

The Physiology of Character in Aristotle – Some ‘Sketchy’ Remarks

1) *ENX* 9, 1179b20-23: Men become good through nature, habit, and reason

<p>γίνεσθαι δ’ ἀγαθοὺς οἴονται οἱ μὲν φύσει οἱ δ’ ἔθει οἱ δὲ διδασχῇ. τὸ μὲν οὖν τῆς φύσεως δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ διὰ τινος θείας αἰτίας τοῖς ὡς ἀληθῶς εὐτυχέσιν ὑπάρχει.</p>	<p>Some people think we become good by nature, others by habit, and still others by teaching. Now it is clear that the share of nature is not up to us, but belongs to those who are truly fortunate because of some divine cause.</p>
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2) *Pol* VII 4, 1325b39-1326a5: Perfecting nature by making a good selection

<p>λέγω δὲ οἷον περὶ τε πλήθους πολιτῶν καὶ χώρας. ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δημιουργοῖς, οἷον ὑφάντη καὶ ναυπηγῷ, δεῖ τὴν ὕλην ὑπάρχειν ἐπιτηδεῖαν οὖσαν πρὸς τὴν ἐργασίαν (ὅσῳ γὰρ ἂν αὕτη τυγχάνῃ παρεσκευασμένη βέλτιον, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον ὑπὸ τῆς τέχνης εἶναι κάλλιον), οὕτω καὶ τῷ πολιτικῷ καὶ τῷ νομοθέτῃ δεῖ τὴν οἰκείαν ὕλην ὑπάρχειν ἐπιτηδεῖως ἔχουσαν.</p>	<p>I am talking, for instance, about a quantity of citizens and land. For just as for other craftsmen, such as for the weaver or shipbuilder, it is necessary that some material is available that is fitting for the function (for to the extent that it turns out to be better prepared, the thing that comes to be by art will necessarily also be better), in the same way also is it necessary for the politician and the lawgiver that material is available that is suitable, being fittingly disposed.</p>
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3) *Pol* VII 7, 1327b18-38: Selecting citizens with a ‘well-mixed’ character

<p>About the number of citizens, we have spoken earlier about what should be their limit; let us now speak about what should be their natural qualities (ποιούς δὲ τινὰς τὴν φύσιν εἶναι δεῖ). One could almost grasp this by looking at the cities that are held in high esteem among the Greeks and, with respect to the whole inhabited world, at how it is divided into nations.</p>	<p><i>Natural qualities citizens: look at map</i></p>
<p>Those nations that live in cold regions and the ones around Europe are full of spirit, but are lacking in intelligence and technical skill (θυμοῦ μὲν ἐστὶ πλήρη, διανοίας δὲ ἐνδεέστερα καὶ τέχνης); and therefore they retain more freedom, but are without political organization and are incapable of ruling over their neighbors. The nations around Asia have intelligent and technically skillful souls, but are spiritless (διανοητικὰ μὲν καὶ τεχνικὰ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἄθυμα δέ), and therefore retain a state of subjection and slavery. The race of the Greeks, just as it is located in between them, so too it participates in both [characters] (οὕτως ἀμφοῖν μετέχει). For it is both endowed with spirit and intelligent (καὶ γὰρ ἐνθυμον καὶ διανοητικὸν ἐστίν), and therefore it retains both freedom and is the best politically organized and capable of ruling everyone, if formed into one state.</p>	<p><i>Europeans: Spirited & dumb</i></p> <p><i>Asians: Spiritless & intelligent</i></p> <p><i>Greeks: Spirited & intelligent</i></p>
<p>The same differentiation also belongs to the Greek nations amongst each other: for some have a one-sided nature, whereas others are well mixed with regard to both those capacities (τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἔχει τὴν φύσιν μονόκωλον, τὰ δὲ εὖ κέκραται πρὸς ἀμφοτέρους τὰς δυνάμεις ταύτας).</p>	<p><i>Not all Greeks are ‘well-mixed’</i></p>
<p>And at this point it is clear that it is necessary for those who are likely to be the most easily led to virtue by the lawgiver to be intelligent and high-spirited in nature (διανοητικούς τε εἶναι καὶ θυμοειδεῖς τὴν φύσιν).</p>	<p><i>Only ‘well-mixed’ populations are most easily led to virtue</i></p>

4) *Pol VII 16, 1334b29-32: Lawgiver should make bodies good from the start*

<p>Εἴπερ οὖν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τὸν νομοθέτην ὁρᾶν δεῖ ὅπως βέλτιστα τὰ σώματα γένηται τῶν τρεφομένων, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπιμελητέον περὶ τὴν σύζευξιν (...)</p>	<p>If, then, it is necessary that the lawgiver sees to it <i>from the start</i> that the bodies of those that are being raised come to be as good as possible, he should take care first of marriage...</p>
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5) *Rh II 15, 1390b21-31: Good birth, natural talent, & the heredity of character traits*

<p>ἔστι δὲ εὐγενὲς μὲν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ γένους ἀρετὴν, γενναῖον δὲ κατὰ τὸ μὴ ἐξιστασθαι τῆς φύσεως· ὅπερ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ οὐ συμβαίνει τοῖς εὐγενέσιν, ἀλλ' εἰσὶν οἱ πολλοὶ εὐτελεῖς· φορὰ γὰρ τίς ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς γένεσιν ἀνδρῶν ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὰς χώρας γιγνομένοις, καὶ ἐνίοτε ἂν ἢ ἀγαθὸν τὸ γένος, ἐγγίνονται διὰ τινος χρόνου ἄνδρες περιττοί, κἄπειτα πάλιν ἀναδίδωσιν. ἐξίσταται δὲ τὰ μὲν εὐφυᾶ γένη εἰς μανικώτερα ἦθη, οἷον οἱ ἀπ' Ἀλκιβιάδου καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ Διονυσίου τοῦ πρωτέρου, τὰ δὲ στάσιμα εἰς ἀβελτερίαν καὶ νωθρότητα, οἷον οἱ ἀπὸ Κίμωνος καὶ Περικλέους καὶ Σωκράτους.</p>	<p>'Good birth' is in accordance to the excellence of the stock, but 'being true to one's descent' is in accordance with not displacing from one's nature: this for the most part does not happen to those of good birth, but many of them are common men. For there is in the generation of men a certain yield, just as there is among things that come to be from the land, and sometimes when a stock is good, over a certain time excellent men are produced, and then [later] yields them again. Naturally talented stock displaces into characters disposed to madness, such as for instance the offspring of Alcibiades and of Dionysus, and steady stock into stupidity and dullness, such as for instance the offspring of Cimon, Pericles, and Socrates.</p>
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6) *On Good Birth (Stob.Flor. IV xxix, fragment 94.11-25): strength of principle*

<p>τὰ δ' αἷτια εἴπωμεν τούτων ὅτι ἡ μὲν εὐγένειά ἐστιν ἀρετὴ γένους, ἡ δ' ἀρετὴ σπουδαίων· σπουδαῖον δ' ἐστὶ γένος ἐν ᾧ πολλοὶ σπουδαῖοι πεφύκασιν ἐγγίνεσθαι. συμβαίνει δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον, ὅταν ἐγγένηται ἀρχὴ σπουδαία ἐν τῷ γένει· ἡ γὰρ ἀρχὴ τοιαύτην ἔχει τὴν δύναμιν, πολλὰ παρασκευάζειν οἷάπερ αὐτὴ. τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀρχῆς ἔργον, ποιῆσαι οἷον αὐτὴ ἕτερα πολλά. ὅταν οὖν ἐγγένηται τοιοῦτος εἷς τις ἐν τῷ γένει καὶ οὕτω σπουδαῖος ὡστ' ἔχειν τὸ ἀπ' ἐκείνου ἀγαθὸν πολλὰς γενεάς, τοῦτο σπουδαῖον ἀνάγκη εἶναι τὸ γένος. πολλοὶ γὰρ ἔσσονται σπουδαῖοι ἀνθρώποι ἂν τε ἀνθρώπων ἢ τὸ γένος, ἂν τε ἵππων ἵπποι, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων.</p>	<p>Let me say the causes of this – that good birth is excellence of stock, and that excellence is good; and a good stock is one in which there have been many good individuals. And this happens when there is a good origin in the stock: for an origin has such power, namely of preparing many things like itself. For that is the function of an origin – to produce many others like itself. When, then, there has been one individual of this kind in the stock and he is so good that many generations receive his goodness, this stock is necessarily good. There will be many good humans if the stock is human, [good] horses if it is equine, and similarly also with the other animals.</p>
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7) *GA II 4, 738b23-36: Mother influences body offspring via blood?*

<p>ὥστε τὸ μὲν θῆλυ ἀναγκαῖον παρέχειν σῶμα καὶ ὄγκον ... καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὅσα τῶν μὴ ὁμογενῶν μίγνυται θῆλυ καὶ ἄρρεν (...), τὸ μὲν πρῶτον κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα γίγνεται κοινὸν ἀμφοτέρων, οἷον τὰ γιγνώμενα ἐξ ἀλώπεκος καὶ κυνός καὶ πέρδικος καὶ ἀλεκτρούονος, προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου καὶ ἐξ ἐτέρων ἕτερα γιγνώμενα τέλος ἀποβαίνει κατὰ τὸ θῆλυ τὴν μορφὴν, ὥσπερ τὰ σπέρματα τὰ ξενικά κατὰ τὴν χώραν· αὕτη γὰρ ἡ τὴν ὕλην παρέχουσα καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῖς σπέρμασιν ἐστίν.</p>	<p>Such that is it necessary that the female provides the body and the body mass... And this is why among as many of those who cross partners that are not of the same kind (...), the first [generation] comes to be in accordance with a common resemblance to both [parents], such as the offspring of the fox and dog, and of partridge and cock, but after time goes by and others come to be from others <i>the final result is a shape in accordance with the female</i>, just as foreign seeds [have a shape] in accordance with the soil: for this is what provides the material and the body to the seeds.</p>
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