to our *finis ultimus*?

No doubt, means (such as e.g. medicine) often can be (intermediate) ends (In Physic., lib. 2, l. 5, n. 6). I will contend, however, that Aquinas's notion of subordinate end cannot be reduced to that of means. Non-ultimate ends can be appreciated and desired for themselves. In developing such interpretation I will confront some difficult questions it raises, namely, how to avoid the problem of teleological overdetermination; how an end can be simultaneously valued for its intrinsic worth and for the sake of an ultimate end, etc.

Pilar Herráiz-Oliva (Istanbul Medeniyet University)

An Averroistic Proposal for a Teleological Ethics: Boethius of Dacia's *On the Supreme Good*

The Aristotelian term *eudaimonia* (*happiness*) reflects the highest end of human activity. Once rediscovered in the thirteenth-century medieval Latin West, *eudaimonia* took the shape of *beatitudo*.

Within this philosophical context, whereas *happiness* was still conceived as the highest end for men, such an understanding posed the question on whether, as Christians, we can achieve true happiness within this life or we have yet to attain it in the afterlife. To answer this, some authors like Thomas Aquinas distinguished between natural and supernatural happiness. Others, like Boethius of Dacia, held that it is through the exercise of philosophy that the philosopher can admire the first principle, i.e., God, thus turning *eudaimonia* into an even stronger end, philosophically speaking.

Throughout this paper, we will examine these changes affecting the understanding of *eudaimonia* in the 13th century with special emphasis upon the works of Boethius of Dacia, an author commonly cited among the *Averroists* or *Radical Aristotelians*.

Manik Konch (Digboi Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Dibrugarh University)

Kant and Anscombe: Two Contrasting Views on Aristotle's 'Virtue as Telos of Life'

The paper attempts to discuss two contrasting views on Aristotle's notion of 'virtue' advocated by Immanuel Kant and G. E. M. Anscombe. Kant maintains that good will is the primary condition of moral action. It is the foundation of moral laws. Virtue is given the secondary status while describing the nature of moral conduct. On the contrary, Anscombe is critical of this Kantian normative approach to the virtue. In her contention, the Kantian deontology excludes the psychological conditions while theorizing morality. This exclusion undermines not only the importance of virtue for the development of moral character, but also fails to judge motive and situation which are essential for investigating the intention of action. In conclusion, we would suggest that any overemphasis on rational construal of morality might restrict human freedom and thereby puts a veil on the basic content of humanity.

Martin Cajthaml (Palacký University, Olomouc)

Teleology in MacIntyre

In my presentation, I will distinguish three different notions of teleology implied or argued for in what has been called “MacIntyre’s philosophical project,” that is, in *After Virtue* and in the subsequent works. I will do so against the background of the following question: “What are the normative implications of these accounts of teleology?” Guided by this approach, I will critically examine, among other things, MacIntyre’s critique of Hume’s claim that norms cannot be inferred from the facts, his concept of virtue and of social practice, his teleological account of science, his critique of expressivism.