In the two preceding chapters, we have examined the close connections between grammar, rhetorical theory and literary analysis in Dionysius’ treatises. In the present chapter, which will concentrate on Dionysius’ views on natural style, syntax and word order, the fruitful cooperation between these disciplines will become even more manifest. Apart from rhetoric and grammar, philosophy will also play a significant role in this chapter. Our investigations will depart from the observation that ‘the natural’ (τὸ Φυσικὸν) is a recurrent theme throughout Dionysius’ rhetorical works (see also section 2.5.2). On closer inspection, it becomes manifest that we find two different concepts of nature (Φυσικὸς) in his treatises. On the one hand, nature corresponds to the artless and the usual. On the other hand, there is a passage in which Dionysius adopts a philosophical concept of nature: in this case, nature corresponds to the rules of logic.

Throughout his works, Dionysius uses the terms Φυσικὸς and Φυσικὸς in the sense of the ‘usual’ and ‘normal’: according to this concept, natural style imitates the language of laymen, who are not trained in the use of rhetorical expression. The term Φυσικὸς is here opposed to τέχνη (see also section 2.5.2). This concept of nature is applied to various aspects of writing: not only word order can be natural, but also syntax (grammatical constructions), style in general and even the organisation of the ideas in a speech. Dionysius’ ideas on natural style, syntax and word order are of course closely related: they will be discussed in section 5.2. I will argue that we can trace a development in Dionysius’ analysis of the styles that he regards as natural or unnatural.
In the early works, Dionysius merely describes certain plain and simple passages (in particular those of Lysias) as natural, and he characterises the more figured style as ‘unnatural’. In the later works, Dionysius adopts a syntactic framework, including a technical terminology, which allows him to be more precise about the exact nature of the passages that he considers to be natural or unnatural. Thus, syntactic theory contributes to the analysis of style.

A different concept of nature is adopted in *Comp.* 5. Here, Dionysius conducts an experiment by which he aims to discover whether attractive and beautiful composition depends on the arrangement of words that ‘nature demands’. Natural word order is in this case determined by a number of logical rules, which claim that the parts of speech (τὰ μόρια τοῦ λόγου) should be arranged according to a fixed order. Because the experiment proves that Homer’s verses do not always follow the rules of nature, Dionysius decides to reject the natural principles. In section 5.3, I will argue that the concept of natural word order in *Comp.* 5 is largely determined by Stoic ideas. In the final part of this chapter, I will compare Dionysius’ ideas with some other ancient views on natural word order, namely those of the rhetoricians and critics ‘Demetrius’ (section 5.4.1), ‘Longinus’ (section 5.4.2) and Quintilian (section 5.4.3).

Since part of this chapter concentrates on natural word order, I should add some introductory remarks on the importance of order in the ancient language disciplines. Order (ordo) is a central concept in ancient rhetorical theory, both in the organisation of arguments (dispositio) and in the treatment of expression (elocutio). In grammar, the order of words in a sentence is mainly discussed in the context of syntax (σύνταξις). σύνθεσις and σύνταξις are complex terms, both of which are used with different meanings. Although σύνθεσις is more frequent in rhetoric, it also occurs in the works of grammarians (e.g. [D. Thrax], *G.G.* I 1, 22.5: λόγος δὲ ἐστὶ πείδες ἔξως σύνθεσις διάνοιαν αὐτοτελὴ δηλοῦσα). Likewise, σύνταξις is more frequent in grammar, but it is also used in rhetorical theory (e.g. *DH*, *Comp.* 5.24.14).