Teleology in Political Contexts: An Assessment of Monte Ransome Johnson’s
“Aristotle on Teleology”

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This thesis titled
Teleology in Political Contexts: An Assessment of Monte Ransome Johnson’s
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ABSTRACT

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Teleology in Political Contexts: An Assessment of Monte Ransome Johnson’s "Aristotle on Teleology" (60 pp.)

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In *Aristotle on Teleology*, Monte Ransome Johnson provides his perspective on the nature of teleological explanation throughout the works of Aristotle. While his treatment of the biological treatises is coherent, Johnson’s interpretation of teleological explanations in the *Politics* needs some clarification. His interpretation of Aristotle’s teleological explanation for acquisition, exchange, and currency would benefit from some clarification on the naturalness of the art of acquisition.

In this thesis, I argue that an anthropological reading, one which recognizes Aristotle’s understanding of the importance and uniqueness of humanity, is needed in order to show how teleological explanations in the *Politics* can be consistent with teleology broadly construed. The anthropological interpretation also offers an alternative to the anthropocentric thesis of David Sedley. I conclude that the globally anthropocentric view is false due to the lack of textual evidence and the ability to account for the apparent anthropocentrism in a way that is compatible with Johnson’s views.

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For my wife, Sara
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**Introduction**

In *Aristotle on Teleology*, Monte Ransome Johnson thoroughly explicates the central tenets of Aristotelian teleology as well as the surrounding historical and contemporary discussion on teleology. As I understand his view on teleology, he heavily relies upon two important factors (among other things) when determining what a teleological explanation is and how it can be used. The first factor is the “for the sake of which” relation. The “for the sake of which” relation highlights a relation between a beneficiary and an end by utilizing hypothetical necessity.\(^1\) In turn, hypothetical necessity describes what parts are essential to make something what it is and how parts function in relation to the whole. Put differently, hypothetical necessity is required to explain what ends can be achieved and what objects are capable of doing.\(^2\)

The other important factor for Johnson is his notion of beneficiary. In biological terms, a teleological beneficiary is the individual itself. A predator benefits from having claws, because it can use these to kill prey and survive. But the prey being eaten by a predator is not an end for the prey because the prey does not exist in order to be prey for the predator. The predator uses the prey instrumentally, though it is not within the prey’s nature to be used by another species, human or otherwise. It will be demonstrated that, on

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1 “For if a piece of wood is to be split with an axe, the axe must of necessity be hard: and if hard, must of necessity be made of bronze or iron. *Now exactly in the same way* the body, since it is an instrument—*for both the body as a whole and its several parts individually are for the sake of something*—if it is to do its work, *must of necessity be of such and such a character, and made of such and such materials*” (642a10-15).

2 Aristotle discusses this sense of necessity in the *Physics* (199b34-200b7), and *Parts of Animals* (642a10-15).
Johnson’s interpretation of Aristotle, natural kind $A$ never has the purpose of “being consumed by natural kind $B$.”

These two factors, the “for the sake of which” relation and beneficiary, work in conjunction to create the core of what Johnson considers to be teleology. While Johnson’s analyses of teleology in the biological treatises provide insights, his characterization of teleology is especially helpful to biology because it is most interested in the sorts of biological explanations Aristotle offers. The *Politics* is considerably more complicated for teleological explanations, and Johnson’s approach to this setting could use more clarity regarding the role human beings have in relation to other species teleologically.

For certain topics (such as slavery and patriarchal social structure), what Aristotle holds is morally repugnant to contemporary society and can be criticized from many different philosophical perspectives. I will argue that Aristotle’s account of slavery is not actually a teleological one, but a political or sociological one. For others, however, it seems as if Johnson’s view of teleology does not clearly account for practices that are essentially human, such as acquisition and commerce. I don’t find this to be a critical problem for Johnson, but it certainly makes the *Politics* more “strained,”3 and his interpretation can appear to be more confusing to readers than it really is.

David Sedley, among others, offers an alternative position on these teleological issues: anthropocentrism. His anthropocentric position basically asserts that Aristotle believes that nature and everything in it is entirely for the benefit of and the use by human beings. I will argue that this is too strong of a view, and is not supported by the

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texts. I will do this in a way that is different than Johnson, which is to say that I will recognize and try to explain the anthropocentric flavor of some of the passages in the *Politics*, where Johnson fails to do so.

While some of the passages in the *Politics* may feature an anthropocentric theme, there certainly can be a teleological case made for human practices that utilize other beings and artifacts that also can avoid the broad claims of Sedley’s global anthropocentrism. In this thesis, I will offer what I shall call an “anthropological” reading of the allegedly anthropocentric passages that Sedley uses to build his case against competing interpretations of Aristotle’s view of teleology. This anthropological reading more explicitly states the role that Aristotle assigns human beings within nature, and understands how teleological explanations in the *Politics* are qualified by the art of acquisition. I hope to find a way to illustrate how artifacts (specifically, currency) can be used to benefit human beings in a natural way, and that such a way has a true, natural teleological explanation for it that does not require an anthropocentric reading of Aristotle.

In Chapter 1, I will define what teleology is, and explain how Johnson uses it throughout his study of Aristotle’s treatises. I will also assess the anthropocentric view of teleology, as well as natural use and technology. In Chapter 2, I will specifically focus on the *Politics* and Johnson’s treatment of teleological explanations in Aristotle’s political thought. I will raise a problem I find with Johnson’s interpretation of Aristotle’s views on acquisition, currency, and commercial activity. In Chapter 3, I will consider a possible contradiction that would motivate an anthropocentric view, dismiss anthropocentrism,
and assert that my anthropological reading clarifies and complements Johnson’s view of teleology.
Chapter 1: Fundamentals of Teleology

What is a teleological explanation, according to Johnson? “For Aristotle, teleological explanations explain how animal parts and behavior are ‘adapted’ to their environment, and not how the environment is adapted to the needs of animals or other organisms (including humans).”¹ Let’s unpack what Johnson has provided here. Working under this definition of teleology, we see that teleology is “self-oriented.” What I mean by “self-oriented” is that teleology only concerns the organism that is in question. Teleological explanations consider one subject or species at a time. Teleological explanations do not dictate which organism may be used as prey by a predator, but rather they are restricted to accounting for the mechanisms by means of which the predator takes the prey that it does. Put differently, how a given natural kind B is used by another natural kind A is never a part of B’s final cause.

Why does Johnson frame his definition of teleological explanation in this way? This question will occupy most of the discussion throughout the rest of this chapter. Let’s consider some of his preliminary comments from Aristotle on Teleology, along with Aristotle’s writings, to set the table and lay the groundwork for what will follow later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

The Greek telos (end, goal, or purpose) should serve as the foundation of our understanding of “teleology.” Telos is important for Aristotle’s notion of causation, because it is the “final cause.” In the Metaphysics, Aristotle contends that the final cause (or end) is “that for which the sake of which a thing is” (1013a32-33). Likewise, in the Physics, Aristotle states that final cause is “for the sake of which a thing is done”

¹ Johnson, 4.
This “for the sake of which” relation is an essential hallmark of what Johnson considers to be teleology, and rightly so. It is this relation between an end (flourishing in relation to the natural kind) and a beneficiary (a member of a natural kind) that most teleological explanations explain. I take Johnson’s understanding of this “for the sake of which” function to be a statement of final cause, that is to say, the purpose, or the defining activity (principle function, *ergon*) of some member of a natural kind is being considered when Johnson invokes “for the sake of which.”

Interestingly, Aristotle uses the same analogy in both the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* to describe this sort of a causal relationship. Aristotle states, “health is the cause of walking about” (194b34, 1013a34). In this instance, health is the end or purpose of walking, and this end or goal of this state of healthiness is causally explanatory of an entity’s walking about. Perhaps we could take this a step further, and say that health is a means to an even larger end, human flourishing. Aristotle allows us to take stock in this sort of a way, which allows us to focus on multiple ends with different levels of importance or interest.

“The same is true also of all the intermediate steps which are brought about through the action of something else as a 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*” (194b35-195a2, emphasis mine). Not only can actions be part of a teleological set of means towards an end, it appears from this passage, but physical artifacts can also function in this way. So not only the end is explicable through this
notion of causation, but the steps taken along the way to reach this end or goal can also be explicable by way of the teleological cause.

In Chapter 3 (“Teleological Notions”) of *Aristotle on Teleology*, Johnson initially moves to frame *telos* into a more accurate statement. Where we often translate the Greek into “purpose” or “end,” Johnson asserts that the more accurate phrase is “for the sake of which.” This is very similar to the example of health in the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics* (“walking is for the sake of health”). Let’s consider one of his first examples of how this “for the sake of which” relation plays out in the text, this time from the *De Anima*, where Aristotle provides insight into the nutritive soul.

For that is the most natural of functions for living things, as many as are developed and neither mutilated nor spontaneously generated: to produce another like itself, an animal an animal, a plant a plant, so that they participate in the eternal and divine as far as possible. For everything desires this, and does for the sake of this everything that it does naturally. For ‘that for the sake of which’ is twofold: that of which (i.e. the aim) and that for which (i.e. the beneficiary) (415a23-415b5).

This sets the tone nicely for what follows in Chapter 3 and the rest of *Aristotle on Teleology*. If we frame the topic of teleology in terms of this more awkward but accurate “for the sake of which,” a statement of a final cause, we can start to get a clearer picture on how Aristotle deploys teleological explanations as well as the necessary and sufficient conditions for teleological explanations.

From the passage in the *De Anima*, we see the universal part of living beings, nutrition and generation (nutritive soul), being explained in terms of aim and beneficiary. It will turn out that all teleological explanations contain a consideration of at least both

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5 Johnson, 64.
the “for the sake of which” relation and beneficiary, but will take into consideration matter, form, and hypothetical necessity. These more complicated details of teleology will be considered later, but “for the sake of which” and beneficiary are essential to teleological explanation. Taking cues from Greek commentators (chiefly, Philoponus), Johnson provides us the teleological lesson we should take from the passage in the *De Anima*.

The point would seem to be that the nutritive soul is for the aim of reproducing, and thereby participating in the form of life, which is eternal. The beneficiary of this… would be the living thing that so participates. Themistius agrees with this when he says “that for which it exists must be said to be what is divine and eternal, and that for whom is an animal, and coming into existence. For nature wants to achieve for the latter a likeness of divinity and eternity insofar as it can.”

The broader points on teleology I take from Johnson’s interpretation of this passage in the *De Anima* are three-fold. First, the beneficiary will often, if not always, be the subject itself that is the focus of the teleological explanation. When the question of “who benefits?” arises, as far as Johnson is concerned, it will be the member of the natural kind. Second, the aim that is sought after will often involve survival or something related to the natural kind. Third, the nature of the beneficiary is very important to both the aim and how the subject benefits in the teleological picture.

Let’s consider what a beneficiary is before moving on to more complex aspects of the essential framework in *Aristotle on Teleology*. For Johnson, a beneficiary is the subject of a teleological explanation, which the whole teleological explanatory process identifies as the receiver of a certain, natural benefit. Johnson also uses “benefit” to refer

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6 Ibid, 69.
to certain organisms using other organisms and benefiting from them as an instrumental end. For example, a human may benefit from racing horses, but it is only instrumental in the sense that it is not within the horse’s nature to be raced around a track, ridden by jockeys. This disambiguation of “beneficiary” and “benefit” (in the instrumental sense) will play an important role in subsequent chapters.

This is not the only view on what qualifies as a teleological beneficiary, of course. David Sedley offers an anthropocentric account that suggests that human beings are, ultimately, beneficiaries of their environment and everything in it. This reading is motivated by some passages where Aristotle appears to be forwarding such a view. I will analyze this view more in depth in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Who can benefit, and how do we identify beneficiaries properly on Johnson’s account? Identifying teleological beneficiaries for Johnson is simple, given that we know that on Johnson’s account a species cannot properly use a different species in a teleological sense. Once these ground rules have been established it is clear that a teleological beneficiary is the subject of the teleological explanation. For example, an eagle benefits from its wings, because these exist for the sake of a flourishing and (for lack of a better term) successful eagle. The focus of a teleological explanation is on the individual entity, rather than on broader notions like ecosystems or anthropocentrism. Beneficiaries “exist for their own benefit, not something else, including ‘more complete’ beings, ‘beings higher on the food chain,’ and even human beings.”7 Taking our rough and ready understanding of beneficiary, I would like to move toward gaining a further understanding of how Johnson understands natural use by beneficiaries.

7 Johnson, 80.
Natures, Natural Use, and Anthropocentrism

Unfortunately, Johnson doesn’t give a detailed account about either “substance” or “natures.” I think, for the purpose of this thesis, understanding nature as an intrinsic and essential attribute of a species, which provides its characteristics, establishes what is hypothetically necessary, and drives it towards a purpose or an end will suffice. This is a picture of nature we can piece together from what Johnson establishes in *Aristotle on Teleology*, and this is as far as we need to go on substance or nature for now.

What he does provide that is relevant to nature (not to mention more relevant to my thesis), however, is an extensive account about natural use, and how we discern what is natural and what is not. I will consider three possibilities of natural use: if it is possible that the final cause of a species is to be used by another species; if nature is structured in such a way that human beings are the ultimate teleological beneficiary; and if technology has a natural use. Johnson will respond negatively to the first two, but positively to the third.

First, for Johnson, no species has the use by another species as its final cause or end. In the teleological view of Aristotle as Johnson understands him, while a bear might eat salmon as a part of its diet, the salmon is not naturally made to be a part of a bear’s diet. The end that a salmon exists to attain is not to be in the digestive track in a predator. Likewise, a bear does not exist to become a rug in someone’s house, that is, it is not within the bear’s nature to be used by humans in this way.

Johnson considers horses and horse-racing when discussing how one species cannot be used by another naturally. “It is clear that we can use horses for entertainment,
transportation, gambling, food, war, labor, and so forth. But the reason that none of these uses- benefits to humans who use horses in various ways- plays into the scientific account of what a horse is, is that these are *incidental* ends. The horse’s (natural) ends, again, are its own survival, reproduction, and pleasure. These are the active states of its intrinsic capacities.” Consider some of the important claims here that shed light on what Johnson considers to be an Aristotelian nature. All beings have “intrinsic capacities,” properties that jointly determine what it is for each being to be the thing that it is. This group of intrinsic capacities constitute (at least partially) what a nature is, which helps us to fill out our use of “nature.” The act of activation or actualizing these intrinsic capacities is what the study of teleology is concerned with.

Teleology, according to Johnson, has no provision for or justification of the assertion that it is natural kind $B$’s final cause to be used by natural kind $A$. To use the horse as an example, we can certainly have the goal of winning $100 at the racetrack by gambling on the horse we want to win. In this instance, we are using the horse instrumentally, but not in a teleological way that reflects the purpose or nature of the horse. This use doesn’t mean that the horse has this purpose intrinsically embedded into its nature. Gambling, transportation, and the like are merely accidental or incidental uses, whereas happiness and propagation of the species are natural purposes or goals of the horse.

It is in an accidental sense that we consider the horse track to be of benefit to human beings or the consumption of the salmon to be of benefit to a bear. These

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8 Ibid, 233 (emphasis mine).
9 Johnson himself uses the terms “accidental” and “incidental” interchangeably throughout *Aristotle on Teleology*. 
accidental beneficiaries may be driven by the most basic biological needs (such as the need for food), but on Johnson’s view, it is not correct to say that the prey exists to be food for the predator, and that predator have as its end to be prey for an even more advanced species. Again, Johnson rejects using other species in this ecological sense, as well as in the more specialized anthropocentric sense, when describing something in teleological terms.

Because Aristotle never describes the behavior of any animal (or plant, for that matter) as if its interests or activities depended on the lives of any other species of animal, one might object that the emphasis on the individual species and its success (in terms of survival and reproduction), in isolation of other species, amounts to a failure to account for the ecological interdependence of organisms. The problem cannot be entirely avoided by appealing to Aristotle’s belief in the doctrine that species do not become extinct obviates the need for explanation about the physiology and ethology of the organism in question. If that were how Aristotle saw the matter, then there would be no need to explain the functionality of animal parts, or the behavioral adaptations that he describes as necessary for their survival and flourishing. Obviously, there could be no explanation for the great variety of animal adaptations (parts and behavior) if these did not relate to their survival or reproduction in some way.11

This passage should illustrate the nuances of Johnson’s view and why, exactly, he is resistant to ecological views of teleology. Simply put, Aristotle’s use of teleology does not lend itself to such an ecological view, according to Johnson.

Johnson can effectively deny horseracing a teleological explanation, because it is not a horse’s end to be used by humans in such a way. However, he can only do so if anthropocentrism is false. Anthropocentrism is the view that the entire universe is

10 His rejection of this ecological reading comes from his interpretation of a passage of History of Animals (589a2-9).
11 Johnson, 208.
structured for human beings and their flourishing and benefit. This view basically works as follows: for any two natural kinds, $A$ and $B$, where $A$ is human and $B$ is non-human, it is within $B$’s nature to exist for the sake of and use by $A$.

The reasoning behind Johnson’s rejection of horseracing as teleological in any strong sense is the unnatural way that the horse is being used. While it may be “natural,” in a sense, for humans to use horses, it is not within the horse’s nature to be used “for the sake of” horseracing. In no way is it within the horse’s nature to be ridden by a jockey for the entertainment or financial gain of the crowd of humans watching a race. If we assume anthropocentrism, it will turn out that human beings are the only beneficiary in any meaningful sense. In this way, horseracing can be described as teleological, insofar as horseracing creates human happiness. Johnson rejects the initial assumption of anthropocentrism, but not every Aristotelian scholar agrees.

One prominent Aristotelian scholar who maintains an anthropocentric position on teleology is David Sedley. Sedley’s interpretation serves as an interesting foil to Johnson and his claims about the *Politics*, though I do not endorse the anthropocentric model of teleology for which he argues. I believe Sedley provides an interesting alternative to Johnson and he emphasizes interesting passages that I will address in Chapters 2 and 3. For now, the question that is of interest is “what is the shape of Sedley’s anthropocentrism, and how does this differ from Johnson’s approach?”

Sedley defines anthropocentrism as the position that “things are so arranged that the entire contents of the natural world, including not only plants and animals but perhaps
even seasons and weather, exist and function primarily for the benefit of man.”\(^{12}\) His anthropocentrism is derived from two main passages in the *Politics* (1256b10-22) and the *Physics* (198b16-199a20). First, let’s consider the passage Sedley uses from the *Politics*.

> Even at the moment of childbirth, some animals generate at the same time sufficient nutriment to last until the offspring can supply itself— for example all the animals which produce larvae and lay eggs. And those which bear live young have nutriment within themselves for their offspring for a time, the substance called milk. *Hence it is equally clear that we should also suppose that, after birth, plants exist for the sake of animals, and the other animals for the sake of men*—domesticated animals for both usefulness and food, and most, if not all wild animals for food and other assistance, as a source of clothing and other utilities. If, then, nature makes nothing incomplete or pointless, *it is necessary that nature has made them all for the sake of men.* (1256b10-22, emphasis mine)

This seems to be an unequivocal anthropocentric statement from Aristotle in the *Politics*. Sedley certainly treats it as such, and anticipates criticisms that either Aristotle’s teleology is not actually anthropocentric, or that this passage in question is a claim that should not be taken as a serious statement about teleology\(^{13}\).

Sedley offers three rejoinders to the critic of the anthropocentric reading of the *Politics*. Johnson will respond to this set of rejoinders directly. First, Sedley’s anticipation of criticism:

> First, this is hardly the kind of argument you would expect to hear from someone who has taken a conscious decision to *reject* anthropocentrism. Second, Aristotle does not merely assert the anthropocentric teleology, but argues for it: given that the mother’s milk exists by nature for the sake of her offspring, there is no ground for denying the same natural function to external sources, which take over the job of milk exactly where it leaves

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\(^{13}\) David Bostock is opposed to viewing passages like this as evidence that Aristotle’s teleology is anthropocentric. His view in *Space, Time, Matter, and Form: Essays on Aristotle’s Physics* (2006) is that this passage in the *Politics* is “so often contradicted by what he says or implies elsewhere that one can be sure that it is not his considered opinion” (Bostock, 71).
off. Third, Aristotle is here engaged in a complex argument of the utmost seriousness. By showing that human acquisitiveness is founded in the natural order of things, he aims to prove the naturalness of the household, and thereby that of the city.  

Sedley’s view of the passage from the *Politics* appears to be plausible. Unpacking what has been said here, Sedley asserts at least two things that are of immediate interest. First, if Aristotle is not thoroughly anthropocentric, he certainly isn’t opposed to anthropocentric ideas playing a role in his understanding of the world. Second, the art of acquisition is a natural one, and as we’ll see later in the *Politics*, acquisition is best understood as creating a natural equilibrium in order to promote human flourishing. Aristotle’s claims in the *Politics* and elsewhere, which Sedley has used as evidence for his global anthropocentrism, can in fact be explained independently of any global view such as Sedley’s.

Johnson criticizes this particular interpretation of Sedley’s. The major point of emphasis in Johnson’s response is to maintain that there is no evidence for the anthropocentric reading that Sedley takes. “The most natural *ergon* (function) of living things is the activity of their own vegetative soul, that is, their own nutrition and reproduction… Animals have additional functions beyond these, owing to their possession of a faculty of perception, and so their functionality is considerably more complex, although it never conflicts with their own survival or reproduction. Thus from the standpoint of their functions, it cannot be the case that plants and animals ‘function primarily for the benefit of man.””  

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14 Ibid, 181.
15 Johnson, 232.
In a way, Johnson misses the important point that Sedley is trying to make with the statement from the *Politics* (1256b10-22), which is what I had emphasized in the quote. It seems to me that Johnson completely avoids explaining this strongly worded, anthropocentric passage. Is this passage an anomaly, or could Aristotle be treating the concept of finality in a homonymous way? Johnson doesn’t make much of an attempt to account for the anthropocentric flavor of 1256b10-22. That is not to say that Johnson does not address Sedley directly regarding this passage.¹⁶ I take Johnson’s view of Sedley here to mean that this passage is not anthropocentric because it can apply to almost any animal.¹⁷ However, this account does not illustrate what, exactly, Aristotle is saying about humanity in this passage and others like it, or why Aristotle utilizes this tone at all. Johnson here only provides a negative account of Sedley’s anthropocentrism, where a positive account of Aristotle’s views on humanity would be more helpful.

Sedley and Johnson both consider the nature of rainfall and agriculture in their own respects, which should draw out the distinctions between the two views even more than the differences in the *Politics*. I will consider Sedley first, since Johnson again responds directly to Sedley’s thoughts on a passage in the *Protrepticus* on farming. The passage from the *Protrepticus* in question is as follows.

> For nature does not imitate art, but art imitates nature and exists to help nature to complete what nature omits. For while there are some things which nature seems able to perfect by herself and to need no help, there

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¹⁶ He addresses Sedley at 232-237, and he is partly motivated to do so because he finds that Wieland and Nussbaum do not address this philosophically, and that Balme and Wardy address it but reject it because it doesn’t fit into their interpretation (231).

¹⁷ Johnson finds that Sedley’s anthropocentric inference about the purpose of animals based on this passage applies just as well to any other organism. “The inference applies just as well not only to all other viviparous animals besides humans... but also to the oviparous animals as well, who will need food once the nourishment of their eggs is depleted” (233-234).
are others which she can do only with difficulty, or not at all, for example in the matter of coming-to-be: there are no doubt some seeds which, whatever ground they may fall on, grow; but others need in addition the art of farming. And likewise, some animals achieve their own full nature by themselves, but man needs many arts to preserve him both when he is born and again in his later rearing. Therefore, if art imitates nature, it is from nature’s lead that, for the arts too, all coming-to-be is for a purpose.\textsuperscript{18}

Sedley’s conclusion from this passage is that the art of farming, which some plants require to survive, is aimed at human survival and flourishing. “We may infer, it is no less the nature of crops to provide man with food than it is the nature of man himself to seek food.”\textsuperscript{19} Sedley’s interpretation of teleology is reinforced with his interpretation of a passage in the \textit{Physics} (194a33-6). “For the arts too make their material: some of it they make simpliciter, some of it they make workable. And we use it on the ground that everything exists for our sake. For we ourselves too are, in one sense, an end.”

Now, this translation of this particular passage has an undeniable anthropocentric flavor. For another translation,\textsuperscript{20} the same passage reads: “For the arts make their material (some simply make it, others make it serviceable), and we use everything \textit{as if} it was there for our sake” (emphasis mine). The passage in question does contain the Greek word \textit{hôs}, which means “as” or “as if”. Furthermore, the anthropocentric thesis does not follow from this passage. It simply does not follow from what Aristotle asserts in (194a33-6) that it is within the nature of all things to be used by human beings.

If Sedley’s is the correct interpretation of the \textit{Physics}, it is looking as if Sedley has built a reasonable body of evidence for his reading of teleology. Sedley asserts that in

\textsuperscript{18} Sedley 188-189.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 189.
both the passage in the *Protrepticus* and the *Physics*, Aristotle is saying that there is an anthropocentric assumption made when we approach nature with an art, and this should be teleologically accountable. Furthermore, the endorsement of the anthropocentric assumption by Aristotle is clear, since he provides explanations that utilize such assumptions.\(^{21}\)

Johnson’s response is that Sedley’s conclusions are too strong. Just because we can use crops for sustenance does not mean that crops exist for that purpose. This is the same line of thought as the horseracing analogy; the use of horses in this way is incidental to the horse and its final cause, since the aim of a horse is to create more of its kind and flourish. Regarding Sedley’s interpretation of the *Protrepticus* passage, Johnson claims that “it does not follow that plants exist for the sake of being eaten by humans, except in the limited sense that humans can in fact use them for that purpose… It is a fallacy to infer from the fact that we can use these things, and that we need to use these things, that they are here in the world for that reason.”\(^{22}\)

I think a few things emerge from the two instances of Sedley’s interpretation conflicting with Johnson’s that should be considered as we move forward. Perhaps it is fallacious to make the move from the facts about human use to a description about the nature of things. I don’t think, though, that Sedley’s interpretation is adequately dealt with by Johnson. In the *Politics*, it appears there are anthropocentric themes in a few passages, which need to be accounted for. In order to deal with these anthropocentric

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\(^{21}\) Sedley, 189.

\(^{22}\) Johnson, 153.
themes, Johnson must provide a reading that can counteract Sedley’s but also account for the unique place that human beings hold in Aristotle’s view of nature.

We’ve seen that Johnson denies a teleological status to interspecies use (such as horseracing) and he is critical of a global anthropocentric position on teleology (such as that offered by Sedley). The third topic that I have placed under the heading of “natural use” is the question of technology. The question of the role that technology and artifacts may play in teleological explanations will be revisited later in this thesis, and it may be more important to my thesis than any of the other questions approached in this section.

Johnson lays out the main premise or assertion on technology and artifacts fairly early in *Aristotle on Teleology*.

Parts of a living thing are instruments for the sake of functions which are for the sake of the individual organism which possesses them. Things that are neither alive nor part of things that are alive may be used for the sake of something in accordance with an art, but are not prepared for the benefit of any other beings, humans included.23

This is a bold and somewhat confusing statement. I will go on to argue that this passage may become difficult to maintain when considering teleological explanations in the *Politics*. But let’s try to untangle the claims here. First, if something is a part of a living thing, it has the “for the sake of” relation to that living thing. Second, things that are inorganic can be used “for the sake of” some goal, but this is related to a particular art.24 Johnson’s wording here is somewhat ambiguous, so for the moment, we should assume

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23 Johnson, 80.
24 Inorganic objects that are not created by an art do not seem to be candidates for teleological explanation. Johnson seems to assert Philoponus’ position when Johnson states, “inanimate beings like stones and metals do not without qualification have a cause for the sake of which in the sense of beneficiary” (68).
that an instrument itself that is created by an art may or may not be the subject of a teleological explanation.

Presumably, Johnson creates this proviso from the outset of Aristotle on Teleology because of the notion of benefit or beneficiary. To be beneficial in a teleological sense, the beneficiary and the object that is “for the sake of” the beneficiary must both be naturally developed things or natural kinds. For example, claws naturally develop and they benefit a bear, which is a natural kind. However, inanimate things do not have final causes, properly speaking, and hence, since they do not have natures, a fortiori they do not have, as part of their “nature” anything like “to be of benefit to humans.” In Chapters 2 and 3, I will argue that this could create problems for Johnson’s descriptions of teleological explanations, which I believe is caused by Johnson’s interpretation. The problems that arise from this issue may make Sedley’s global anthropocentrism seem to be a more congenial option, but it will be shown that it is even more problematic than Johnson’s complications.

Chapter 1 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to establish how Johnson sees the shape of teleology and what the essential attributes of his understanding of teleology are. By seeing that teleology is composed of two major features (the notion of beneficiary and the “for the sake of which” relation, which is a statement of final cause) for Johnson, we have set the table for Johnson’s more nuanced views on teleology in the Politics. Johnson also

25 Johnson, 68.
believes that there is a narrow conception of natural use in the teleological sense, that is, natural use, on Johnson’s account, is tied to the notion of intrinsic natures.
Chapter 2: Teleology in the Politics

So far we have seen that Johnson’s view of teleology translates quite nicely to the biological treatises of Aristotle. However, how would such a view work within the context of the Politics? Can Sedley’s anthropocentrism be vindicated (to some degree or another) due to the nature of Aristotle’s political thought? How can we begin to make teleological explanations for more complex natural associations such as households or cities? These questions are some of the more prominent ones we should ask at the outset when considering Johnson’s political teleology.

To the first of my three initial questions, I think regardless of how Johnson’s view works out, any view of teleology worth its salt must be able to provide some insights on the Politics. Johnson does provide interesting insights, but he struggles in some ways. His view of slavery fundamentally misunderstands that Aristotle is making a political or sociological argument for a very specific sort of slavery. Johnson construes this as a teleological explanation, which I find to be mostly unhelpful. Furthermore, I don’t find that Johnson provides a direct and clear account of the art of acquisition, which may leave the reader confused about how, exactly, Johnson can maintain that human beings can benefit from other species and also say that Sedley’s anthropocentrism is false. Whether Johnson has enough resources to form a reasonable interpretation and maintain his previous philosophical commitments in a coherent way is a serious question that will be addressed.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand in order to approach this more nuanced area of teleology is that units of human society (particularly, families and cities)
are natural associations. These occur in nature and have existed for as long as human beings have, according to Aristotle. He gives a short account of this in Book II of the *Politics*.

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. 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. (1252b28-1252a2)

This passage is completely loaded with teleological terms, but it establishes two major points that I want to highlight. First, the state (and its constitutive parts) is a natural association that takes its naturalness from human nature. It is within human nature to be political, for Aristotle. Second, the state exists “for the sake of” a good life, or human flourishing.

Aristotle concludes that “it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal” and to exist outside of the bounds of the state is unnatural (1253a3-5). The movement towards the full development, as dictated by something’s nature, is what is being described here, which is essentially teleological. Charlotte Witt describes how we are to understand this explanatory process of development, which she describes as “metaphysical teleology,”26 which explains how substances develop towards maturity. “Immature substances are substances; but being a substance admits of degrees… because their end or form can be realized to a greater or

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lesser extent.” Developing human flourishing is the end for which society exists, and Aristotle is very clear on this. On Aristotle’s account, naturally we create these sociopolitical structures, and do so to create a greater amount of human flourishing, a greater good.

Furthermore, Aristotle finds the state to be chronologically prior to the other units of society. These smaller units need the larger one, and it has a parts-whole relationship on which Aristotle elaborates.

The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But 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. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. (1253a25-32)

Another teleological element comes into play here, the notion of beneficiary. Individuals benefit from society insofar as society allows them to maintain their own existence. All individuals benefit from being a part of the state, since human beings by nature are political animals and, outside of social life, individuals cannot flourish.

Making sense of teleological explanations in the Politics requires an explanation of something that is “for the sake of” the beneficiary or the final goal. Humanity, either as an individual human being or as a family of human beings, can be seen as a beneficiary. The good or flourishing is the teleological end for both human beings and families, and it is for the sake of human flourishing and existence that the state exists. It seems, from

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27 Witt, 265.
28 Aristotle tends to identify individuals and families as beneficiaries in the Politics, though if we consider a city to be just a larger unit of social organization, I think we’re within our rights to speak meaningfully of a city benefiting from certain things (such as good leadership or good laws), insofar as the city is a natural entity.
what we’ve seen so far, that there is a reasonable possibility for successful teleological explanations in the *Politics*.

Johnson would agree that there is a reasonable possibility for successful teleological explanations, and agrees that Aristotle’s explanation of human organizations is “thoroughly teleological.”29 However, he considers these sorts of teleological explanations to be an analogous use of what Aristotle does teleologically in the biological treatises, rather than a full-on teleological explanation in its own right. In his analysis of a passage of the *Politics* (1280a31-34), where Aristotle explains that the city exists for the sake of the good life, Johnson sells this teleological explanation a little short by suggesting that the part-whole relationship in the *Politics* is metaphorical.

The city has this single ultimate end, the good life, to which all the ends of its parts and functionaries are subordinate. Its parts, like organs, function organically for the sake of the life and the good life of the city. Although Aristotle’s use of biological analogy or metaphor in the *Politics* produces some results, only some of which fit with his biological doctrines as expressed in such works as the *Parts of Animals*, still there is no doubt that Aristotle’s methodology in both works is thoroughly teleological.30

What concerns Johnson is not that such explanations are teleological, but whether these teleological explanations are justified.31

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29 Johnson, 239.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 240.
Slavery: A Political, Not Teleological, Explanation

The case Aristotle makes for slavery is one of “teleological reasoning gone awry”\textsuperscript{32} according to Johnson. Johnson also says that Aristotle’s explanation of slavery and natural domination offers “little to teach contemporary sociologists and political scientists, other than what to avoid.”\textsuperscript{33} While I wholeheartedly affirm that the teleological explanations offered for forms of natural dominion involve faulty reasoning, I am hesitant to go so far as to say that such explanations “in the context of politics is a spectacular case of failed extrapolation.”\textsuperscript{34} I would much rather take teleological explanations in the \textit{Politics} on a case by case basis, since most differ in terms of identifying beneficiaries and processes or behaviors. One of my concerns going into this topic is that Johnson presumes that Aristotle is advancing teleological explanations for certain aspects about society in the \textit{Politics} when Aristotle may not be making any such teleological claim. In the case of slavery, it seems to me that Aristotle is actually making a political or sociological explanation of how it can be that certain humans can naturally be slaves, while others are not.

Johnson considers the issue of slavery in conjunction with Aristotle’s account of paternalism under the umbrella term, “natural domination.” This natural domination is, as Johnson sees it, a part-whole relationship, where the “part” exists for the sake of the whole. Later on, it will be shown that this relationship will be so problematic to Johnson that he is willing to say that this is used metaphorically to describe the function of political states. In the case of a state, the state is the whole and the family is a part of that

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 242.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 288.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
whole. Aristotle lays out this relationship quite clearly and early in the *Politics*. “Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except homonymously, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that” (1253a19-22).

The priority of the state is important, because it enables civic life and human flourishing. As we’ve seen, if man is a political animal, the state is a requirement for any end human beings can accomplish. Regardless of the scope one wants to explain, the part exists for the teleological benefit of the whole. This certainly is the case in Aristotle’s biological teleological explanations (animals benefiting from their own parts, for example), and this part-whole relationship is carried over to the political teleological explanations Aristotle gives in his justification of slavery. The part-whole relationship becomes a serious concern to Johnson when employed to justify natural forms of domination. Let’s take a look at that employment.

In the *Politics* (1253b1-55b40), Aristotle’s most concentrated thought on slavery begins with his notion of priority and the part-whole relationship. “The parts of household management correspond to the persons who compose the household, and a complete household consists of slaves and freemen” (1253b2-4). All of the constituents of the household exist as parts, and within a certain teleological scope, the household acts as a whole, which is explanatorily prior to the part. Johnson affirms this as a possible reading of Aristotle, though he will go on to say that Aristotle is not justified, teleologically, to draw the conclusions that he does about slavery. “It seems to me that
the soundness of this argument depends on the legitimacy of extending the method of
analysis of parts and wholes beyond organisms to relationships between organisms.”35

Aristotle establishes that “property is a part of the household, and the art of
acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household” (1253b24-25). This
starting point seems to be uncontroversial, and I will help myself to this starting point
when speaking of property acquisition more generally. However, Aristotle goes on to
give the broader provision that “a slave is a living possession, and property a number of
such instruments; and the servant is himself an instrument for instruments” (1253b32-34).
Aristotle further relates this notion of possession and instrument to the part-whole
relationship.

A possession is spoken of as a part is spoken of; for the part is not only a
part of something else, but wholly belongs to it; and this is also true of a
possession. The master is only the master of the slave; he does not belong
to him, whereas the slave is not only the slave of his master, but wholly
belongs to him. Hence we see what is the nature and office of a slave; he
who is by nature not his own but another’s man, is by nature a slave and
he may be said to be another’s man, who, being a slave, is also a
possession. A possession may be defined as an instrument of action,
separable from the possessor. (1254a9-17, emphasis mine)

Aristotle is here relating three somewhat separate notions (instrument, possession, and
the part-whole relationship) under one heading of natural domination in order to make a
teleological explanation.

With this account in place, Aristotle then asks whether anyone can be intended by
nature to be a slave or if all slavery is a violation of nature (1254a17-19). Johnson will
hold the latter, that all slavery is a violation of nature, but Aristotle maintains the former:

35 Johnson, 244.
some slaves are intended, by nature or their nature, to be slaves. Why does Aristotle maintain that there are people who are intended by nature to be slaves, and is this explanation, in fact, teleological?

After Aristotle frames the question, he asserts his answer firmly and authoritatively. “There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule” (1254a20-24). Aristotle, like Plato, saw political structures as parallel to the human soul, and that “inferior” classes of people need to be controlled as one controls the passions or appetites by means of reason. “The intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful” (1254b5-10). To Aristotle, the most natural social structure involves inferior individuals being ruled by superior individuals. Certain individuals are simply meant to be ruled.

Now, this does not mean that all forms of slavery are natural to Aristotle. On the contrary, Aristotle distinguishes between natural slavery and conventional slavery. This conventional brand of slavery involves people who are taken under circumstances, regardless of whether or not they are naturally inferior to their masters. Typically, this happened during war, where the victorious group can have its way with the property of the defeated, including making the defeated group slaves (and thus property). Aristotle is interested in making a few comments about the surrounding debate, but he does make
such a differentiation between natural and conventional slavery, where he affirms natural slavery but criticizes conventional slavery. “Where the relation of master and slave between them is natural they are friends and have a common interest, but where it rests merely on convention and force the reverse is true” (1255b13-15).

The idea that a master and slave can be “friends” seems to be entirely unrealistic. Trevor Saunders explains that such a friendship can be best understood as a relationship that is established by Aristotle’s sense of social justice.

Our relationship with our inanimate tools raises no question of justice, for such a tool can have no ‘claim’ to any particular kind of treatment; it is simply not that sort of thing. But between master and animate tool there is some relationship of justice, for (presumably by virtue of his limited reason) a slave is capable of ‘participating in law and contract’ (EN 1161b7); he can keep, or fail to keep, to his natural role; and in the former case he deserves just treatment… Hence the crucial distinction is this: with a slave qua slave (i.e. qua tool) there cannot be friendship, with a slave qua man there can be (1161b4-6). Of the three categories of friendship, (i) for mutual advantage, (ii) for mutual pleasure, (iii) ‘because of virtue’ (of the friend) (EN VIII iii), friendship with a slave is presumably an instance of (i) (see 1252a24-34, 1255b9).36

So, to Saunders, the friendship (a relation of social justice) that is at play in natural slavery is one of mutual advantage. This view is supported by the context of Book I of the Politics.

I offer this account because it provides shape to Aristotle’s thoughts on slavery that Johnson does not include, and shows that Aristotle is only committed to a certain version of slavery. There are boundaries, and even for Aristotle, there are conditions that define a natural sort of slavery, which exclude conventional slavery. I find this to be a

helpful distinction to clarify what Aristotle’s maintains regarding slavery, though
Johnson makes no mention of this distinction.

Johnson’s issue with slavery is that it is not teleologically justified. This is
because, as we saw in Chapter 1, it is not within a slave’s nature to be used by another
substance, including another human being. Much like a salmon does not exist for the sake
of a bear, Johnson argues that it is unthinkable that a person can exist for the sake of
another person if we are to be teleologically consistent. “If slaves exist for the sake of
something else, then how can they be regarded as natural substances?... Should not the
possibility of their use by other humans be regarded as incidental to their own end?”

These pointed questions illustrate that, at best, Aristotle is being inconsistent with his
previous teleological commitments to the “for the sake of which” relation and the notion
of beneficiary, since organisms cannot teleologically benefit from the use of other
organisms in this way on Johnson’s reading.

The critical issue that could be taken up with Johnson is that he fundamentally
misunderstands Aristotle’s writing on slavery because he conflates natural and
conventional slavery. What Johnson seems to be criticizing is the conventional form of
slavery; one that makes slaves of individuals that could and would flourish on their own.
But the account of natural slavery, the kind that we should be interested in, seems to not
be natural in the teleological sense. The case of slavery is quite different from the case of
the bear and salmon, since the bear and salmon are not bound by a shared society, or a
shared nature that determines how they are related to one another.

37 Johnson, 242-243.
Natural slaves are slaves because they are incapable of being independent and free beings, primarily because they do not possess the capacity to deliberate (1260a12). Aristotle’s view of the natural slave is very similar his view of children, with the exception that the reason children cannot deliberate is that they have not yet developed this capacity (1260a13-14). These sorts of people are not fully actualized; according to Aristotle, children could become actualized while it appears that a natural slave will never and could never be actualized in this way.

The fact that natural slaves and natural masters have the exact same nature is not something that should be overlooked at this juncture. Since this is the case, their final cause cannot differ. So the difference between a master and a slave is not found in their respective telos, since the telos of a natural slave and a natural master is the same. The difference can be found in their level of actualization, which I think can best be understood in light of Witt’s view of metaphysical teleology. It will turn out that it is possible to interpret Aristotle’s view on slavery in a non-teleological way.

Witt explains how Aristotle’s metaphysical view of teleology can address the role of substances that have not yet fully actualized their potentialities, such as children.38 The material component is necessitated by the formal component, in a way that the form is prior to the matter. For example, in order to become a man, the boy must have the capacity for that form, which is caused by the boy’s substance. Witt’s view could be extended to say that natural slaves while having the same substance as their masters, have

38 Witt, 262.
potentialities that simply have not been actualized sufficiently. I find that this metaphysical notion is implicit in Aristotle’s views on slavery in the *Politics*.

When Aristotle says that “some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule” (1254a20-24), he doesn’t seem to be making a teleological explanation per se. It appears that Aristotle is simply highlighting an aspect of a political order or a sociological reality that is grounded, in some ways, in his metaphysics. In light of the considerations just raised, it is fair to say that this is not a teleological explanation at all, but rather an anthropological assessment of the societal structures in which Aristotle lived.

Underwriting Johnson’s concerns with slavery is his trouble in understanding political institutions as organic wholes, in the same way any organism is an organic whole. He suggests that we use organic, political descriptions metaphorically, and by doing so, Johnson is straining the part-whole teleological relationship to work within political contexts.

It seems to me that the soundness of this argument (Aristotle’s argument for natural slavery) depends on the legitimacy of extending the method of analysis of parts and wholes beyond organisms to relationships between organisms. For even if we can conceive of the relationships between animals, women, men, slaves… and so forth, in terms of ‘part-whole’ relationships, do such relationships manifest the same relations between part and whole that obtain in actual organic wholes? … Organistic metaphors, of course, pervade our political language, what with the body politic, heads of state, and so forth. But it is unclear whether or not the persistence of these metaphors signals a conception of the state as an organic whole, whether they are merely worn-out metaphors, or whether they are metaphors that have become so deeply integrated into a
conceptual scheme that they are no longer recognizable even as metaphors.39

What I find here is a mistrust of one of the basic assumptions of the Politics: political structures occur naturally and are considered by Aristotle to be a natural association, which in turn has constituent parts. If we want to avoid the part-whole distinction, as Johnson would like to do, I think we essentially lose a very basic political insight that Aristotle assumes from the outset of the Politics. That is, we lose the naturalness of political wholes and parts because we may mistakenly infer, as I think Johnson does, that such a relation is the basis for Aristotle’s “teleological explanation” of slavery. If we see his justification of natural slavery as not teleological but as political or sociological, however, we can still maintain the naturalness of the part-whole distinction without the worry regarding slavery.

I’d like to offer David Sedley’s interpretation once again as an alternative to Johnson, because I believe Johnson unduly repudiates the naturalness of political parts and wholes. Sedley unequivocally affirms that a household is a “natural entity,”40 and that “man’s individual nature as a political animal is itself derivative from the nature of the household and the polis, on the principle that the whole is prior to the parts.”41 By affirming the priority of the political structure, and the part-whole relationship, we can maintain some of the basic elements of political teleological explanations.

Johnson criticizes the practice of slavery as expressed by Aristotle, however, I am not entirely sure that Aristotle is actually making a teleological explanation. It appears

39 Ibid, 244.
40 Sedley, 193.
41 Ibid.
more likely to me that Aristotle believes what he does about slavery because he believes that natural slaves require their masters in order to have a place in the political order. I am also confused by his strange insistence on considering political structures, which are organic and natural for Aristotle, in a metaphorical way. We have seen what Johnson considers a broken or unsuccessful teleological explanation, but what are the prospects of a successful teleological explanation in the *Politics*?

The value of the anthropological reading rests in identifying one of Aristotle’s main assumptions in the *Politics*: it is human nature that best explains the phenomena Aristotle is explaining in this particular treatise. An anthropological reading would find Aristotle’s work on acquisition philosophically interesting because it features the essential faculties of reason and deliberation. Furthermore, the material on acquisition and exchange illustrates what is meant by an anthropological reading, since such a reading is centered on human faculties and abilities. The anthropological reading offered shortly can do so without being “anthropocentric” in Sedley’s sense of the word.

Johnson will argue that actions within human society involve practical sciences and arts. If this is the case, Johnson will need to give a teleological account for how human beings using these arts belong to teleology proper. Johnson’s case is a strong one, though I will argue that the anthropocentric flavor of some of the passages may motivate the reader to consider alternative interpretations unless Johnson can account for the tone of these passages.
Acquisition, Exchange, and Wealth

Aristotle offers his explanation of acquisition and exchange (1256a1-58b7) as a philosophical understanding of how human nature applies to such basic human actions. For Aristotle, we will see that the process of acquisition and exchange is natural insofar as it is done so within certain boundaries. Johnson will affirm this, and I suspect many of the points I am soon to make, though I find Johnson’s account for acquisition to be opaque.

On the heels of his discussion of slavery, Aristotle provides more general insights into the nature of human possessions and property. From the outset of this discussion, we get two interesting statements, one on how property is natural (to some degree), and an anthropocentric statement that David Sedley picks up on. “Property, in the sense of a bare livelihood, seems to be given by nature herself to all, both when they are first born, and when they are grown up” (1256b9-11). There is something universal about property, and I will make the argument that this sort of universal nature does not come from a notion of human rights, but from Aristotle’s understanding of human requirements, which I will further suggest is teleological in nature.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Sedley picked up on another initial statement of teleology that appeared to be anthropocentric in nature. “After the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of
man” (1256b15-22). This seems to set the tone for anthropocentrism, or at least as we saw Sedley argue, this “is hardly the kind of argument you would expect to hear from someone who has taken a conscious decision to reject anthropocentrism.”42 However, if we consider this passage in light of the naturalness of the art of acquisition, perhaps we can appeal to the nature of human beings rather than the nature of what is acquired in order to interpret Aristotle in a way that is in line with his views in the biological treatises.

Sedley’s point here is reiterated from Chapter 1 in order to relate it not to anthropocentrism generally speaking, but to relate it to the nature of acquisition in the Politics. Aristotle understood that humans need to acquire certain things for their own flourishing, and Sedley suggests that this can include any kind of animal or plant, because man is the ultimate teleological end. Some human activities can be explained in such a way for Aristotle. “From one point of view, the art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts, and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just” (1256b23-25, emphasis mine).

I am very interested in exploring this idea, because the idea of a “natural art” is not one that Johnson elaborates on within the context of the Politics. My interpretation affirms that it is within human nature to participate in arts naturally, chiefly the art of acquisition, which occurs within the context of human nature and actions. If I can help myself to this notion of natural art Aristotle acknowledges (1256b23-25), it would be possible to understand this art within a teleological framework. I will demonstrate

42 Sedley, 181.
through exposition of passages in the *Politics* that thinking of acquisition as a “natural art” is the correct way to interpret Aristotle and is vital to understanding teleology in political contexts.

Aristotle considers a particular art, the art of shoemaking, and how that can relate to the nature of exchange, and the initial method of exchange considered is barter.

A shoe is used for wear, and is used for exchange; both are uses of the shoe. He who gives a shoe in exchange for money or food to him who wants one, does indeed use the shoe as a shoe, but this is not its proper use, for a shoe is not made to be an object of barter. The same may be said of all possessions, for the art of exchange extends to all of them, and it arises at first from what is natural, from the circumstance that some have too little, others have too much. Hence we may infer that retail trade is not a natural part of the art of getting wealth; had it been so, men would have ceased to exchange when they had enough. (1257a11-19)

There are several threads in this passage I’d like to highlight. First of all, the natural circumstance to which the art of exchange applies is the state of economic reality. Some individuals have too many shoes, and not enough food (and vice versa), so exchange comes about in a natural way to create economic and biological stability. Second, we can infer that retail trade (or, engaging in trade to make a profit) is not a natural part of getting wealth for Aristotle, though acquiring goods that are required for survival (“enough” goods for survival) is.

Aristotle will consistently consider the art of exchange or acquisition that is required for human survival and flourishing to be natural, and exchange beyond that threshold to be unnatural. The natural kind of exchange is “a kind of barter which is still practiced among barbarous nations who exchange with one another the necessities of life and nothing more” (1257a25-27). Johnson concurs that it is the case that there are natural
boundaries for exchange, that boundary being what is required or necessary for survival.\textsuperscript{43} Aristotle continues, “this sort of barter is not part of the wealth-getting art and is not contrary to nature, but is needed for the satisfaction of men’s natural wants” (1257a28-30).

Aristotle considers the use of currency as an outgrowth of this sort of barter (1257a30-31). “When the use of coin had once been discovered, out of the barter of necessary articles arose the other art of wealth-getting, namely, retail trade” (1257b1-2). Once a currency is established, barter becomes obsolete. Aristotle briefly considers two views on the use of currency that he considers to be incorrect. The first view is that the main purpose of having a currency is to create wealth, to a degree well beyond what is required for human sustenance. “Originating in the use of coin, the art of getting wealth is generally thought to be chiefly concerned with it, and to be the art which produces riches and wealth. Indeed, riches (are) assumed by many to be only a quantity of coin, because the arts of getting wealth and retail trade are concerned with coin” (1257b5-10).

Aristotle believes that this is incorrect because it is incomplete. If we understand currency to be an outgrowth of the barter system, which can be natural when it is reserved rather than excessive, then there surely can be a reserved and natural method of using currency. Not all uses of currency require unnatural excess. The second view that Aristotle dismisses is the view that currency is nothing more than conventional. “Others maintain that coined money is a mere sham, a thing not natural, but conventional only, because, if the users substitute another commodity for it, it is worthless, and because it is

\textsuperscript{43} Johnson, 236.
not useful as a means to any of the necessities of life, and, indeed, he who is rich in coin may often be in want of necessary food” (1257b10-14).

Aristotle dismisses this view as well, as he should. If a currency is sound (as sound as currencies based on precious metals usually are), there is really no plausible situation where currency entirely lacks value. I think Aristotle humorously suggests that such a proponent of this conventional view imagines someone like Midas, who cannot even eat because he is cursed with the power of wealth creation (1257b15). Such an unrealistic and useless view doesn’t do any work in explaining currency.

Dismissing these two views quickly, Aristotle turns to the business of establishing what acquisition and wealth is really about. “Natural riches and the natural art of wealth getting are a different thing; in their true form they are part of the management of a household; whereas retail trade is the art of producing wealth, not in every way, but by exchange” (1257b17-21). Furthermore, “the art of wealth-getting which consists in household management has a limit: the unlimited acquisition of wealth is not its business” (1257b30-31). The picture that we receive is that there is a natural method of using currency that is within the bounds of natural use. Currency is used by the household, as a politically organic whole, “for the sake of” the flourishing of the household. In other words, Aristotle understands currency and wealth as any other sort of property of the household, as a part of the whole.

Aristotle concludes that there are two forms of the art of getting wealth: household management and retail trade (1258a39-40). Household management entails getting the goods and wealth that is required for the survival of the household; retail trade
entails using wealth to get more wealth, and can include predatory economic practices. “The most hated sort, and with the greatest reason, is usury, which makes a gain out of money itself, and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. That is why of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural” (1258b2-7, emphasis mine). Household management is “necessary and honorable” (1258a40), but retail trade is always unnatural and hated. An interesting notion in this section that comes out is that money has a “natural object,” which is another tell-tale sign of teleological significance.

So how is the teleological explanation for currency successful? If we understand that political entities at all levels (cities, villages, households, etc.) are natural and wholes, and consist of parts, one very large part of the teleological explanation (the beneficiary) is provided. So some political process can be “for the sake of” the household, the city, the State, etc. If we understand acquisition (within natural limits) to be such a politically natural process, acquisition is “for the sake of” the household. A natural form of acquisition is barter, and currency was created as a stand-in for other goods in this bartering process, in order to make exchange and acquisition easier. Furthermore, if I can help myself to the notion of money as a “natural object” or money possessing a “natural object” (1258b4), I will consider Aristotle’s views on acquisition in the Politics with an alternative interpretation to Sedley’s that I am calling the “anthropological reading.” I will explore this possibility in depth in Chapter 3.
I think such a teleological explanation can be reconciled with Johnson’s view of teleology, but there are a few important things standing in the way. First, I think that Johnson fundamentally mistrusts the part-whole relationship in the *Politics* because of the unsuccessful teleological explanation for slavery. I have provided an alternative way to interpret this passage that should not cause any systemic problems for Johnson’s broader view of teleology. Second, it will be shown that Johnson has not clearly established how Aristotle can say that the art of acquisition can be natural, given the way Johnson (correctly) characterizes teleology in the biological treatises. I will go on to explore the naturalness of the art of acquisition, including exchange, in order to bolster Johnson’s account of teleology in the *Politics* in Chapter 3. I will do so without making problematic commitments to artifacts (e.g. admitting artifacts are substances or as having natures) or succumbing to anthropocentrism. I will maintain that the only nature that concerns a teleological explanation of currency and exchange is human nature.

**Chapter 2 Summary**

In a way, teleology is a much more complicated topic in the *Politics* than it is in the biological treatises. For Johnson, complications arise due to his need for an account of acquisition as a “natural art,” his strong resistance to anthropocentric strains found throughout *Politics*, Book I, and his understanding of Aristotle’s explanation of slavery, which I have argued is not teleological in the sense supposed by Johnson. On the issue of acquisition, it will be shown that Johnson does not provide a clear and explicit account for why, exactly, human beings can benefit from acquiring other species in a teleological
way (i.e. a way that is expressive of the naturalness of human beings participating in the act of acquisition) if anthropocentrism is false.

The teleological explanation for acquisition, exchange, and currency is a useful one because it is both necessary to human survival and it is a natural process. I will explore the role of this art, how Johnson’s explanation of the *Politics* needs more support, why anthropocentrism fails, and provide a more helpful reading of the *Politics* that is sympathetic to Johnson’s projects and commitments in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Natural Arts and the Anthropological Interpretation

The anthropocentric evidence seems to be stacking up against Johnson in Book I of the Politics, and I find that Johnson does not address this evidence as directly as he could. However, the anthropocentric position staked out by Sedley is global, that is, Sedley maintains that it is in the nature of all things in nature to be used for the sake of human beings. I find this view to be ultimately unwarranted in either the biological treatises or the Politics. I will argue that the Politics best lends itself to what I am calling the “anthropological reading” because of its subject: humans and human societies. It will be demonstrated that the anthropological reading is quite compatible with Johnson’s broader work, though I think it is more explicit regarding the relation of humanity to teleology and it can better account for the anthropocentric passages than Sedley’s global anthropocentrism or even Johnson’s interpretation, as his view stands.

Johnson considers natural and unnatural forms of acquisition (1256b26-7a5), but he is unclear on how his view of acquisition explains the naturalness of human beings acquiring from other species. “Notice that this fits perfectly with our interpretation (!), since the kind of acquisition that it justified, and thus the sense in which it held that animals are for the sake of or benefit humans, was the kind of acquisition needed to provide nourishment once that provided with birth depleted.”44 The sort of acquisition that is unnatural is acquiring something unnecessary. This is why cannibalism is wrong.45

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44 Johnson 236, emphasis and exclamation mine.
45 Ibid.
Johnson suggests. He does allow for “natural limits on the extent to which humans can justifiably use natural things like plants and animals for their own purposes.”

The trouble here is that it is not clear how Johnson’s line of thinking on (1256b26-7a5) relates to his main positions on teleology. In this instance, other organisms are used “for the sake of” humans, but only instrumentally. Recall the horseracing example, where the use of horses to benefit humans is incidental, and is not teleological in the sense that it does not correctly explain the telos of horses. I will go on to show how, exactly, the anthropological reading can clear up the confusion on the issue of instrumental and natural use, and the human-centeredness of Aristotle’s explanation of these uses in the Politics.

Teleological explanations that feature humans and how they benefit from the use other organisms could be problematic for Johnson. For teleological explanations that feature human nature, such as Aristotle’s description of acquisition as a natural art or an art in accordance with nature, Johnson needs an account of how these explanations can be successful if anthropocentrism is false. I believe that, to clarify his sense of “natural,” Johnson will need to clarify the natural/incidental distinction and need to adopt more explicitly the anthropological reading that I will present. That is not to say that Johnson does not accept this reading, but he needs to do so more explicitly in order to dismiss the anthropocentric reading of Sedley, as well as make better sense of the art of acquisition.

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46 Ibid, 237.
The Natural/Instrumental Distinction

Before showing why the anthropocentric reading should be dismissed for the *Politics*, it would be best to show how the natural/instrumental line could be clarified, since I think the lack of clarity on this distinction could motivate an anthropocentric reading. The anthropocentric position could possibly conflate natural and instrumental uses if these kinds of uses are not sufficiently distinct from one another. Assuming that Johnson would want the weaker “instrumental” sense of benefit in the human case of acquisition or “for the sake of which,” instead of the full teleological “natural” benefit, the reader would profit from clarity on this distinction.

Johnson seems to be saying something much stronger than “human beings instrumentally benefit from acquisition” in his chapter on the *Politics*. What he says implies that acquisition is an art, but it is also necessary and natural (he says that this is “paradoxically”\(^{48}\) the case), rather than contingent and incidental, in order to be consistent with 1256b26-1257a5, where Aristotle describes a kind of acquisition that is “in accordance with nature,” and specific to humanity. Consider this passage from Johnson mentioned earlier.

Things that are neither alive nor part of things that are alive may be used for the sake of something in accordance with art, but are not prepared for the benefit of any other beings, humans included, as Philoponus and Simplicus argued. The same point applies a fortiori to plants and animals themselves. They exist for their own benefit, not something else, including ‘more complete’ beings, ‘beings higher on the food chain,’ and even human beings. That is, they do not exist for the benefit of humans naturally and intrinsically, but only in accordance with some art and incidentally.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) Johnson, 235.
\(^{49}\) Johnson, 80 (emphasis mine).
This thesis is not entirely or clearly realized when Johnson analyzes the passage concerning acquisition in accordance with nature (1256b26-1257a5). And since human beings are the only species that participate in this kind of acquisition naturally, on Johnson’s account, it only makes the natural/incidental distinction even less clear, and may motivate one to consider the anthropocentric position.

Fortunately for Johnson, the anthropocentric alternative is even more problematic than the lack of clarity on the natural/instrumental distinction. An anthropocentric view, like the one of David Sedley, commits one to the view that Aristotle believes that it is within the nature of all substances to be used for the sake of human flourishing. Sedley asserts that “things are so arranged that the entire contents of the natural world, including not only plants and animals but perhaps even seasons and weather, exist and function primarily for the benefit of man…this is the view I wish to attribute to Aristotle.”

David Bostock simply addresses this view by saying that “Sedley is one of the few who have supposed that this is Aristotle’s real opinion.” He also says that “although he does once allow himself to say this, at the beginning of a work wholly devoted to men (i.e. Politics I. 8, 1256b15-22), it is so often contradicted by what he says or implies elsewhere that one can be sure that it is not his considered opinion.”

I find this conclusion to be largely correct, though not sufficient. Bostock makes little effort to take the anthropocentric position seriously. Sedley draws from passages

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50 Sedley, 180 (emphasis mine).
51 Bostock, 71.
52 Ibid.
53 Bostock’s only other mention of Sedley on teleology that I am aware of addresses Sedley’s view of rainfall. Bostock’s view of Sedley’s interpretation: “I cannot believe Aristotle’s view would be so anthropocentric” (Bostock, 50).
that are not in the Politics to build his case, though Bostock is silent on Sedley’s treatment of these other passages. What is required is a view that makes sense of the passages to which Sedley appeals while avoiding the commitment to global anthropocentrism. It is my hope that the anthropological reading can make strides towards this goal.

The Anthropological Reading

These passages are not anomalies in Aristotle’s broader conception of teleology, as Bostock concludes, but an indication of the important role that human beings have in Aristotle’s understanding of nature. What makes humans unique is their capacity for reason and knowledge, and it is reason that allows us to participate in productive arts like acquisition. I find that it is this natural art of acquisition that allows us to make sense of human beings using other animals in a teleological way without succumbing to the pitfalls of the global anthropocentric view.

As established at the beginning of Book I of the Politics, certain forms of human organizations are natural because people are political animals by their very nature. In his account of acquisition (1256a1-58b7) Aristotle describes how households and individuals have progressed from barter to exchange via currency. Now, if we are to explain teleologically how this process works, the only viable candidate as a beneficiary in this process is humanity. Whether that be individuals or households is entirely incidental to how we would want to break down the analysis, but human beings specifically benefit from gaining necessary goods through the process of exchange. And it is tough to say
otherwise, that is, it is difficult to make any case that human beings do not benefit from this process that helps them survive. Much like the claws of a predator, economic activity is a part that is essential and natural to human society.

So the beneficiary of this process is some level of humanity. What about the “for the sake of” element of teleology? Acquisition is “for the sake of” sustenance or survival, which is unquestionably one of the ultimate purposes for living things. For human beings specifically, the kind of survival that is the goal is one based on rationality and Aristotle’s notion of the “complete life.” In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097a15-1098a20), Aristotle reaffirms that human beings are political animals and that simply surviving isn’t the *telos* of human beings. A complete life that is guided by reason and is social by nature is the *telos* of humans. Aristotle first describes the goal of human life as “happiness,” but goes on to spell happiness out in more specific terms.

There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; and as this too can be taken in two ways, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean. Now if the function of man is an activity of the soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle… human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there (is) more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete. But we must add ‘in a complete life.’ For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy. (1098a4-1098a20)

Aristotle’s conception of survival as the goal or purpose of human life is more nuanced than, say, the survival of a species of birds or plants.

The teleological explanation is that human beings participate in the art of exchange for the sake of human survival. For the household to survive, Aristotle says that the manager of the household “must either find ready to hand, or itself provide, such
things necessary to life, and useful for the community of the family or state, as can be stored” (1256b28-30). And, in order to do so, societies have moved to using currency rather than barter as an intermediary between two parties who participate in the activity of acquisition.

To this point, it should be clear that the anthropological reading I am forwarding is compatible with Johnson’s views. 54 Aristotle provides a sweeping narrative of how nature provides for humanity, though this narrative focuses on human nature rather than the nature of what humans use. Rather than establish a globally anthropocentric conception of natures, Aristotle in the Politics offers us a way of understanding the role of human nature in respect to other natures by way of acquisition. After 1256b28-30, Aristotle returns to the “original question,” which is “whether the art of getting wealth is the business of the manager of a household and of the statesman or not their business—viz. that wealth is presupposed by them” (1258a19-21).

Aristotle answers this question affirmatively, given the natural limits of acquisition, which is based on necessity and sustenance. Aristotle goes on to offer a pair of statements that sound anthropocentric, but may not support the anthropocentric thesis as well as Sedley would hope. “Nature provides (humans) with earth or sea or the like as a source of food” (1258a23). “The means of life must be provided beforehand by nature; for the business of nature is to furnish food to that which is born, and the food of the offspring is always what remains over of that from which it is produced. That is why the art of getting wealth out of fruits and animals is always natural” (1258a34-38).

54 Johnson, 236.
These passages have an anthropocentric flavor to them; however, I do not find that Aristotle is committed to global anthropocentrism because of these assertions. Nature may offer us a food source, but nature also offers a food source to all animals and plants. This does not establish the subjugation of nature to humanity in the way global anthropocentrism requires. Also, in the second passage, Aristotle is speaking of the natural art of acquisition, which involves human nature rather than the nature of what is acquired. I find both of these passages to be inconclusive, at best, for the anthropocentric thesis.

What I take from these passages is that human beings acquire goods from nature in order to flourish, and do so with this uniquely human process of naturally participating in an art of acquiring. It isn’t because there is something inherent in the nature of plants and animals to be used by humans specifically, but humans acquire what is necessary to survive and flourish from nature. Acquisition from nature directly is not the only form of acquisition that Aristotle considers to be natural; exchange within natural, social contexts. “For natural riches and the natural art of wealth-getting are a different thing; in their true form they are part of the management of a household; whereas retail trade is the art of producing wealth, not in every way, but by exchange” (1257b19-21). This sense of natural art of acquisition is an interesting one, because only human beings participate in it. Whether it be product to exchange in a barter system or currency is inconsequential: in the natural art of wealth getting, some object is exchanged for something that is required for the household.
The naturalness of the art of acquisition isn’t some internal nature of an artifact or living organism, but it is human nature, which is why the anthropological reading is so vital to making teleological sense out of this section of the Politics. For something to be natural, there has to be some sort of a nature involved, and I think this is something that is unavoidable. Without natures, in what way can something be said to be natural? Since the teleological aspects of the Politics involve the part-whole analysis of human society, on Johnson’s account, how could the Politics be about any nature other than human nature? Since the Politics is explicitly an analysis of humanity and human societies, this seems to be a point that needs no further support.

Acquisition is an art that requires a teleological explanation that reflects the anthropological approach at play in the passages in the Politics. I do not believe that Johnson is explicit enough to make this point entirely clear to the reader. The anthropological reading that I have presented here emphasizes that it is human nature that is the nature of interest in the Politics. I don’t find that Johnson adequately addresses this issue, or how “nature” provides for human beings “in the sense in which it held that animals are for the sake of or benefit humans… the kind of acquisition needed to provide nourishment once that provided with birth depleted.”

Johnson can provide a consistent and thorough account of Aristotelian teleology as long as his interpretation can account for acquisition and its naturalness. An account for this in Aristotle on Teleology would have been very helpful and would have clarified questions and complications that may arise for his readers. If we can add the nuances of the anthropological reading that I have highlighted, then we can maintain the gains made

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55 Ibid, 236.
by Johnson in the biological treatises as well as make sense of human activities like acquisition without invoking problematic interpretations.

Chapter 3 Summary

The need for an anthropological reading of the *Politics* stems from the *Politics* subject matter: human nature. But what seems to me to force any reader of the *Politics* to consider an anthropological reading is the art of acquisition, and how to make sense of the teleological explanation that Aristotle is offering. That Aristotle is providing a teleological explanation is clear to Sedley, Johnson, and me. Johnson is not as clear or convincing in his response and treatment of passages regarding how nature provides for human beings, and how human beings acquire what is needed for survival. It is my hope that this anthropological reading of the teleological explanations in the *Politics* can go toward clarifying how, exactly, teleology can be used to explain how human beings can naturally use other beings.

In summation, Aristotle sets up natural limits of use for things, but the limit of natural use is based in human nature, not the nature of animals, the ecosystem, or the universe. Such natural limits do not diminish the anthropological content that Aristotle makes explicit in Book I of the *Politics*, but on the contrary, they make human nature and the natural art of acquisition essential to understanding the teleological content of the *Politics*. 
Works Cited


