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Does Aristotle's Political Philosophy Rest On A Contradiction?

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I. Introduction

In a recently published paper,¹ David Keyt has argued that there is a contradiction at the heart of Aristotle's political philosophy. According to Keyt, Aristotle holds that

- (I.1) The polis is a natural entity, coming to be and existing by nature.
- (I.2) A polis comes to be when a legislator imposes constitutional form on social matter by political art.
- (I.3) Nothing can come to be both as a natural entity and as a product of rational art.

As stated (I.1)-(I.3) are inconsistent. Commentators have tried to resolve this problem by weakening (I.3). They have said that art aids nature in the creation of the polis. But, Keyt argues, in all Aristotelian contexts where art actually comes to the aid of nature nature is construed as capable of achieving an end on its own, but for one reason or another has been prevented, in particular cases, from doing so (56). (Medicine offers plenty of cases like these.) No one claims that the genesis of the polis is like that. More promising is the converse interpretation of the "art aids nature" trope: Nature is assumed to possess certain potentials, but cannot realize them unless an artisan causes form to be induced in the relevant proximate matter (56). The genesis of the polis is most often thought to conform to this pattern. Ernest Barker, for example, writes:

Aristotle concedes that in saying that the state is natural, he doesn't mean that it 'grows' naturally, without human volition and action. There is art as well as nature, and art co-operates with nature: the volition and action of human agents 'construct' the state in co-operation with a natural immanent impulse."²

On this view, Aristotle is far from justified in claiming that the polis comes to be or exists by nature in the sense he himself gives to these concepts. For a natural entity is defined by Aristotle as one that "has *in itself* a principle of motion and of rest" (Phys. II.I.192b13-19), while on the present interpretation the polis counts as a natural entity only because natural social matter can be worked up into political form by the rational art of the legislator. But Aristotle defines natural genesis in the passage just cited precisely by contrasting it with art: In art the efficient cause lies outside the object itself, while in nature it lies within it. Thus even if political art itself rests on a natural potentiality, it is realized by rational art--and so not by natural genesis. Moreover, on the view under consideration there would scarcely be any product of art that wasn't at the same time natural, rendering the distinction unclear and useless.

This difficulty might be alleviated by amending (I.1): We might attribute to the polis a natural existence, but not a natural genesis. Keyt says that for Aristotle there can be things that are natural existences that are not natural geneses, and vice-versa (59). It is difficult to deny, however, that Aristotle wants the polis to have *its* natural existence by way of natural genesis (58). That is, in any case, certainly the point of the most important argument for the natural existence of the polis--the argument Keyt calls "the genetic argument," according to which the polis comes to be through a natural process of development from the household (oikos) and the village (kome) (Pol. I.2.1252b27-34). At the end of this argument Aristotle says "Therefore every

polis exists by nature, since the first communities so exist (I252b31-32)." Thus Keyt concludes that if Aristotle is serious about defining the state as a natural entity, he must accept (I.3). But if he accepts (I.3) he must reject either (I.1) or (I.2)--to both of which, however, he appears to cling. The result is that at the conceptual heart of the Politics there is doubtless a strong and persistent desire to ground political life in natural properties and processes, but not much success in doing so.

I think Keyt has performed a service in undermining the customary shilly-shallying about (I.3). I do not believe, however, that this reveals a contradiction in Aristotle's political philosophy. In this paper I will argue that for Aristotle the genesis of the polis is fully natural in the strong sense that Aristotle ascribes to other developmental entities. The polis is not, therefore, a product of rational art in the sense that (I.2) demands. I realize that it is incumbent on me to provide an interpretation of (I.2), or a replacement for it, which does justice to the texts, but avoids the contradiction that must otherwise ensue if (I.1) and (I.3) are taken to be true.

2. *Political Animals and the Genesis of the Polis.*

Keyt recognizes that the claim that the polis exists by nature occurs in conjunction with Aristotle's assertion that anthropos is by nature a political animal (I253a2-3). The latter claim is presumably highly relevant to the former (56). One might even think that if human beings were naturally political animals in the same sense that bees, wasps, ants and cranes are said to be political animals in the History of Animals (HA I.1.487b33-488a10) they would dwell in cities in the same way that bees, for example, live in hives. Political animals in this "zoological sense" exhibit ways of life (bioi) that depend on division of function: "Political animals," says Aristotle, "are those among whom there comes to be some one and common work (koinon ergon)" to which their various functions contribute. Is not functional role division in this sense most developed among human beings? And is it not most highly elaborated in the social structure of the polis? Is not, therefore, the natural existence of the polis an expression of natural, indeed biological, politicality?

I think there is merit in this way of looking at the matter, but Keyt denies it (61). He claims that "in six of the eight passages in the corpus where the expression [political animal] occurs, it is linked either to polis . . . or to politike koinonia . . . or to politēs" (60). We ought, therefore, he says, to take it that :

- (2.1) The base meaning of the expression 'political animal' is that "nature endows man with a latent capacity for civic virtue (politike arete) and an impulse (horme) to live in a polis" (62).

Two things follow from this definition. First, "strictly speaking man is the only political animal" (60). For only anthropos can actualize a potentiality for civic virtue. The zoological sense of 'political animal' found in the HA must, then, be a weak analogy. Second, the vast majority of human beings do not actually live in cities, but in families, clans, tribes, and nations. They can be said to be political in the required sense only by taking that phrase in a dispositional sense: All humans, qua human, have a "latent capacity" and an "impulse" (horme I253b29-30) to live in a polis in accord with the virtues proper to political life, but this capacity must be developed by habituation, education and choice if it is to be actualized. From such a weak view of human politicality, it is unlikely that Aristotle would be able to infer much about the naturalness, or the natural genesis, of the polis. For the question of how these potentials are to be realized in a set of social and political arrangements is independent of the capacity for political life itself. In this way Keyt dismisses

natural politicality as grounding Aristotle's argument for the natural existence of the polis (63).

I do not think that Keyt's interpretation of politikon zoon is correct. I shall argue in this section that Aristotle's use of this phrase in the Politics and Ethics presupposes and builds on the zoological sense. The zoological sense provides an *analysis* of the so-called 'literal sense.' It is, therefore, the base meaning of the phrase. On this view:

(2.2) Human beings, *qua* human, are political not because they possess a potentiality for civic virtue, whether actualized or not, but because their bios exhibits functional role division and orientation to a common project in *whatever* social forms they find themselves.³

On this reading, anthropos is not, literally considered, the only political animal--although, because functional role division is extensively and greater and common projects intensionally more complex and explicit among human beings than among other species, Aristotle claims that humans are "more political than any bee and any herding animal" (I253a8-9). It is because this trait is most fully developed and paradigmatically instantiated in the articulated polis and in political virtue that the trait is called politicality. But that does not imply that it is not literally predicated of earlier forms of human social life and of certain other animals. On the contrary, it implies that the paradigm case is a fully developed instance of the more general trait.

The texts in which Aristotle uses or alludes to the phrase 'political animal' do not elevate what I will call Keyt's civic-normative sense over the zoological sense. There are in fact not eight but nine such passages in the Aristotelian corpus. Two of these are found in the biological writings (HA I.1:487b33-488a14; and 589a1-2). Three are found in the Politics (I.2: I253a1-4; a few lines later at I253a7-8; and III.6.I278b17-21.) The other four occurrences are found in the several versions of the Ethics: EE VII.10.I242a22-27; NE I.7.I097b8-II; VIII.I2.II62a17-19; and II69b17-19. In all but two passages in the Ethics, there is a clear reference to or reliance on the zoological sense, and to the civic-normative sense only in the context of the zoological sense. Moreover, I think the anomalous texts can be reconciled to this primacy of the zoological sense.

To the first of the passages in HA I have already alluded: Anthropos is said to be one of a number of political animals because among human beings, as among bees, ants, wasps and cranes, "something one and common becomes the work of all" [hen ti kai koinon gignetai panton to ergon] (488a8-9). There is, however, a second passage in HA, not cited by Keyt, in which human beings are said to differ from other animals because human couples do not abandon their young to their own devices, or break up their own unions when the young go off on their own, but rather live together cross-generationally and in permanent unions "in a more political way" than other animals (589a1-2). Presumably, this way of life is more political than that of animals that abandon their mates or their offspring because living in permanent union leads necessarily to social cooperation and role-division in matters other than the bare act of reproduction (which is, in itself, obviously insufficient for politicality, since on that account all animals would be political).

The first of the three occurrences of politikon zoon in the Politics occurs in the context of the "genetic argument" (and what Keyt calls the "telic argument") for the naturalness of the polis. Having argued that the city is the end (telos) of the earlier and less autonomous (autarkes) forms of social organization, the family and the village, and that the polis is natural just because it is the final and best state of those other social forms, Aristotle claims at I253a1-4 that

From these things it is clear that the polis exists by nature, and that anthropos is by nature a political animal; and that

that he who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean sort or superior to man; he is 'without clan, without law, without hearth,' like the person reproved by Homer.

Keyt believes that this text rests on the civic sense of politikon zoon. But his interpretation implies something Aristotle explicitly denies: that human beings living in scattered households or in villages are "without a city" and hence are political in his sense only dynamei. But it is highly improbable that Aristotle ascribes to pre-civic human beings a potentiality for civic virtue. Aristotle recognizes dynameis only where there is a clear potentiality for an entity of a certain type to become actualized along a certain pathway.⁴ It is far from clear that every human being, merely in virtue of being a human being, has a dynamis for civic virtue. In fact, Aristotle claims that barbarians and natural slaves are fit to be ruled precisely because they lack such dynameis (I252b5-9). Keyt approvingly quotes the remark of J.A. Stewart that "the uncivilized man is not civilized already, but has it in him to become civilized."⁵ Yet this is just what Aristotle denies even about comparatively advanced barbarian societies. When Aristotle says that "He who is without a city . . . is 'without clan, without law, without hearth', like the person reproved by Homer," the hearth refers to the family and the clan to the ethnos. Accordingly, Aristotle excludes only those living outside of the cooperative context of the family, the village, and the tribe from the scope of politicality in this passage--which is to say virtually no one we recognize as human. On this reading human beings are already *actually*, if imperfectly, political in virtue of their manifold social relationships in the family, village and tribe, rather than being in possession of a dubious disposition for civic virtue which, as we have seen, most humans do not in fact have. The sense of politikon zoon that sustains this analysis is the zoological.

Aristotle names entities after their most developed, articulated state (Phys. 193b7-8). Accordingly, these earlier, subordinate forms of human social life are treated in this passage as underdeveloped cities. It is true that the household and the village reach their true nature only when they become subordinate parts of a fully articulated city (I252b35). They are not autarkes enough to be otherwise. But prior to the development of the articulated city, these social organizations carry within themselves the seeds of full development, like an embryo, and in that sense are said in this passage to be potential poleis. Humans are political, then, because the forms of human social organization in which they are found, and in which they behave in a characteristically human way, look forward to and, barring constraints, develop into, the polis. But they probably do this in virtue of the presence and progressive development within each such social stage of functional role differentiation and a changing, complexifying intensional constitution of common projects. To the extent that this is true the genetic argument relies on the zoological sense of politicality that humans share with other animals.

This reference is followed almost immediately by a use of zoon politikon that clearly harks back to the zoological sense of the HA. At I253a8-9 Aristotle says that "Anthropos is more political than any bee and than any herding animal" because humans alone among the animals have speech (logos), which reveals the useful and the just, and "it is partnership (koinonia) in these things that makes (poiei) the household and polis." Commentators have sometimes worried that there is an equivocation between Aristotle's use of politikon zoon at I253a1-4 and its appearance at few lines later at I253a8-9. R. G. Mulgan, for instance, believes that the first occurrence refers to the literal polis, whereas the second relies on the zoological sense. Mulgan wonders whether Aristotle changed the meaning of the phrase in midpassage "without giving any indication of such a change" or even being aware that he was doing so. He speculates that Aristotle may have

realized that he had been using the term politikon zoon of man

in a different sense from that used of other animals . . . and hoped to reconcile the two by saying that man is *more politikon*, thus preserving the zoological similarity between man and other 'political' animals and at the same time maintaining that man is politikon in a special, unique sense⁶

Mulgan is suggesting that anthropos is more political than other animals because there are *two senses* in which humans can be said to be political. This would, of course, be a compositional fallacy, as Mulgan sees: Two senses in which I might be an x do not make me more of an x. "Nonetheless," Mulgan concludes, "it is a fallacy which is easily committed and one which Aristotle, in his desire to accommodate his political theory to his general biological principles, might well have been tempted into."⁷ This bizarre and desperate solution would be rendered unnecessary, however, if the first passage, no less than the second, relies on the zoological sense, as I have suggested it does. Indeed, the close connection between the two occurrences of politikon zoon reinforces the probability that the first rests on the zoological meaning, since the second clearly does.

Keyt is less worried than Mulgan about the problem of equivocation here because he does not think that the two uses are part of the same argument, despite their close connection. This is, as far as it goes, true. The first text occurs within the genetic argument (assuming, for the moment, that the latter includes what Keyt calls the 'telic' argument). The second occurs within what Keyt calls the 'linguistic argument.' Keyt treats the second passage as one of two exceptions to his claim that politikon zoon refers to the normative life of a city. His problem, however, is to say why the only occurrence of politikon zoon that clearly alludes in the way Keyt suggests to the normative life of the polis, and to the connection between justice and the other virtues and the uniquely human characteristic of linguistic ability, is referred by Aristotle in this passage not to the civic-normative but to the *zoological* sense of the phrase! In his reconstruction of the linguistic argument, Keyt ascribes to Aristotle a tacit assumption that "Animals that are capable of forming communities based on justice are more political than those that are not." On the civic-normative sense of the phrase, this is very nearly an analytic claim, although it would be difficult to see how on this interpretation other animals could be political at all, and hence how they could be *less* political. But if the zoological sense is intended, as Keyt concedes it is in this passage, an argument is required showing that increased functional division and cooperation in the achievement of a single task is facilitated by linguistic competence and by the sense of justice that it brings about. In point of fact, this seems a plausible enough claim. But to follow it out would have the effect of undermining Keyt's studied indifference to the relevance of the zoological sense to human political development.

An argument to this effect would begin by asserting once again that the genetic argument, which immediately precedes the linguistic, rests on the zoological sense of politicality, since the development of the polis from household to city is represented there as mediated by progressive role differentiation within a context of ever more conceptually constituted, hierarchial conceptions of the koinon ergon to which the civic community is devoted. In this argument, the village is represented as more self-sufficient (autarkes) than the household, and the polis than the village. It is easy to suspect that this increased self-sufficiency is a function of increased division of labor and cooperation, first across household lines in villages and then across what amounts to class lines in cities. At the same time, Aristotle says that the aims of these various koinonai are in a process of change from grim concentration on mere life to appreciation of the good life as the end of association--from the daily task of surviving in the face of scarcity to a way of

life in which leisured activities worthwhile for their own sake become the focus of the community's life. Indeed, Aristotle virtually defines a city as that form of human association in which the good life in this sense is the koinon ergon (I252b28-31). But neither progressive and innovative divisions of labor, nor increasingly rich conceptions of the koinon ergon, can arise without linguistic ability. Language, Aristotle says, uniquely identifies the useful or advantageous in the economic sphere, as well as the good and the just in the emergent political sphere. In this way one can see why, although the genetic and the linguistic arguments are indeed distinct, they appear nonetheless check by jowl as parts of a single line of reasoning. The conclusion of the linguistic argument is *not* that the polis is a natural existence. That has already been established by the genetic argument, if it has been established at all. Rather, once we have appreciated the genetic argument, and seen that the polis arises out of an intensification of functional differentiation, we can see immediately why and how this occurred: It is in virtue of linguistic competence that anthropos is "more political than any bee or any herding animal". For, on the explicit assumption that nature does nothing in vain, such a high degree of politicality occurs only where linguistic competence functions to produce it.

I turn now to the third and final occurrence of zoon politikon in the Politics. At 3.6: I278b17-21 Aristotle asserts that anthropos is by nature a political animal because "he desires to live together (sudzen) even when he has no need of the help of others." This text echoes HA 589a1-2, a passage not considered by Keyt, in which humans are said to be more political than other animals because of permanent coupling (synduastein). This link between politicality and sociality (sudzen) based on degrees of permanence in the male-female relationship is repeated, moreover, in two of the four texts in which the phrase 'political animal' is also found in the Ethics. At NE I.7.I097b8-I2, Aristotle says that natural politicality implies that human autonomy (autarkeia) does not mean a solitary life (bion monoten), but a life together with "parents and children and women and generally with friends and fellow citizens." Similarly, at NE II69b17-I9 Aristotle says that "No one would choose to have all good things in solitude, for anthropos is by nature (pephukos) political and inclined to live together (sudzen)."

I find no exclusive or dominant reference to the polis to the exclusion of other forms of community in these texts, and hence nothing in them to ground Keyt's assertion that these texts rely on a civic-normative sense of politikon zoon rather than the zoological sense. Political community in the sense Keyt intends is explicitly mentioned only once in this sequence (NE I097b12), and then one's relation to fellow citizens appears simply as the last in a long list of social relations important for human political life in the wider sense. All these social relations are constituted by functional role discrimination, either within or beyond the family, and hence rely on the zoological sense of the phrase.

Keyt might have noted this if he had cited HA 589a1-2, the primary locus in which this conception is grounded. In that passage, the foundation of human political life, and the stable ground on which it naturally complexifies and develops, is the fact that "Human beings [more than other animals] tend to form couples" (synduastein NE 8:I2: II62a17) who live together permanently in a way that increasingly embraces their kin. Human couples do not separate fully from their parents when they form their own families; nor when children are grown do they abandon their parents. The result of these traits is the indefinite, natural expansion of kinship groups, first into villages, which are "colonies out of the household, formed by those whom people speak of as 'milk peers' (homogalaktas), since they are the children and children of children (I256a16-I9)," and then into clans and nations; and sometimes, by a peculiar twist, into cities. It is on the basis of these permanent relationships that humans live a "more political life" than other animals. Sociality is not

identical to politicality, but invariably leads to it. For permanence of association leads to and requires the discrimination of different functional roles, both economic and political, through the emergence of natural rulers and ruled (I252a31). In the permanent household and the village, elder rules naturally over younger. It is out of this relationship that civic rule itself emerges:

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Cities were at first under kings, as nations are even now.

For those who joined together were already under kings, since every household was under the eldest as king, and so also were the extensions [of the household] *as a result of kinship*.

That is what Homer meant when he says that 'each acts as law to his children and wives,' for humans were scattered then and used to dwell in this manner in ancient times (I252b18-23).

From the emergence of natural rule on the basis of permanent coupling and kinship derives the integral role of servitude within the household and of economic and political role-differentiation within village and polis. In the primitive household, women, as well as children and tame beasts, are treated as slaves, so that economic functions are conflated with reproductive (I252a35-b7). But as society complexifies, through the aggregation of kinship, functional roles and spheres of authority within the household are differentiated. Beasts differ from slaves, slaves from women, children from parents. Indeed, Aristotle treats the degree to which this articulative process fails to occur as an objective measure of barbarism. But as the household is articulated, so are trans-household economic relationships in the village, where different persons perform different functions in a local economy. Finally, the authority patterns that arise within the village develop, where sufficiency generates leisure, into the distinction between economic and properly political life, mere life and good life, that characterizes the polis. As this process proceeds both within and beyond the household, and as the tasks of social reproduction become more complex, those who are more capable will become ever more clearly distinguished from those lacking foresight to exercise authority. At one end of the scale will be people with enough practical wisdom to govern and protect the household or, even better, the community as a whole. At the other will appear natural slaves, who would perish unless they were playing a highly subordinate role in a complex structure of authority.

An apparent difficulty for this view is that in the remaining two texts in which politikon zoon occurs in the Ethics the conjunction of permanent coupling with politicality in the zoological sense seems to be replaced by a conception in which politikon zoon is contrasted with 'householding animal', rather than including it:

Anthropos is not only a political but also a household (oikonomikon) animal, and does not like other animals couple only occasionally with any chance female or male, but is not a solitary but a community forming animal (koinonikon zoon) with respect to those with whom he shares by nature in kinship (suggenia) (EE I242a22-7);

and

Friendship (philia) between man and woman seems to be by nature, for anthropos is by nature coupling (synduastikon) more than political, insofar as the household is prior to and more necessary than the city (NE II62a17-19).

These texts appear to assert that the household is a function of coupling and kinship alone, rather than of permanent coupling *together with slavery*, as the Politics has it (I252a26-34). In consequence, the trait 'political' seems reserved for city life in the narrow or so-called strict sense favored by Keyt. Moreover, the NE text seems to disagree with the Politics in asserting that the

household is prior to the city, whereas in the Politics Aristotle says that "the city is prior to the household and to each of us" (1253a19-20).

Perhaps, however, Aristotle is stressing in the Ethics the fact that without permanent coupling there would be no stable economic and political relationships, and hence that permanent coupling, and the sociality attendant upon it, is an ineliminable condition for political relationships in the zoological sense, *even within the household*. If that is the case it follows that the contrast between 'political animal' and 'householding animal' is not, despite first appearances, a contrast between the oikos as part of the polis and a public sphere in which male heads of households are active as citizens, but between those *elements of the household* that rest directly on permanent coupling--including instinctual love and care--and the elements within it and beyond it that depend on the functional division of roles and authority--the political elements. In that case, the zoological sense of zoon politikon is assumed in these texts no less than in all the others.

An advantage of this reading is that it does not countenance any real conflict between the Ethics and the Politics. Aristotle does not deny in the former that the household itself is defined by both the male-female and the master-slave relation, as in the Politics (1252b9-10). He affirms only that household politicality is asymmetrically dependent, from a genetic point of view, on the permanence of the male-female relation in a way that the male-female relation is not dependent on mastery and servitude. Mastery and servitude not emergent from the more basic, affective relationships within the household would be impermanent and based on force, and hence unnatural. It is precisely this that Aristotle is denying, against the liberal Sophists, throughout Pol I; and that is why he insists, against Plato, on the irreplaceability and relative autonomy of the household within any natural political system.⁸ Aristotle is thus free to say that the household is prior to the city, in the sense that the bonds of affection on which it most deeply rests must be there first and permanently, without thereby denying that the city, considered as the telos of the complex, proto-political household is prior by nature to the household.

I submit, therefore, that the zoological sense of politikon zoon undergirds Aristotle's use of this phrase throughout the corpus. When Aristotle says, however, that it is evident from the genetic argument that "the polis exists by nature *and* that anthropos is by nature a political animal," he is not arguing, as is commonly thought, from a prior conception of "human nature" to the sociopolitical arrangements that correctly express that "nature." That is a conception that Moderns like Hobbes and Locke took over from Medieval and Renaissance Aristotelianism. Aristotle's own argument is much more empirical and behavioral. He says in the HA that traits like politicality, gregariousness, solitariness and scatteredness name "actions (praxeis) and ways of life (bioi)," observed patterns of individual and collective behavior, rather than underlying dispositions that might or might not be actualized (487b33-6). Thus when Aristotle says that the polis is natural and that humans are naturally political he means to say that because we see *all* human societies, and the individuals that constitute them, behave and develop cooperatively without external agency or force, we may conclude that these relationships (koinonias) are natural. This is an important and frequently misconstrued point. Keyt, for example, says that "just as anthropos is by nature a political animal does not entail that the polis is a natural entity" neither does "the entailment run in the other direction." Given Keyt's dispositional and normative sense of political, this may be true. But given the zoological definition of zoon politikon, and the claim that politicality describes certain patterns of life, there is indeed entailment in both directions. For the same facts are referred to under two descriptions--one institutional and developmental, the other individual and behavioral.

The overall strategy of Keyt's paper is to show that the arguments Aristotle uses to demonstrate the natural existence of the polis fail to achieve their purpose. Keyt distinguishes four such arguments--the genetic, the telic, the linguistic and the organic. In this section I will briefly recount Keyt's reconstructions of these arguments and his reasons for asserting their failure. I will suggest that it is Keyt's reconstructions that fail and not Aristotle's arguments.

The most important (perhaps the only) argument by far for the natural existence of the polis is the genetic. Keyt reconstructs this argument roughly as follows: A powerful natural instinct for self-preservation, both biological and economic, grounds the male-female and master-slave relationships. Thus the household, which comes to be from the union of the these two relationships, exists by nature in virtue of a tacit premiss to the effect that

- (3.1) Where natural instincts give birth to an entity that entity exists by nature. (Nature is here contrasted with choice [prohairesis, I252a28]).(66).

The trick of the genetic argument is to transmit this natural existence from the household to the village and from the village to the polis. The difficulty, Keyt says, is that the warrant Aristotle uses to infer the natural existence of the village and the state from the natural existence of the household is false. Aristotle employs, Keyt says, the following principles:

- (3.2) If one community (koinonia) is more self-sufficient than another, it is a greater good and more choiceworthy than the other (67).
(3.3) If one thing comes to be from another, and if the one is a greater good and more choiceworthy than the other, the one is prior in substance to the other (67).
(3.4) If one thing is prior in substance to a second, and if the second exists by nature, then the first exists by nature (67).

Since the village is more self-sufficient than the household, and the city than the village, the conclusion is supposed to follow from these principles that the village and the city exist by nature (67).

Keyt cites Pol. I261b14 in support of (3.2) and Phys. I94a28-33 in support of (3.3). But he thinks (3.4)--an alleged "principle of the transitivity of naturalness"--is false within the general context of Aristotle's philosophy (68). Priority in substance, Keyt says, obtains "if and only if one thing is more fully developed or more fully realized than the other" (63). Thus what is prior in substance is posterior in generation. Assuming it is a substance at all, then, a house would be prior in substance to the materials from which it is made. But, says Keyt, note that the naturalness of these materials does not guarantee the naturalness of the house (68). Perhaps, however, (3.4) is meant to exclude artifacts. It still does not follow, Keyt argues, that the actualization of a natural potentiality produces something that comes to be or exists by nature. The latent human capacity for theoretical knowledge is brought to realized by education. "So in a sense it is natural for man to be educated. But educational institutions such a the Academy and the Lyceum do not exist by nature" (69). Similarly, from the natural human capacity for political life, Keyt concludes, it does not follow that the polis itself comes to be by nature. For "an object or an institution that aids a man in fulfilling his nature does not necessary exist by nature" (69). The genetic argument cannot, then, rely on (3.4).

Perhaps, however, the naturalness of the polis *would* follow from the natural existence of the household if household, village and polis were stages of a single developmental process. For then the polis would come to be by nature in the same way an adult human being comes to be from embryo, neonate and child. It

seems to me that this is precisely what Aristotle has in mind in the genetic argument. For he appears to make use of a principle that applies only to such cases in the final sentences of the argument: "Nature is an end," he writes, "since that which each thing is when its growth is completed we speak of as being the nature of that thing, for instance of a man, a horse or a household." (1252b32-35). Keyt, however, denies this. First, he assumes without argument that

(3.5) the relationship between household, village and polis is that of different species of the same genus (koinonai, communities), and not of underdeveloped to developed stages of the same entity (58).

Second, he argues that when Aristotle says that

(3.6) The nature of thing is what it develops into he is *assuming* that the entity in question has within it an internal principle of motion and rest in virtue of which it develops. But, says Keyt, only things that have already been shown to have such an internal principles of change, and hence to be natural existences, can *have* a nature in this sense (68). Thus one cannot use (3.6) to support the naturalness of the polis without begging the question or equivocating on 'having a nature' (68). Keyt concludes that appeal to (3.6) "adds nothing, or at any rate nothing coherent, to the foregoing argument" (68).

But if Keyt is right in dismissing (3.6) there will be no genetic argument at all. In Phys II.2 Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of things that have internal principles of change, elements and developmental entities, and hence between two conceptions of nature, the material and the formal. At Phys. 194a28-33, which is the sole text Keyt cites to support (3.3), Aristotle is referring to the latter. These are entities that develop in such a way that temporally prior parts, which receive their own definitions only when a continuous process of change is complete, are there for the sake of the subsequent achievement of completed form. But these are coextensive with the same class of entities picked out by (3.6). Only of formal natural entities can one say that they "undergo a continuous change and there is a stage which is last and best," which state is both their end *and their nature*. For only of these entities is it true that "a thing is more properly said to be what it is [and hence to have a nature] when it has attained to fulfillment than when it exists potentially" (Phys. 193b7-8). Thus anything meeting the conditions of (3.3) must also meet the conditions of (3.6).

I am loathe to accept a reconstruction of an Aristotelian argument that makes no use of an important part of the text. But I am especially loathe to do so in this case, since there would be little left of the genetic argument unless the sentence summarized by (3.6) is included. What Aristotle needs, then, are empirical reasons showing that the development of the polis from the household exhibits a principle of internal change that conforms to the general model for entities whose nature is their form, that is, developmental entities. If he can show this, he will have provided what Keyt asks for--an argument to the effect that the polis has a formal nature because it demonstrably exhibits an internal principle of change and does not assume that because it has a 'nature' it must have an internal principle of change.

Artifacts, Aristotle immediately goes on to say, certainly do not meet these conditions. For artisans use materials *as if* they were there for the sake of the artificer's end, although they actually are not (Phys. 193b33-35). The materials are defined 'materially', as it were, independently of the artist's process of using them. But something similar is true of the achievement of theoria out of paideia, or of political virtue from the institutional support for it provided by the realized polis. These accomplishments come about not by nature but by habituation, choice and learning, making use of materials, opportunities, contingencies, occasions, and advantages at hand. In these cases,

no less than in artifactual ones, the end is not the nature because in neither of them is there a self-generating process of articulation of undeveloped capacities into functionally discriminated and defined parts that reach their own form when the whole of which they are parts has reached *its* form. The genetic argument will succeed, then, only if it can be shown that the required process of articulation occurs in the sequence from the isolated household to the polis. The earlier stages have to be underdetermined until the final state, and the process by which the articulated terminal stage comes about cannot be reduced to intentional actions working on independently defined materials--or, a fortiori, to spontaneity, chance or force.

We have seen that Keyt assumes throughout that

- (2.1) The base meaning of the expression 'political animal' is that "nature endows man with a latent *capacity* for civic virtue (politike arete) and an impulse (horme) to live in a polis" (62)

and that

- (3.5) The relationship between household, village and polis is that of different species of the same genus (koinonjai, communities), and not of underdeveloped to developed stages of the same substantial form (58).

Given these assumptions, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to see the polis as a developmental entity. This definition of political animal virtually rules out this possibility. For it requires an external agent to reduce potency to actuality. Similarly, the change from one species of association to another cannot *in principle* conform to the required developmental paradigm, since on that paradigm each stage of the process must be a stage in the development of an entity of a single kind. Keyt himself says that "in natural genesis product and producer have the very same form" (57). Thus the truth of (3.5) would render Aristotle's argument's vacuous without further consideration. Given Keyt's assumption of (2.1) and (3.5), the causal parts of the development of the polis *must* be wrought by rational choice and art, quite apart from the success or failure of any of Aristotle's *particular* arguments.

But this does not constitute a reason to tax *Aristotle* with failure. For we have seen that for Aristotle

- (2.2) Human beings, *qua* human, are political *not* because they possess a potentiality for civic virtue, whether actualized or not, but because their bios exhibits functional role division and orientation to a common project in *whatever* social forms they find themselves.

Moreover, we have seen that politicality in this sense rests on permanent coupling (sunduadzein) and hence sociality (sudzen) through the natural expansion of kinship (suggenia). Within the permanent household and across the kinship network these characteristics entail the emergence of natural rule, and hence of differential function. These characteristics, which are already evident in the underarticulated household, entail zoological politicality. But zoological politicality so construed also *entails* that, driven by powerful urges for both biological and economic self-preservation, the endless replication of households by marriages leads *with no further requirement* to ever more complex social and political wholes, in which new functions, spheres of authority and common purposes, are constituted and differentiated. It is certainly the case that the household itself is forever devoted to "mere life." But the replication of the household *at any given level of social development* leads, *among naturally social and political animals*, to further social complexification beyond the household, out of which eventually emerges self-sufficiency and with it a novel devotion to the good life in the polis.

This can happen, of course, only if (3.5) is either false or trivially true.

But Aristotle never uses species-genus talk when talking about household, village and city. It is a façon de parler that owes more to later Aristotelian machinery than to Aristotle. Koinonai, in any case, do not form a true genus, so it is difficult to speak of 'species' of koinonai. These points seem to me sufficient, then, to ensure enough 'transitivity of naturalness' to let the genetic argument go through in principle.

What Aristotle is asserting is that this process occurs universally, and naturally, among human societies *to the extent* that they are unconstrained by external impediments, such as a difficult environment, or by internal impediments, such as emotive and cognitive defects in a given interbreeding population. This is an empirical question, a matter of comparative anthropology, to which Aristotle devotes much space. But, more importantly, if the polis is a developmental entity Aristotle must also show not only, as Keyt has it that

(3.2) If one community (koinonia) is *more* self-sufficient than another, it is a *greater* good and more choiceworthy than the other but that the polis is the *terminus* of this sequence, that the material self-sufficiency, political autonomy and other human goods achieved by the polis *cannot be bettered*. "For not every stage that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is *best* (Phys, I94a32-33)." Now Aristotle himself certainly thought that intrinsic goods are never increased by forms of association that might be called post-political. His conclusion, therefore, is that the polis is indeed the terminal point of a formal, natural developmental sequence, and hence that it exists by nature and has a nature in the way that only beings of this sort do. We might doubt this, citing the modern nation state, or unknown possibilities beyond it, as possible candidates for this role (or by taking a relativist position about all such matters). But we might also agree with Aristotle in either of two ways. The nation state might *be* a polis in Aristotle's sense, merely using novel technical means of production and communication to increase the material underpinnings of civic well-being. Or, we might think that Aristotle is simply right in saying that civic life in something like his sense is never surpassed as a locus for the realization of the full range of human goods, and that greater economic and military linkages among cities and regions afforded by territorial nations, or even larger international groups, merely provide more adequately security for the material goods that make possible the good life that is uniquely available in cities. In either case, however, Aristotle's claim is far from empty or closed to empirical investigation.

I have expressed reluctance earlier in this paper to count what Keyt calls the 'telic argument' (I252b34-I253a7) as distinct from the genetic argument that immediately precedes it (69). The reason is now apparant. I have implicitly argued in the previous paragraph that Keyt's (3.2) should be amended to read

3.7: The community (koinonia) that is *most* self-sufficient is the *best* among communities and the *end* of their development.

Aristotle says at the beginning of the so-called telic argument that self-sufficiency is (by its very nature) a best condition and an end. But if the polis is the *most* self-sufficient of communities, it is, therefore, an end and the best among communities. The so-called telic argument is, then, part of the genetic argument. It fills in a missing link between the premisses of the genetic argument and the conclusion that the polis is a developmental entity by specifying the characteristic, namely self-sufficiency, in terms of which the polis is best and an end, the terminus of a developmental sequence. The eti with which these lines begin do not, then, as Keyt asserts, mark the beginning of a new argument for the natural existence of the polis, but only a new premiss in the argument. When, moreover, in the next sentence Aristotle says that "From these considerations" (ek touton) it is evident that the polis exists by nature and that man is a political animal, the plural in ek touton cannot refer, as Keyt

says it does, merely to the point about self-sufficiency as an end and as best. The plural obviously refers to the entire sweep of the genetic argument, which is now marked as complete.

In what Keyt calls the 'organic argument' (1253a18-53) Aristotle purports to show that

(3.8) The polis is prior in nature to the household and to each of us (1253a19-20)

on the ground that the whole is prior to the part (1253a20-21), as in the paradigm of organic parts in relation to organisms. Because they are functional parts of functioning wholes, hands are hands only as parts of organisms (1253a22-25). Similarly, households are functional parts of poleis, as are individuals, since none of them is self-sufficient (1252a25-29).

Keyt's objection is that the "priority principle" "can be applied to the polis only on the *assumption* that the polis is a natural entity." Otherwise the question is begged (74). This is true enough. But the genetic argument provides at least some independent evidence for the naturalness of the polis by showing that the polis develops, by way of natural sociality and politicality, out of households and villages toward self-sufficiency, and that there is no further development beyond the polis that increases this trait. The polis, in this respect, conforms to the model of what I have called developmental entities. But if that is true it *must* also be true, by implication, that the communities out of which the polis develops achieve *their* identities and definitions by becoming functional parts of the polis. Thus the organic argument is not a separate argument for the natural existence of the polis, but an implication of the genetic argument (as Keyt recognizes: 77). Yet if the genetic argument provides evidence for the existence of the polis as a developmental entity by considering it as a developmental sequence, the fact that household and individual can *plausibly* be viewed as articulated parts provides additional, independent support that this model fits without begging the question. If the genetic argument implied something plainly untrue, this would be evidence that it must be wrong. By parity of reasoning, independent evidence for an implication of the genetic argument provides additional support for that argument.

I conclude this section by making two points about the organic argument.

First, Keyt remarks of (3.8) that Aristotle "presumably does not mean to deny that an individual or a family can exist apart from the polis" (64). But Aristotle says that "what each thing is when its growth is completed we speak of as being the nature of each thing, for instance of a man, horse, or a *household*" (1252b35). We must be careful to distinguish, then, between the scattered (sporades) household--an underdeveloped polis, as well as an undeveloped household, which certainly *can* exist apart from the *developed polis*--and the mature household, which stably secures its ends only when it is a fully developed, functional part of the developed polis. In such a household the constituent social relations of male-female, parent-child, and master-slave are fully discriminated. A household in this sense *cannot* exist apart from a polis. "The whole is prior to the part" for this reason. Aristotle might have made similar points about the village, which becomes a deme within the polis, a mediating institution between kinship and civic identity. In general, it helps to remember that the organic argument is conducted in its entirety from the perspective of an analysis of fully developed natural wholes and parts, while the genetic argument is conducted from the point of view of an unfolding process.

Second, Keyt has a preference throughout his article for speaking in terms of priority in substance where Aristotle refers to priority in nature. This is fraught with peril when it comes to Aristotle's claim that the "polis is also prior in nature also to the individual" (1253a19-20; 25-26). For it is certainly *not* the case that the polis is prior *in substance* to the individual. Substantial individuals standing in certain social relationships *constitute* the

polis. The pattern of these social relationships comes to be and exists by nature, and can be inter-generationally replicated with some fidelity, because anthropos is a political animal in the sense I have defended in this paper. The claim that the polis is prior in nature to the individual encodes Aristotle's profound belief that, just as the household reaches its nature only as a functional part of the developed polis, so to the individual, as citizen, is fully realized as a human being, and a locus of self-sufficiency, only by participating in the activities of developed political relationships. (It does not follow that everyone has an 'underlying' dynamis for this sort of life.)

I have earlier expressed the view that human natural politicality and the natural existence of the polis are mutually entailing because they are two descriptions of the same facts. But these two descriptions differ in an important way. The polis is a natural developmental entity, but it is not, under this description, a substance. There are, then, developmental entities that are not, *as such*, substances. But individual political animals, becoming individuated and acting within social relations that express their nature while at the same time constituting the polis, *are* substances, even though they are at the same time *parts* of natural developmental entities that are *not*.⁹

4. *The Role of Intentional Agency in the Development of the Polis*

"The first person who constituted [the polis] is the cause of the greatest of human goods" (1253a31). This text seems to support Keyt's preference for what he calls "rational art" over natural genesis as the route to the realization of the polis. Keyt's interpretation is that the founder of the first city is identical with the "statesman and lawgiver" mentioned in another text (Pol. 7.4.1325b40-26a5) who, like other craftsmen, imposes form onto "matter in a suitable condition" by giving a political constitution to social matter of an appropriate sort.

In assessing this interpretation I wish first to call attention to another text, not considered by Keyt, in which Aristotle says that "the polis comes into existence (ginomene) for the sake of life, but exists (ousa) for the sake of the good life" (1252b30-31). Under which description, we may ask, did the person to whom we owe the greatest of human goods found his city? If, as Keyt holds, the founder's intention is the causal source of the coming-to-be of the city, and if, as Aristotle says, the city *comes to be* for the sake of mere life, then the answer is mere life. But this will not yield a full-fledged city at all, nor will the scope of the founder's intention embrace "the greatest of human goods"--that condition in which material self-sufficiency makes it possible for a community to pursue a range of intrinsic goods as the very point of its common life (koinon ergon) and to distribute social goods to individuals in accord with these values: autonomy in the face of other societies, recognition and pursuit of the just and the good for their own sake, and cultivation of the goods of leisure, such as music and contemplation.

The solution to this dilemma is to deprive it of its premiss: the identification of the cause of coming to be with an intentional action described as its agent originally described and performed it. When Aristotle says in the genetic argument that the polis comes to be for the sake of mere life, he is clearly referring to the entire development from the isolated household to the beginnings of civic life proper. This development results, under normal conditions, in ever greater material self-sufficiency. But our earlier consideration of the linguistic argument has shown that this process is causally mediated *throughout* by speech. Thus the developmental curve from household to polis is brought about by myriad acts of many political animals in the strong sense. Each such action is performed under intentional descriptions of some sort. Acts performed under such descriptions presuppose habituation and

learning. That, as Keyt repeatedly points out, is why we are virtuous not by nature but by our choices. But note that no *one* of these intentional actions has, or could have, the entire developmental sequence for its scope. The developmental sequence itself, emerging through many generations, is not the object of anyone's intention. That is part of what Aristotle implies by saying that that developmental curve is natural. It is absurd to think that the founder of the first polis brought it about under such a description.

Is then, the developmental sequence from household to polis a *sum* of intentional actions under their original, agent-centered descriptions? The answer is clearly no. For clearly Aristotle's doctrine that the polis is a natural entity implies that its developmental curve is not *reducible* to a sum of intentional actions, at least under these descriptions. Nonetheless, rather large parts of this developmental sequence *can* be described in intentional terms if agents at later times, or more often later agents, are free to redescribe earlier actions in new ways. That is exactly the function of historical tradition in the life of continuous societies, and it is an important cause of their coherence, continuity and further development.

The act of Aristotle's original founder can be appreciated in this light if we allow ourselves to rationally reconstruct Aristotle's argument just a bit. We know from another text that the first cities were under the rule of kings, who were tribal elders on the model of kinship relations that defines natural rule in villages (1252b19-24). This form of social life, which Aristotle says still prevails among the ethne, is devoted to goods no higher than those of mere life. A king in possession of this conception of himself might nonetheless have taken actions that directly resulted in the transformation of his community into a polis, devoted to the good life under some description, even if he did not intend, and could not intend, to change his own self-conception or that of his community by doing so. All that is required that his actions be redescrivable as the causes of later developments that either were not, or more more likely could not, have been known to him, but which can be thought to be opaquely implicit in his own intentions. Under such redescrptions the founder is causally responsible for events that he performed under different descriptions.¹⁰

Keyt's decision to view the genesis of the polis as a single act of constitutional craftsmanship rests on his assumption that the household, the village and the polis are three different species of koinonai (3.5). This assumption makes it necessary to bring about a sudden change in *kind* if a polis is to exist. Intentional action seems the only recourse. This analysis leads to Keyt's assertion that "the end of a polis varies with its constitution"(61), something I think Aristotle would deny. My interpretation of the natural coming-to-be of the polis differs in regarding political form as a determining and ever more determinant characteristic of a single process of formation. It is woven throughout by intentional actions, but no intentional action has the entire process as its scope, although redescrptions of intentional actions that are important for a community's identity are an aspect of the unfolding shape of the process. On this view the end of the polis *cannot* vary with its constitution. The end is always the good life, considered as the stable last phase of a natural process of social development. Different constitutions represent differing, and often contested, *conceptions* of the good life. Changes in constitutional forms do not make a city a city, but make it this sort of city or that sort. Here the intentional action of reformers or tyrants requires little redescription. But these actions, which Keyt takes to be identical in kind with those responsible for the emergence of cities from villages, already presuppose a sort of political discourse that could only exist within cities. Cities can hardly, then, come to be intentionally from villages under such descriptions, even if we are able to describe the earliest phases of a given city, or even of the first city, under redescrptions of this sort.

Notes:

¹Keyt, David, 1987. "Three Fundamental Theorems in Aristotle's Politics," Phronesis XXXII: 1: pp. 54-79. Further references to page numbers of this article are given in parentheses in the text.

²Barker, E., 1946. The Politics of Aristotle (London), p. 7, n. 1. Quoted by Keyt, pp. 55-56.

³This interpretation of human politicality agrees with that of John Cooper, who writes:

The fundamental point about the nature of human beings that grounds the biological classification is that humans have the capacity for, and are regularly found taking part in cooperative activities involving differentiation of function. . . Language gives human beings the capacity, which no other animal has, to conceive of their own and other's long term and short term advantage or good, and so to conceive of justice and injustice as well, since . . . in general what is just is what is to the common advantage or good of some relevant group. The consequence of having, through language, these capacities is, I take it, that the kind of work that human beings can do together, in which their being political animals will show itself, is of a much higher order of complexity than that which bees or cranes can manage. Human beings form and maintain households and cities, whereas bees can only have hives and cranes only form elaborate and differentiated migration scheme.

Cooper, John, "Political Animals and Civic Friendship," Symposium Aristotelicum, forthcoming.

⁴ Cf. for instance, Waterloë (Broadie), S., 1982. Nature, Change and Agency (Oxford).

⁵ Stewart, J.A., 1982, Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle (Oxford), note to 1103a19. Quoted by Keyt, p. 62.

⁶ Mulgan, R.G, 1974. "Aristotle's Doctrine That Man is a Political Animal," Hermes 102, p. 444.

⁷ Mulgan, 1974, pp. 445-6.

⁸ I argue elsewhere that Aristotle's repeated assertion in HA (487a33-488a8) that anthropos 'dualizes' (epamphoterizein) between gregarious and solitary and ways of life is intended not to account for exceptional individuals, but to mark off a constraint on gregariousness that allows the household, and other mediating institutions to retain their relative autonomy and identity within more complex forms of human aggregation and differentiation. Cf. "Political Animals," unpublished participant paper, NEH Summer Institute on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Biology and Ethics, University of New Hampshire, 1987.

⁹ Karl Marx shows himself an insightful student of Aristotle when he writes that "Man is by nature a zoon politikon--not merely a gregarious animal, but one who individuates himself only in the midst of his fellow humans."

¹⁰ Keyt holds that Aristotle would reject invisible hand arguments, on the same ground (presumably) that he rejects Empedocles evolutionary theory of organic development (58). They reduce a process that is clearly intelligible (hence natural) to chance or luck. But the kind of redescriptions I am talking about are not invisible hand arguments. In the paradigmatic invisible hand argument the social good arises spontaneously or accidentally from the pursuit of a competing, private good. In Aristotle's account of the development of the polis the natural politicality of anthropos rules this out and undergirds the naturalness of the developing social relations that emerge from human actions.