

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF THE POLIS:
Political Naturalism and the Natural Polis in Aristotle's *Politics*

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Abstract

Aristotle argues in Chapter 2 of Book I of the *Politics* that the polis exists by nature. I argue that this notion of a natural polis, what I call the Naturalness Thesis, is fundamentally important to Aristotle's political philosophy. The Naturalness Thesis is discussed in only one place by Aristotle, and it is found alongside two further claims—the claim that humans are the most political animal and the claim that the polis is naturally prior to the individual. Together these three ideas constitute Aristotle's political naturalism. I begin by examining the relationship between the Naturalness Thesis and the other two claims. I argue that the Naturalness Thesis is the central idea in Aristotle's political naturalism. I then proceed to defend the argument Aristotle gives in support of the Naturalness Thesis from David Keyt's critique of it. Keyt argues that Aristotle's argument is unsuccessful and that, furthermore, Aristotle himself has reason to believe the polis exists by art rather than nature. Because of this, Keyt believes that there is a blunder in Aristotle's political naturalism. I argue that it is Keyt, and not Aristotle, who blunders. Keyt makes the mistake of interpreting Aristotle's account of the rise of the polis out of the village and household as an account of three distinct social arrangements. As I see it, Aristotle is instead suggesting that village, household, and polis are three stages in the development (or growth) of one thing, namely the polis. That is, households and villages are essentially the same (they contain the same form) as the polis, though they are underdeveloped. Finally, I expound on the Naturalness Thesis by interpreting

Aristotle's account of the rise of the natural polis from a number of perspectives. First, the account is sociobiological: Aristotle's polis is literally a naturally living thing. Second, the account is historical: it alludes to other accounts of prehistory and reveals Aristotle's ascription to the theory of a perpetual rise and fall of civilization. Third, the account is ethical: it seeks to break down the distinction between *nomos* (=law) and *phusis* (=nature) to ground politics in nature.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	iii
One: Introduction	1
Two: The Naturalness Thesis Within Aristotle's Political Naturalism	
Introduction	5
Political Human Nature and the Naturalness Thesis	5
The Linguistic Argument and the Naturalness Thesis	12
The Priority Argument and the Naturalness Thesis	14
Conclusion	18
Three: The Naturalness Thesis Defended	
Introduction	21
Aristotle's Blunder?	21
Keyt's Blunder	26
Conclusion	37
Four: The Naturalness Thesis Expounded	
The Naturalness Thesis as Metaphor	39
The Sociobiology of the Natural Polis	43
The History of the Natural Polis	52
The Normativity of the Natural Polis	56
Conclusion	61
Bibliography	64

Chapter One

Introduction

Aristotle argues in *Pol I.2* that the polis exists by nature. This idea is the subject of my thesis, and I shall argue that it is crucially important to understanding Aristotle's political philosophy. The claim that the polis exists by nature is what I will call the Naturalness Thesis. Aristotle argues plainly in the *Physics* (192b9ff.) that there are things which exist by nature. The Naturalness Thesis is the view that the polis is one of these things. Aristotle tells us (*Phy* II.3-6) that things not existing by nature exist by art, spontaneity, or chance. Things that exist by nature, however, are naturally generated (*Phy* 192b9) and *Pol I.2* provides an account of the natural generation of the polis out of the village and household. *Pol I.2* is the only place Aristotle ever provides an account for how the polis arises, and it is the only place the Naturalness Thesis is ever mentioned.¹

The Naturalness Thesis is one of three theses in *Pol I.2*. The second is that humans are the most political of animals, and the third that the polis is naturally prior to the individual. Together, these three theses constitute what I will call Aristotle's "political naturalism." The relationship between the Naturalness Thesis and the other two theses will be considered in Chapter Two. In that chapter, I argue that the Naturalness Thesis is the most important thesis of Aristotle's political naturalism. Moreover, the Naturalness Thesis does not depend on the more general point about the human species' political nature. The second thesis of *Pol I.2* is that we are the *most* political animals. This is

¹ Actually, Aristotle has another account of the generation of the polis in the dialogue *On Philosophy* but unfortunately, no fragment of this account is extant. For an elaborate discussion of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, see Festugière, *Dieu Cosmique*, 219ff.

different from the more fundamental (and biological) claim about the kind of animal humans are. The idea that humans are political animals is found in several places throughout the *Corpus Aristotelicum*.² The pervasiveness of the latter idea had led some commentators to think that the Naturalness Thesis is grounded in human nature qua political.³ And while there is something to be said for this interpretation, I think it runs the risk of weakening Aristotle's political naturalism. Moreover, *Pol* I.2 itself has no argument, nor any explanation, for the specific notion that humans are political animals. The second thesis—that we are the most political animal—follows from the so-called Linguistic Argument of *Pol* I.2, an argument that our capacity for speech is related to the fact that we are political animals. I will argue that this thesis depends on the thesis that the polis is a natural thing. I will also show that the argument Aristotle gives for the polis' priority over the individual is secondary to the Naturalness Thesis. In sum, Chapter Two argues three points: first, the Naturalness Thesis is not grounded in the mere fact of our political human nature; second, the thesis that humans are the most political animal relies on the Naturalness Thesis; and third, the Naturalness Thesis underpins Aristotle's argument that the polis is prior to the individual. With these claims I conclude that the Naturalness Thesis is the central idea of Aristotle's political naturalism.

Chapter Three moves to defend Aristotle's argument for the Naturalness Thesis. In an influential paper,⁴ David Keyt argues that Aristotle's argument for the Naturalness Thesis does not succeed. Keyt agrees with my claim that the Naturalness Thesis is the

2 See *Pol* 1278b19; *EE* 1242a23; *EN* 1097b11, 1162a18, 1169b18. And at *HA* 488a7, Aristotle provides his definition for “political animal.”

3 See esp. Miller, “Aristotle's Political Naturalism,” 211. But see also Kullman's “Man as a Political Animal” for a similar strategy.

4 Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems.”

primary thesis of Aristotle's political naturalism and that it is fundamental to his political philosophy generally. But, he thinks that there is a blunder in Aristotle's argument. Moreover, Keyt argues that the importance Aristotle gives to the legislator and statesman in founding the polis offers Aristotle reason to deny the Naturalness Thesis. In other words, Keyt believes that Aristotle should see the polis as an artificial thing—that is, that the polis exists by art rather than nature. I think that it is Keyt, and not Aristotle, who blunders. Keyt's critique rests on what he calls the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle. He argues that Aristotle's claim to the polis' naturalness is derived from a faulty line of reasoning. Keyt understands Aristotle as arguing that that the naturalness of pre-political communities bestows naturalness on the polis. I agree that Aristotle's argument relies on something like the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle. However, my reading of *Pol I.2* differs from Keyt's in that, as I understand Aristotle, the pre-political communities (viz. the household and the village) are formally equivalent to the polis. That is, the form of pre-political communities is identical with that of the polis. Pre-political communities are underdeveloped poleis. Smaller human communities contain the same form as the polis, but they have not yet reached their full potential as poleis. I conclude that my reading saves Aristotle's political naturalism from Keyt's accusation.

My reading of *Pol I.2* is defended in Chapter Four. There I argue that the account of the origin of the polis is sociobiological. The polis is literally a natural thing. Furthermore, it is a living thing with parts that operate organically. And, this is consistent with Aristotle's hylomorphism. The form of the polis is its constitution, and its matter is the inhabitants and territory. The sociobiology of the polis is the salient feature of the

Naturalness Thesis. But, this does not exhaust the full meaning. The account Aristotle gives of the origin of the polis is important from a historical perspective. Aristotle is alluding to other accounts of prehistory, and he is revealing a cyclical theory of history that is relevant to his political thought. Finally, I argue that the Naturalness Thesis has a normative dimension that seeks to break down the antithetical distinction between νόμος and φύσις and ground politics in nature.

I think that this investigation of *Pol* I.2 is relevant to the study of Aristotle. Aristotle's political philosophy is often neglected, and contemporary scholarship on Aristotle's ethics only occasionally includes any discussion of the *Politics*. However, for Aristotle, ethics and politics go together, and I find myself sympathetic to this view. Furthermore, recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in Aristotle's political thought by a handful of scholars.⁵ Unfortunately though, Keyt and others have pushed the current discussion away from the Naturalness Thesis. Much more emphasis is placed on Aristotle's notion that humans are political animals. I think this is a mistake, and my thesis attempts to show why.

5 I say “renewed” because, whereas most of the 20th century had nothing at all to say about Aristotle's *Politics*, at the end of the 19th century, Aristotle's political theory was more popular than ever. In fact, the first English translation of anything by Aristotle was Newman's (1902) superb four-volume labour of love, *The Politics of Aristotle*.

Chapter Two

The Naturalness Thesis Within Aristotle's Political Naturalism

Introduction

Pol I.2 contains three closely inter-connected arguments: In addition to the argument for the naturalness of the polis (1252a18-1253a7), Aristotle argues that humans are the most political of animals (1253a7-18) and that the polis is by nature prior to the individual (1253a18-39).⁶ I define Aristotle's political naturalism as the conjunction of these three arguments.⁷ The connection between them shall be explored in this chapter. I will show that the claim that the polis is natural (the Naturalness Thesis) grounds the other two claims. So, on my view, the Naturalness Thesis is the primary thesis of Aristotle's political naturalism.

Political Human Nature and the Naturalness Thesis

With Aristotle as with us, the term “political” (πολιτικὸν) enjoys a wide range of meanings. In modern English usage, “political” can narrowly refer to that which concerns the organization and administration of the state. But, its meaning sometimes widens to characterize (the study of) social relations of any kind involving questions of

⁶ I have deliberately avoided translating the term “polis.” This is consistent with contemporary scholarship on Aristotle's *Politics*. I do so to avoid implying anything about the applicability of Aristotle's political thought to contemporary political theory. Translating the term “state” might suggest that Aristotle's political philosophy is appropriately directed at modern nation-states, while translating it “city” can suggest the opposite. A translation to “city-state” is not much better. Besides this, the *OED* and *Webster's 3rd* recognize both “polis” and “poleis” as English words. S.v. n. 40 below.

⁷ Cf. Miller, “Aristotle's Political Naturalism,” 196, who defines it as only the first view (i.e. that the polis is natural). Because I argue below that the other two theses are secondary, and because I think the three theses taken together lay the groundwork for Aristotle's political thought, I include all three under the heading “political naturalism.” But, the term is not intended to be associated with (neo-)Aristotelian ethical naturalism. On this last point, see Miller, “Aristotle's Political Naturalism,” 195 n. 1.

power (as in, e.g., Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*). For Aristotle, *πολιτικὸν* is, at its widest, a technical category that subdivides gregarious animals. Basically, and this will be explored below, the wider sense of “political” is synonymous with “cooperative.” Elsewhere in Aristotle, however, the term has a more familiar meaning. *EN* X.7-9 uses *πολιτικῆς* to describe the art of politicians—the “political art” (1177b15, 1180b31, 1181a23). In much of the *Politics*, *πολιτικὸν* is used to identify the active life spent devoted to statesmanship—the “political life” (1324a32, 1324a40, 1329a30). But, in *Pol* I.2, the term is used biologically: “man is by nature a political animal (*πολιτικὸν ζῷον*)” (1253a3).

This statement is among the most well-known of Aristotle's. It is also among the most often misunderstood. Sometimes readers unfamiliar with Aristotle's political philosophy take the phrase to be democratic—that we have a natural right to participate in politics.⁸ But, for Aristotle, political rights for non-Greeks and women are contrary to nature.⁹ Also, Aristotle provides a theory of natural slavery (in Book I), and this alone suggests that we should not take the phrase to imply some universal political ability present in all humans as such. Another interpretation is required. Others interpret “political” in this passage to mean simply polis-dwelling—the so-called narrow sense of “political.”¹⁰ To say that man is a polis-dwelling animal does not compromise the humanity of those living outside the polis, nor does it imply that humans have always

8 Apparently, this mistake is sometimes made even by those addressing Aristotle's political philosophy. Kullman points this out and provides examples: “Man as a Political Animal,” 94 n. 3.

9 See *Pol* 1253b15-1255a2 and *Pol* 1261b16-1262b36. Note esp. 1254a21-23.

10 See Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory*, 23ff.; Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems,” 123, 125; and Kraut, “Nature,” 202. On the advantages and disadvantages of this narrow view: Miller, “Aristotle's Political Naturalism,” 198-201.

lived in the polis.¹¹ All it means is that man has the potential for forming and living in a polis. Yet this reading suggests that only humans are political since only humans are polis-dwelling. This is a problem given the second part of *Pol* I.2 where it is argued that man is the most political animal, more (μᾶλλον) than “bees or any other gregarious (ἀγελαίου) animals” (1253a8). Thus, in order to sustain this (narrow) interpretation, one must argue that Aristotle is switching senses of the term in the space of a few lines. Indeed, Aristotle does sometimes use “political” to mean “polis-dwelling,” and there are advantages to interpreting this particular line in that way. But given that the idea that man is a political animal is not unique to the *Politics*—and where the phrase is found elsewhere, it is meant in a wider sense—and given that a wider sense is adopted in the very chapter in question, there are good reasons to be skeptical that such a narrow sense is meant in this passage.

In my opinion, then, the best way to understand the line is to adopt a wider sense of “political.”¹² This wider sense includes non-humans among political animals. In the *History of Animals*, Aristotle distinguishes between solitary (μοναδικά) and herding or gregarious (ἀγελαῖα) animals (487b33ff.). Of gregarious animals, Aristotle mentions pigeons, cranes, swans, bees, wasps, and ants. Importantly, some gregarious animals are political (πολιτικά) while others are sporadic or independent (σποραδικα). Political animals include wasps, cranes, bees, and ants. Sporadic gregarious animals include the pigeon and swan. What separates sporadic from political animals is that political animals

11 Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 98f. appears to object to this, but his argument will be taken up in Chapter Four.

12 This interpretation is found in Miller, “Aristotle's Political Naturalism”; Cooper, “Political Animals,”; Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*; and Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal.”

work (ἔργον) cooperatively toward some single end (488a7-8). Pigeons and swans gather in groups, but they do not cooperate to find food. Wasps, bees, ants, and cranes, on the other hand, work together to accomplish tasks. In this way, animals that are political are simply those that are cooperative. Political animals are further subdivided into those who submit to rulers (ἡγεμόνα) and those who do not (ἄναρχα). Cranes and many bees submit to rulers,¹³ but ants (apparently) do not. Humans, Aristotle tells us, are both solitary and gregarious. Presumably this is because we can either work alone or cooperate.¹⁴ I take it that the label “political” suggests nothing especially determinate about our relationship to the polis; it is rather a description of our behaviour. We are not told whether humans are hegemonic (i.e., whether they submit to rulers), but Aristotle's depiction in *Pol* I.2 of the family and village as analogous to a monarchy suggests that we are. This hypothesis is strengthened by Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. Natural slaves lack the capacity for deliberation and as such they are incapable of ruling; they submit (naturally) to rule. Likewise, non-slaves have a desire to rule. Even saying this much, it is clear that Aristotle would place humans among the hegemonic political animals.¹⁵

It is also pertinent to point out that for Aristotle, humans are the model species and superior to all other animals (*HA* 588b4-589a4). It is only in humans that the natural parts are according to nature (*PA* 656a10ff.); we are the most natural of animals.¹⁶ So,

13 Interestingly, Aristotle knows that the rulers of bees are female, but he calls them kings, and not queens (*GA* 759a20).

14 The idea of our “dualizing” nature is noted by Kraut (*Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 249).

15 For some fascinating commentary on Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, see Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 277-304.

16 For elaboration on this idea, see Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*, 186-91. See also, Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 109; and *PA* 644a23-644b7 should be conferred.

determining what is natural for Aristotle is not simply a matter of statistical observation; it involves understanding how superior animals relate to the inferior ones. In this way, we might say that the products of sub-human political cooperation in ants and other political animals pale in comparison with the elaborate works of the human race.

Taking this into consideration, I contend that the mere fact that we are political animals is not especially relevant to the *Politics*. The claim *in itself* is not profound or abstruse. Aristotle never presents it that way. Rather, it is merely a description of human social behaviour.¹⁷ The only other place we find *πολιτικὸν ζῶον* in the *Politics* is in III.6.¹⁸ Aristotle uses the premise to conclude that “men, even when they do not require one another's help, desire to live together; not but that they are also brought together by their common interests” (1278b19-21). This, it seems, reiterates that humans are a gregarious species that cooperates to achieve some common end.¹⁹ My contention that our political human nature is overemphasized is helped by the fact that *Pol* I.2 contains no argument defending the claim that we are by nature political.²⁰ The second-part of *Pol* I.2, the so-called Linguistic Argument which discusses language and its function, is an

17 To be clear: the statement “humans are political animals” is *in itself* a mere description of our behaviour. This is not to say that the fact of our political natures is not relevant to some teleological or ethical considerations about humans. We might say that the fact that we are political animals matters to the way we live (ethically) or that it matters to a discussion of human purposes (teleologically). But, such considerations do not make the statement as such teleological or ethical. The statement itself is just descriptive—it merely gives a name to the type of work we do, viz. cooperative work.

18 I am also convinced that the other four instances of the phrase (q.v. n. 2 above) are consistent with my contention.

19 Cf. Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 170 n. 22 who uses the passage as evidence that Aristotle is a social contractarian. See also, Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 101f.: that this passage is a response to the atomists' view (and Plato's) that it is primarily need that brings people together. And see Kraut, “Nature,” 203f.: that this passage underscores the non-rationality of the political impulse without denying the advantages that follow from it.

20 Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems,” 131-133 makes the case for a telic argument for our political human nature at *Pol* 1252b34-1253a7. Keyt decides that the argument is fallacious, but in Chapter Three, I disagree with Keyt that this is an argument at all.

argument defending the thesis that humans are the *most* political animal. In my opinion, it is this claim that is of greater importance to Aristotle's political philosophy. But, before moving to discuss this idea, we must answer to the view that it is our political human nature which grounds the naturalness of the polis.

This view is not uncommon in the literature, but ultimately it weakens Aristotle's political naturalism.²¹ The view as it is typically defended relies on the Linguistic Argument (1253a7-18). There, Aristotle states that we are the most political animal because of our capacity for speech ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$). Speech is what allows us to discern justice and injustice, and only a community of such animals can constitute a polis. However, as I have been stressing, it is important to recognize that the Linguistic Argument is not an argument for the biological claim that we are political animals. Rather, it is an argument that we are *most* political animal. If we fail to observe the distinction, the Linguistic Argument will appear to suggest that our political human nature follows from the fact that humans dwell in poleis. But if so, our political human nature follows only if we take “political” in the narrow sense of “polis-dwelling.” As I have argued, however, there is reason to be skeptical of this interpretation of the term.

Now, the idea that the Linguistic Argument somehow grounds the Naturalness Thesis derives from the way in which our natural capacity for the political life—that is, our natural capacity for polis-dwelling—is teleologically connected to the polis. The potential for political activity is actualized in the polis.²² This is certainly true. Notice,

21 That this a popular view is shown by the relatively slight emphasis typically given to the claim that the polis is a natural entity combined with the fact that whole chapters and even books are devoted to the idea that we are political animals. But for specific defences of the view, see Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal”; Miller, “Aristotle’s Political Naturalism”; Chan, “Blunder”; and Yack, *Problems of a Political Animal*, 90-96.

22 “Political” here in the narrow sense. I.e. our potential for polis-related political activity, as for instance

however, that this is a top-down argument, and one susceptible to a problematic counter-example. For Aristotle, poetry is also the product of natural capacities. Aristotle writes that we have a natural capacity to imitate and a natural capacity to appreciate works of imitation (*Poet* 1448b5-9). But the products of mimetic arts do not exist by nature. Nature has given us the capacity to produce art, but we cannot say that therefore the products of art are natural. We must concede the following principle: any thing which has as a necessary condition some natural capacity is not from that fact alone a natural thing.²³ Whether the Linguistic Argument can succeed without the Naturalness Thesis will be discussed shortly, but it should now be clear that the argument cannot itself establish the Naturalness Thesis. This is why I urge a reading in which the argument for the naturalness of the polis is logically prior to the Linguistic Argument. Furthermore, the Linguistic Argument must contend with the fact that for Aristotle, our capacity to discern justice and injustice is acquired by habituation and directed by practical wisdom: “none of the moral excellences arises in us by nature” (*EN* 1103a19-20). Indeed, our capacity to discern justice is natural, but that capacity is not a sufficient condition for justice. Finally, the view that our political nature grounds the Naturalness Thesis tends to overlook an important organic component stressed by Aristotle. The account of the origin of the polis depicts the polis as organic. There are numerous similarities between the polis and a living organism. To argue that the polis is natural only because our capacities for living in it are natural is to omit or weaken this aspect of the account. Whether this organic depiction is merely an analogy will be addressed later, but there

in being a politician, is actualized in the polis.

23 See as another example, *EN* 1103a23-25 respecting moral excellences: “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature, do excellences arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.”

would be no reason for Aristotle to present the polis organically if it could be said to be natural just because humans have natural political capacities.

The Linguistic Argument and the Naturalness Thesis

The Linguistic Argument concludes that we are the most political animal. This, I submit, is a conclusion that relies on the Naturalness Thesis, and I will explain why. Let us examine the argument in a little more detail. Aristotle claims that nature makes nothing in vain (1353a9). Then he claims that nature has given humans (and only humans) the capacity for speech (1353a10). Implied is the idea that a natural capacity for speech must have some purpose, since any useless natural capacity would be given in vain. Aristotle proceeds to discuss the purpose of speech—that without it, we could not discern the just and unjust (1253a15). It follows that humans alone can discern justice. The crucial move comes next where Aristotle tells us that “the association of living beings who have this sense makes (ποιεῖ) a family (οἰκίαν) and a state (πόλιν)” (1253a17-18). Aristotle leaves it to us to complete the argument. I suggest that two tacit premises are needed: (a) a necessary condition for the making of poleis is the capacity to discern justice; and (b) animals with the capacity for making poleis are more political than those without such a capacity. Given these premises, the rest follows without difficulty. Since humans are the only animal capable of discerning justice, they are the only animal capable of making poleis. As such, humans are the most political animal. But premise (b) is confusing and ultimately unnecessary unless the Naturalness Thesis is kept in mind. Non-human animals are incapable of making artificial things: “in the

animals other than man, they make things neither by art nor after inquiry or deliberation” (*Phy* 199a20). Of course, spiders spin webs and birds build nests much like humans build houses. But houses are artificial things, whereas spiders' webs and birds' nests are natural (*Phy* 199a26). And because non-human animals are incapable of artificial production, premise (b) is superfluous if the polis is artificial. In fact, it is difficult to understand what Aristotle should mean at all in putting forth the Linguistic Argument if it stands independently of the Naturalness Thesis. Without the idea that the polis is a natural entity, comparable to other natural things like say a beehive, the conclusion would follow simply from the claim that humans alone are capable of artificial production.

This should help us to grasp the meaning of the Linguistic Argument. Aristotle is pointing to the polis as the model example of what can be achieved through natural cooperation; the polis is the pinnacle of natural social achievement in the animal kingdom. Humans are superior not only because they alone are capable of artificial production; they are superior because even their natural cooperativeness excels above other animals. Humans are naturally superior because they can combine their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency—on this level of cooperative output, no other animal approaches.

With this interpretation of the Linguistic Argument, we can begin to see the fluidity of the chapter. The first and largest chunk develops an account of the genesis of the polis concluding that it is natural. As something built and inhabited by the same animals for the sake of which it exists, it closely resembles a beehive or a bird's nest. It is also like a beehive or a bird's nest because it is the product of cooperative work. Humans are like bees and birds not only because they are gregarious, but because they work

cooperatively (i.e. they are political). Here, we can test the view that humans are the most superior animal. Aristotle decides that as the most superior animal, humans will be the most superior political animal, and in turn the most political of political animals. The polis proves the correctness of this view. Humans have the special capacity to discern justice and to express it in their work. Political participation requires that citizens are capable of discerning justice, just as the participation itself is an expression of justice. Now, at this point in *Pol I.2*, Aristotle has discussed the natural genesis of the polis for the sake of individuals, and he has discussed the natural capacities of individuals for the sake of the polis. But here a new question emerges: which is by nature prior, the polis or the individual?

The Priority Argument and the Naturalness Thesis

I turn now to the relationship between the final section of *Pol I.2* and the Naturalness Thesis. The argument Aristotle provides for the polis' priority over the individual (1253a18-39) is complex, and to see how it relates to the Naturalness Thesis, some elaboration of the argument itself will be necessary. First, what does it mean to say that something is by nature prior to something else? For the answer, we must turn to Aristotle's doctrine of natural priority.²⁴ In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes a number of priority types. For instance, something is prior *in substance* to another if it is more fully realized (e.g. 'man' is prior in substance to 'boy': 1050a4-5). Similarly, something is prior *in formula* to another if that thing's formula includes the other's, but the other's

²⁴ Much of the groundwork for this section of *Pol I.2* can be found in Keyt's copiously cross-referenced "Three Basic Theorems."

formula does not include its (e.g. a right angle is prior in formula to an acute angle: 1035b5). And something is prior *in nature* to another if and only if it can exist without the other but the other cannot exist without it (1019a3).²⁵ It is in this last sense that Aristotle means that the polis is prior to the individual: “the state (πόλις) is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part” (1253a18-20). Aristotle follows this with the example of the body's priority to the hand noting that if the whole body is destroyed, the hand cannot exist, whereas if the hand is destroyed, the body can continue to exist.²⁶

But, Aristotle's doctrine of parts and wholes is more nuanced. If the hand is removed from the body, it ceases to exist entirely insofar as it is a hand (except homonymously). That is, the hand is teleologically (and hence, metaphysically) connected to the body. Its existence qua functioning part is dependent on the body, but the whole body qua functioning whole is not dependent on it. If we chop off a hand, the body can continue to function. We might still call the thing we chopped off a “hand,” but actually it is a hand in name only (homonymously). This is why Aristotle claims that “there will be no foot or hand, except homonymously (ὁμωνύμως), as we might speak of a stone hand” (1253a21-22). Aristotle then points out that things are defined by their work (ἔργῳ) and by their power or potential (δυνάμει) and that, metaphysically, a thing is no longer the same if it has lost these qualities—except homonymously (1353a23-24). Now, Aristotle makes the important move to draw an analogy between the body-hand example and the polis-dwelling individual. This passage is worth repeating:

25 For additional types of priority, see *Cat* 12. Also, see Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 257-76 for what Kraut calls “civic priority.”

26 There are many examples of amputated body parts illustrating this in *Met* VII.

The individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing (αὐτάρκης); 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 (αὐτάρκειαν) for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of the state. (1253a25-29)

It is not immediately clear how this passage has anything to do with the Naturalness Thesis. However, the case is easier to make given what Aristotle states at the beginning of this section. Aristotle begins this section by stating that the polis is prior to the individual “because the whole is of necessity (ἀναγκαῖον) prior to the part.” To establish this, a fact about *natural* wholes (that is, about the human body's priorness to its parts) is provided. Aristotle infers that natural wholes are always prior to natural parts, but here nothing commits Aristotle to the further generalization that all wholes (natural and non-natural) are prior to their parts. So, it would seem prudent to think that Aristotle means that only *natural* wholes are necessarily prior by nature to their parts, and his argument is effectively to establish the polis-individual relationship as one of natural wholes and parts.²⁷ Thus, the argument understood this way is related to the Naturalness Thesis because it requires that the polis is not just any whole, but a natural whole. Moreover, it seems odd to talk about something non-natural as being prior by *nature* (φύσει) to something else. Natural priority itself seems to be restricted to the realm of the natural.

My position here is only that the argument that the polis is prior to the individual

²⁷ My position here is admittedly weakened by the fact that Aristotle does not qualify his generalization—that he does not say that *only* natural wholes are necessarily prior to their parts. But, I suspect that this criticism might be met by proposing that the implication here is that the wholes Aristotle refers to are substances. It is noteworthy that in Book Zeta of the *Metaphysics*, the preferred example to illustrate the form-matter distinction is the bronze statue (an artifact). But, when Aristotle moves to discuss wholes and parts, his examples are only living organisms. On the other hand, artificial things do have parts (e.g. the rudder of a ship is a part), and it would be strange if Aristotle were to deny this.

is better understood if we bear in mind the naturalness of the polis.²⁸ As something natural, the polis can be explained as a whole and the individuals as the parts of that whole. The claim that the polis-individual relation is one of parts and wholes is centred on the fact that individuals isolated from the polis are not autarkic. Autarky is the level of self-sufficiency needed to realize human natural ends; it permits the pursuit of the good life (1256b31, 1326b8). Part of what it means for the polis to be natural is that the polis represents the only social arrangement in which resources can be sufficiently amassed to provide the means (e.g. leisure)²⁹ necessary for reaching our natural ends. Aristotle tells us that autarky is the nature (φύσις) of the polis (1252b31-1253a1). Self-sufficiency is the polis' function, since “self-sufficing is the end [of the polis] and best” (1253a1). An individual's realization of his natural ends is only possible in an autarkic polis, unless he is a beast or a god. The individual thus depends on the autarky of the polis. But, the autarky of the polis does not depend on the particular individual. In this way, the polis is prior by nature to the individual. And this confirms the more general metaphysical claim that natural wholes are necessarily prior to their parts (*Met* VII.10-11).

With this, we can see that the final section of *Pol* I.2 culminates the discussion so far in three ways. First, it settles a question that is likely to arise from the discussion that preceded it. In the first section, Aristotle is concerned with the polis' teleological relation

28 Thus, respecting the question of priority, the Naturalness Thesis is not *logically* prior to the third argument (i.e. the Priority Argument) of *Pol* I.2. The Naturalness Thesis is, as I have argued, logically prior to the second thesis. And it is *important* to the third thesis, but not necessary for the Priority Argument to succeed. In this chapter, I am aiming to establish the primacy of the Naturalness Thesis to Aristotle's political naturalism. With regard to the Linguistic Argument, the Naturalness Thesis is necessarily prior. Respecting the Priority Argument however, the role of the Naturalness Thesis is weaker. Nevertheless, the Priority Argument is *improved* by the Naturalness Thesis, and so, in my opinion, the Naturalness Thesis remains the primary idea.

29 On the importance of leisure, see Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, ch. 2.

to the individual. It is revealed that the polis exists for the sake of the good life of individuals. In the second section, Aristotle is concerned with the individuals' teleological relation to the polis: humans have the special capacity to discern justice and this capacity exists for the sake of its expression in the polis. But, the reader may wonder, given this teleological relationship, which is prior to the other. The third section reveals that it is the polis which is prior to the individual. Second, the section confirms Aristotle's generalization from the *Metaphysics* that natural wholes are necessarily prior to their parts. Since the polis can exist autarkically without the particular individual, but the particular individual cannot exist autarkically without the polis, and since the polis is a whole which has individuals as its parts, it is another example of a whole that is prior by nature to its parts. Finally, this section reinforces the preceding two sections. It reinforces the Linguistic Argument by locating in our highly political natures an innate capacity for political life in a relationship motivated by the drive for self-sufficiency. Furthermore, it reinforces the Naturalness Thesis by presenting the polis as biologically analogous to the human body.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have tried to demonstrate the centrality of the Naturalness Thesis to Aristotle's political naturalism. Given a wide interpretation of the term "political," our political human nature cannot itself ground the claim that the polis exists by nature. Likewise, neither of the two subsequent arguments in *Pol* I.2 can be said to lay the foundations for the idea. The Naturalness Thesis cannot be grounded on the idea that we

are the *most* political animal. Nor does it follow from the natural priority of the polis over the individual. In fact, as I have argued, the two theses that follow the Naturalness Thesis are secondary to it. The Linguistic Argument that establishes humans as the most political animal depends on a tacit premise that an animal's capacity for making poleis defines that animal as more political. But, this premise is redundant unless the polis is a natural entity. For the Linguistic Argument to be meaningful, it must take for granted the truth of the Naturalness Thesis. Likewise, the argument Aristotle provides to conclude the priority of the polis is derived from a generalization about wholes and parts. It is best to avoid extending this generalization to include non-natural wholes since the fact provided as the basis for this induction is a fact about a naturally existing thing, just like the polis. In this way, the Naturalness Thesis improves the argument for the priority of the polis.

This chapter is meant to establish the basis for concluding the centrality of the Naturalness Thesis. Such a conclusion is already suggested by the order in which Aristotle presents the three arguments in *Pol* I.2. With regard to the inter-relatedness of the three theses, their collection inside a single chapter itself testifies to this notion. Still, to demonstrate this relation, I argued for the importance of the Naturalness Thesis. Additionally, I suggested that the content of *Pol* I.2 is structurally fluid. The account of the origin of the polis establishes the polis as a natural thing and the product of the cooperative work of political animals. But then, the polis resembles other natural dwellings produced by other political animals. The degree to which we are political animals is, in this sense, a connected inquiry. Likewise, the third section flows from the

preceding two. The first argument emphasizes the polis and its teleological relation to the individual. The second argument emphasizes the individual's relation to the polis. It is thus pertinent to ask whether the polis is prior to the individual, or vice versa, or neither—the subject of the third section. Therefore, I have examined the logical and structural ties between the Naturalness Thesis and the other sections of *Pol* I.2. I conclude that the Naturalness Thesis is central to Aristotle's political naturalism, and we must now turn to an analysis of the argument that Aristotle provides to establish the truth of the thesis.

Chapter Three

The Naturalness Thesis Defended

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the Naturalness Thesis in detail, and argue that it is consistent with Aristotle's philosophy. In doing so, I am contending with David Keyt's much discussed essay in which it is alleged that "there is a blunder at the very root of Aristotle's political philosophy."³⁰ Keyt's allegation is that the none of the Aristotle's arguments for the thesis that the polis exists by nature succeed, and that furthermore, Aristotle has reason to deny it. I say that Keyt is himself subject to a blunder. My allegation is that Keyt mistakenly sees the polis as a thing distinct from villages and households. To be in line with Aristotle, Keyt should instead see that the polis is the development of these more basic social arrangements, which is to say that household, village, and polis are three stages of the same thing. With this, we can save Aristotle's thesis from Keyt's critique, and show that there is no blunder after all.

Aristotle's Blunder?

Most thinkers in modern political philosophy have found the idea that polis exists naturally a thoroughly false one. Hobbes is likely thinking of Aristotle when he opens his introduction to the *Leviathan* with the claim that the state exists by art rather than nature.³¹ To claim that the state is artificial (i.e. that it exists by art) is not only to deny

³⁰ Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems," 118.

³¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Intro., 1: "For by Art is created that great Leviathan called a Common-Wealth, or State." See also *De Cive* I.2 where Hobbes denies Aristotle's claim that man is a political animal.

the naturalness of the state, but to challenge Aristotle's other two theses as well, since—as I argued in Chapter Two—the Naturalness Thesis is the primary principle of political naturalism.

But, what does Aristotle mean in the first place to say that a thing exists by nature? According to Book II of the *Physics*, natural existence depends on two conditions being met. First, things that exist by nature are caused by nature (192b8).³² This is important to the Naturalness Thesis because Aristotle never explicitly claims that the polis has a natural origin, even though commentators typically take this as implied.³³ Second, things existing by nature have an internal source of motion (192b12). Motion, we know from *De Anima* (415b22), can be locomotive, quantitative, or qualitative. The polis can achieve at least two types of motion in this respect, since it can change locations (locomotion), and it can grow in size (quantitative motion). Keyt agrees that the polis satisfies this condition for natural existence and even adds that qualitative motion is

32 Actually, this is not explicit. And this is perhaps true only for most things. Aristotle's words are: "Of things that exist, some exist by nature, some from other causes." And while "cause" does not always mean "efficient cause," I take it that this is the meaning here. Keyt, however, notes that some things that do not come to be by nature can exist by nature; celestial bodies, for instance, do not come to be at all in Aristotle's thought. And lice and worms come to be spontaneously, rather than by nature ("Three Basic Theorems," 123). But, the polis is not an eternal thing like celestial bodies, and Miller has his doubts about the natural existence of spontaneously generated organisms like lice and worms (Miller "Aristotle's Political Naturalism," 209 n. 24). Moreover, the quotation from the *Physics* is from the opening lines of Book II, and the subject of Book II is the distinction between things that *come to be* naturally, and those that do not (i.e. natural *genesis* as opposed to natural *existence*). It is for this reason that it is taken for granted, by Miller and most commentators (cf. n. 33 below) including Keyt, that the claim that the polis exists by nature is grounded in the claim to its natural genesis.

33 Cf. Yack, *Problems of a Political Animal*, 90-6. Yack believes that the the Naturalness Thesis is restricted to a claim about the polis existing according to nature. For Yack, some things can exist according to nature without having a nature, and the polis is one of them. However, Yack provides only one example, the burning of fire: fire has a nature, but the burning of fire, even though such burning exists according to nature, does not have a nature. And, I fail to see exactly how this is the burning of fire is even a thing at all, let alone a thing that exists by nature. Yack is perhaps (though no source is provided) referring to Fr. 20 (Philo, *de aeternitate mundi*, VI 28 – VII 34; p. 2395 in the *Complete Works*) where the "natural motion of fire" is mentioned..

instantiated in the perceptions and thoughts of state officials.³⁴

The issue, then, is not with discovering an internal source of motion. The problem as Keyt sees it, lies rather with the first condition for natural existence, the condition respecting natural genesis. For the polis to exist by nature, it must arise naturally. The problem is that the polis comes to be only when its constitution is established by some statesman or lawgiver, the constitution being the product of the art or “craft” of politics.³⁵ It would seem, then, that the natural genesis of the polis is precluded by its artificial causes. But, this is not the story we get in the second chapter of the *Politics*.

Here, Aristotle’s account of the polis’ coming to be (*Pol* 1252a24-b30) suggests that the polis arises naturally from a natural impulse to satisfy human needs (1252a29), both physical and otherwise. In short, the polis arises (naturally) from the natural desire for self-sufficiency.³⁶ To explain Keyt’s objection, we must understand the so-called Genetic Argument suggested by Aristotle’s account.³⁷ The basic thrust of the Genetic Argument is that the polis arises naturally because it arises from natural social arrangements that are prior in substance to it. There are many types of Aristotelian priority (as I pointed out in Chapter Two), but something *x* is prior *in substance* to *y* iff *x* is more fully developed or more fully realized than *y* (*Met* 1050a4-5). The most basic social arrangement, the household, arises naturally from the despotic and spousal

34 Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems,” 123. I return to this point in Chapter Four.

35 This is Aristotle’s own view in the *Politics*. That the statesman or lawgiver is a craftsman: 1324b40. That they are craftsmen of the constitution: 1325b40, 1274b18. That they are the cause of the polis: 1253a29.

36 Much is made of these natural impulses in the scholarship. On this, see esp. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 240-6.

37 What follows is a very brief summary of the complete Genetic Argument from Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems,” 128-30.

relations which are grounded in the respective instincts for self-preservation and procreation. A more complex social arrangement, the village, arises naturally from the household because it is prior in substance to it. This crucial move is facilitated by an important premise—if x is prior in substance to y , and y exists by nature, then x exists by nature too. This is a tacit premise Keyt calls the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle. Because of this principle, the village is natural because it is prior in substance to the household (a natural thing). And likewise, the polis is natural for the same reason.

This is Keyt's version of Aristotle's Genetic Argument, and I agree with Keyt—for the most part—that this is what Aristotle is trying to argue. Aristotle is arguing that because the household is prior in substance to the village—and because the household is natural—the village is natural also. But as Keyt notices, the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle is false. It is not always the case that where x is prior in substance to y , and y is natural, that x is natural. A house is prior in substance to its material. And the material of a house is natural, but houses exist by art according to Aristotle's own philosophy.³⁸ This is Keyt's reason for thinking that Aristotle's Genetic Argument does not succeed.

Keyt dismisses Aristotle's other putative arguments in *Pol* I.2 as well. A Telic Argument is apparently at work to show that because the polis exists for the sake of self-sufficiency, and because that for the sake of which something exists is best, the polis exists for the sake of the best.³⁹ Now, perhaps Aristotle is suggesting that because something that is natural exists for the sake of the best, the polis is therefore natural. As Keyt observes though, if Aristotle is in fact making this argument, it will be fallacious. It

38 See *PA* 646a24-29.

39 It is not clear from 1253a7-18 *whose* self-sufficiency and the best *what*. The empty language here is Aristotle's, and Keyt correctly points out ("Three Basic Theorems," 132) that it is cryptic.

does not follow from the premise that the polis is x and the premise that natural things are x that the polis is a natural thing. Keyt is of course correct that if Aristotle is making this argument, he is in error. However, I see no convincing reason to think that Aristotle is making any such argument. Keyt's purported Telic Argument, if it is made at all, is only two lines long. After the Genetic Argument for the Naturalness Thesis, Aristotle notes that, "Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best" (1252b34). Immediately following this, Aristotle concludes that, "Hence it is evident that the state is creation of nature" (1253a1).⁴⁰ The former line is not the premise to a separate argument, in my opinion. Rather, Aristotle adds it as an addendum to the Genetic Argument. He is saying that the Naturalness Thesis (the conclusion of the Genetic Argument) *explains why* self-sufficiency is the end and best. That is to say, self-sufficiency is the ultimate goal of social arrangements and it is best *because* the polis—qua limit of self-sufficiency (1252b27)—is a natural thing.

Keyt also critiques two additional arguments in the chapter. There is a Linguistic Argument suggesting that we alone have language, and so, we alone can discern justice. Since this capacity facilitates the polis, and since animals capable of facilitating poleis are most political, we are the most political of animals. This argument purports to establish the second thesis of political naturalism, but Keyt argues that it actually serves to

⁴⁰ This is Jowett's translation from the *Complete Works*. Two things are worth pointing out about this translation: First, Jowett translates "*polis*" as "state," and I concur with this translation. I think that in translating it "city" or even "city-state" a suggestion is being made that Aristotle's political philosophy is suited to the specific political context in ancient Greece, and that its relevance to modern nation-states is questionable. I prefer to think that Aristotle's political philosophy is flexible enough to warrant pertinence for modern political theory. So, I think of a polis as a state. However, in this essay I retain "polis" to forestall any such concerns. Q.v. n. 6. Second, and more to the point, Jowett adds a paragraph break between the two sentences and I think he is right to do so since it suggests (contra Keyt) that the latter is not the conclusion of a new (i.e. the Telic) argument contained entirely in the former line, but rather that it is the conclusion of the Genetic Argument and the former line is merely an addendum.

undermine it.⁴¹ The third thesis—that the polis is prior to the individual—is the conclusion of what Keyt labels the Organic Argument. And Keyt finds problems with this argument as well. I am not concerned here with either of these arguments, since they do not establish the Naturalness Thesis. Still, I should point out that one strategy in responding to Keyt's general accusation is to, first, challenge Keyt's assessment of one of these arguments, and then, argue that its corresponding thesis is primary to Aristotle's political naturalism. For example, we might defend Aristotle by showing that the Linguistic Argument is sound and correctly establishes the second thesis, and this second thesis is the primary thesis upon which the other two are derived.⁴² But this strategy is unnecessary since, as I will show, we can defend the Naturalness Thesis from Keyt's objections.

Keyt's Blunder

I turn now to my reply to Keyt's objection to the Naturalness Thesis. I agree with Keyt that the Genetic Argument, as it appears in *Pol* I.2, is an informal one subject to the criticism that it is unclear.⁴³ But this is far from saying that Aristotle is committing an error as damaging as the one suggested by Keyt. Of course, Aristotle is capable of making mistakes, and in the course of his prodigious contributions to so many areas of study, he has made a number. Yet, considering that political naturalism lies at the core of his political philosophy, Aristotle is unlikely to have held such a doctrine if it were

41 Basically, Keyt argues that because practical reason guides habituation, and justice is the product of habituation (*EN* 1103a18-1103b6 and 1179b20-24), justice depends on reason rather than nature, suggesting an artificial cause of the polis.

42 This is Miller's strategy in "Aristotle's Political Naturalism."

43 However, we will do well to remember that the *Politics* is a collection of lecture notes. For an fascinating essay on this, see Lord, "Character and Composition."

refutable as easily as Keyt suggests. I submit that it is Keyt's version of the Genetic Argument and not Aristotle's which blunders. Keyt's version overlooks a crucial point in Aristotle's account of the development of the polis: the household, village, and polis are not three different things, but rather three stages in the generation of the same thing, viz. the polis.

At least, this seems to be an oversight in Keyt's paper, the reason for which is located in the confusing definition he offers for substantial priority. When he describes the various types of Aristotelian priority, he describes each of them as ways in which *one thing* is prior or posterior to *another*. For example, when he defines natural priority, he writes: "One thing is *prior in nature* to another if, and only if, the one can exist without the other but not the other without the one."⁴⁴ This works well to explain why the sun is prior in nature to the plant, for instance. But I cannot accept the parallel definition Keyt gives to substantial priority: "a thing is *prior in substance* to another if, and only if, the one is more fully developed or more fully realized than the other."⁴⁵ Keyt provides as an example the difference between a boy and a man. The man is prior in substance to the boy, according to Keyt's definition. This is true. Yet, strictly speaking, nothing in Keyt's definition requires the two things to be related. So, is the sun also prior in substance to the boy? I draw out this complication below, but it suffices to note that this is not the technical meaning of substantial priority as Aristotle defines it. Whenever Aristotle discusses substantial priority,⁴⁶ he uses examples of the same substance at different stages of its development. The man *as he exists now* is prior in substance to himself *as he was*

44 Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems," 127.

45 Ibid., 126.

46 See *GA* 742a19 and *Met* 1050a4.

when he was a boy. Thus, I want to suggest a revised definition for substantial priority:

A thing (x) at stage (t_2) of its development is prior in substance to x at another stage (t_1) of its development iff at t_2 , x is more fully realized or developed than at t_1 .

I take it that this is actually what Keyt means when he describes substantial priority, since he says that if something is prior in substance, it is consequently posterior in generation. Nonetheless, if this is what Keyt means, he is being unclear in his definition and misleading in his examples.

Furthermore, this confusion leads Keyt to deny the truth of the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle and thus to discredit the Genetic Argument. Recall that the Genetic Argument establishes the naturalness of the polis from the naturalness of more basic social arrangements. The most basic social arrangement, the household, exists by nature because it arises out of natural impulses. Keyt concedes that the household exists by nature (about which concession, more will be said below), but denies that its naturalness can be logically transferred onto the polis. As Keyt understands it, the logical transference of naturalness depends on the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle which he states thus: "If one thing is prior in substance to another and if the other exists by nature, then the one exists by nature."⁴⁷ This is false according to Keyt, because houses exist by art even though they are prior in substance to their natural material. Notice, however, that stone, wood, and clay are distinct things (before they become the material of the house). They are not identical to the house. They are the matter of the house, certainly, but insofar as they are natural objects, they are distinct things with no inherent relation to the house. But, Keyt wishes this to be an analogy for the polis' relation to the village and

⁴⁷ Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems," 129.

household. So, for it to be analogous, we must think of the polis, village, and household as distinct things with different forms. As I will argue, I do not think that they are. Also, Keyt's definition of substantial priority—taken literally—can be applied to any two unrelated things. Keyt's definition assigns substantial priority to one thing (*any* one thing) that is more fully developed or realized than another thing (*any* other thing). Are we to say that my computer, for instance, which is more fully developed than my niece, can be considered prior in substance to her? And, does Keyt really believe that Aristotle's theory rests on a tacit premise that supposes that the artificiality of my computer suggests the artificiality of my niece? I doubt it. This is why I think that Keyt is actually suggesting something closer to my revised definition of substantial priority. The problem is that this confusion has misled others to think that the Genetic Argument is fallacious, and in an effort to save Aristotle, this interpretation of the chapter is rejected by them in favour of some other explanation.⁴⁸ I am not convinced that this interpretation commits Aristotle to a fallacy. Rather, I find that Keyt's counter-example is disanalogous, because for Aristotle the polis, village, and household are not essentially distinct things.

That they are not distinct things can be concluded from the chapter in question. Aristotle begins the chapter with a methodological point that is telling: “He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will

48 Miller, e.g., concedes that if we adopt this interpretation of natural existence it will entail the blunder Keyt suggests. And notice that Miller has been misled by Keyt's Transitivity Principle: when he reiterates this principle, he highlights the error in the definition of substantial priority: “Aristotle's argument relies upon a tacit premiss: If entity₁ is prior in completeness to (i.e. more complete than) entity₂, but entity₂ exists by nature, then entity₁ also exists by nature” (*Nature, Justice, and Rights*, 39). Nothing in this principle requires that the two entities be even related. But, as I see it, this commits Aristotle to the absurdity that my niece is artificial. Of course, Miller attempts to save Aristotle by reinterpreting the Naturalness Thesis and awarding argumentative priority to the thesis that man is a political animal, but I suggest that this is an unnecessary move, since I should think that both Miller and Keyt are presuming additional restrictions on the relation between the two entities.

obtain the clearest view of them” (1252a24). Aristotle then discusses the household. Aristotle wishes to have a clear view of the state, and he begins with it in its first growth—that is, the household. Later in the chapter, the claim is made that the state is the end, and thus the nature, of the household and village because “what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature” (1252b32).⁴⁹ These are reasons to think that the polis is the *fully formed thing*, and that the household is the *same thing* considered in its “first growth and origin.” What is hinted at toward the end of the chapter when the relationship between the polis and the individual is compared with the relationship between a whole body and the hand (1253a19-21)—and what becomes clear upon reading the *Generation of Animals* (II.6)—is that the basic relations between individuals (i.e. master-slave, husband-wife, parent-child) should be thought of as the internal parts that function just like parts of an organism. We should also notice that Book I of the *Politics* was written around the same time as the *Generation of Animals*.⁵⁰ In the latter, discussing the phenomenon of animal genesis from the embryonic stage, Aristotle writes that “the internal parts come into being before the external” (741b25). I contend that this is true in the development of the polis. Just like any animal, the polis' internal parts within a household (i.e. the basic social relations of master-slave, parent-child, and husband-wife) must come into being before the household. Its most basic parts (the relations within a household) arise from basic forces (natural impulses) for the sake of a natural end (self-sufficiency). Even though the polis may be able to reproduce at its adolescent stage, since families in the village can break away and settle elsewhere, its end is not reached at

49 It is interesting that regarding this line, Keyt claims: “This sentence, as far as I can see, adds nothing, or at any rate nothing coherent, to the foregoing argument” (“Three Basic Theorems,” 130).

50 See Rist, *The Mind of Aristotle*, 163.

that stage—it has not reached the limit of self-sufficiency—and it will continue to grow and develop until it realizes that end (in the polis). Thus, villages and households are proto-poleis, and as such they have a form identical to the fully developed polis. With a little luck and enough resources and time, and provided that nothing impedes them, all basic communities will grow up into their adult form as poleis.

My reading of this chapter, then, makes the following analogy: the household and village are to the polis as the child and boy are to the man. The thing is one and the same throughout the course of its development. Notably, we do not call them by the same name; the village is not called a “polis,” but neither do we call the boy a “man.” Yet both village and boy have that form (i.e. the respective forms “polis” and “man”) and potential. This is my interpretation of the chapter, and it is here only partly defended. But however we interpret Aristotle's account, I think it is clear that we should resist a conception of the village and the household as distinct things analogous to the materials of a house. Thus, I have located where I think Keyt blunders:

A thing that comes to be by nature comes to be through the agency of a distinct object that is the same in species as itself. But according to I.2 *the polis evolves from the village and the household, both of which differ in species (though not in genus) from the polis*. The only occasions when the generation of a polis fits Aristotle's theory of natural genesis are when one polis founds another (as Corinth, for example, founded Syracuse). The one community whose generation does fit Aristotle's theory is the family or household.... household generates household just as man generates man.⁵¹

Now, on my reading, the household, village, and polis are not three different species of the same genus (i.e. the genus “community”). Rather, they are one and the same species, and they are one and the same thing. The polis does not evolve in any sense at all, unless

⁵¹ Ibid., 122. Emphasis mine.

a boy can be said to *evolve* into a man—which is to say more precisely that he *grows* into a man. Finally, poleis “give birth” to poleis all the time, since whenever polis-dwellers leave the polis to settle elsewhere, their polis (or “motherland”) can be said to have reproduced itself. This is what happened with the Corinthian settlers who founded Syracuse, and this is what happens with settlers everywhere. Of course, it is not always the case that settlers are always successful founders of fully-developed poleis. But, neither does everything seeded in nature become what it has formal potential to be. Natural things have the same form as the things which produced them, whereas artificial things have their form imposed on them by the artificer (who has a form different from the thing produced). Settlers are like the seeds of the polis; insofar as they are families that struggle to grow and multiply, they have a form identical to the polis.⁵²

Thus, the Genetic Argument is a rather simple one on my reading. It makes sense for Aristotle to conclude that the polis exists naturally. If something is natural at its earliest stage of development, it will remain so during the (natural) course of its development. The polis is at its earliest stage of development as a household. At this stage, its existence is natural. Villages are the more complex social arrangements that tend to happen as the household grows. Aristotle's villages are described as “homogalactic” (i.e. suckled from the same milk). This alone should suggest that Aristotle has in mind something quite different from villages as they are typically understood.⁵³ The villages are more like dynastic clans. It is perhaps construed in this

52 This point is similar to Kraut in *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*. Kraut claims (contra Keyt) that “cities do emerge from proto-cities, as plants develop from seeds” (245). But, Kraut's seeds are the natural desires and plans of individuals, whereas for me, settlers-qua-families are the seeds and the individual desires are more like the soul within the seed, since these desires are the proto-polis' internal source of motion.

53 For a detailed discussion of Aristotelian villages, see Saunders' commentary *Politics Books I and II*,

way because Aristotle wishes his account to be free from external influences (or as free as possible). Theoretically, a single household—(almost) without any help—can develop into a fully formed polis. But let us return to the logic of the village's claim to naturalness given the naturalness of the household. If we apply my revised definition for substantial priority, we will see that the village is prior in substance to the household. Some particular homogalactic dynastic clan-village (i.e. x at t_2) is prior in substance to the its original ancestors' household (x at t_1) because it is now more fully developed—i.e. closer to being a polis—than it was then. Now, applying the Transitivity of Naturalness Principle, we can derive the naturalness of the village. In the same way, we can derive the principle thesis, that the polis exists by nature.. Notice, however, that we can conclude the Naturalness Thesis on even simpler grounds. In fact, we do not require the Transitivity Principle or even the definition for substantial priority. The premise required is this: if x is natural at the most basic stage of its development toward its natural end, then it is natural also at each stage in the course of its development. Compare this premise with the Aristotle's own conclusion from I.2: “Therefore every state exists by nature, since the first associations did too. For this association [i.e. the polis] is their end.” (1252b31).⁵⁴

Statesmen and Lawgivers

Even though I think that the argument thus far sufficiently counters Keyt's objection to the Genetic Argument for the Naturalness Thesis, it will not be enough to

66-7.

54 Saunders' translation.

dispel the accusation that Aristotle's political theory rests on a blunder. Keyt argues that not only is Aristotle's argument unsuccessful, but that Aristotle himself has reason to dismiss it entirely. In many places throughout the *Politics*, it is clear that statesmen and lawgivers are necessary agents for establishing the constitution of a polis.⁵⁵ Even in *Pol* I.2, this idea is present: “he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors” (1252a31). These founders and administrators of the polis are the craftsmen of the constitution. Their craft is the art of politics, but the whole point of such a craft—and any normative political theory as well—is lost if the art of politics is made redundant by the natural existence of the polis. Of course, the art of politics is not a redundant one; it is of central importance. So, how can the claim that the art of politics is centrally important be reconciled with the claim that polis exists naturally?

This problem is known as the nature-craft dilemma, and one answer to it is to note that there are several cases in which nature and craft cooperate. For example, craft cooperates with nature when medicine aids in bringing about health.⁵⁶ Likewise, midwifery (a craft) aids with birth (a natural process).⁵⁷ Keyt acknowledges these examples, but argues that they will not do.⁵⁸ Consider that nothing artificial comes to be *without* the cooperation of nature whereas everything natural that comes to be *with* the cooperation of art is capable of coming to be without it—and usually does. Nature's cooperation is necessary for artificial existence. But, art's cooperation is only rarely necessary for natural existence. Keyt adds that the polis comes to be in the same way that poetry does; it arises out of a natural impulse and is completed by a craft. The

55 Q.v. n. 27 above for these places.

56 *Phy* 194a21; *Pol* 1257b25.

57 *HA* VII.10.

58 Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems,” 120.

constitution is necessarily a product of the lawgiver and statesman. Also, Aristotle calls the founder of the polis the “greatest of benefactors,” suggesting first, that someone is necessary to found the polis, and second, that such a person (and not nature) is responsible for the goods that obtain. Thus, the examples that purport to solve the nature-craft dilemma (with this answer) do not match the importance Aristotle places on the art of politics in the establishment of the polis.⁵⁹

We must look elsewhere. Another answer to the nature-craft dilemma is, in my opinion, more promising. Moreover, it chimes nicely with my reading of the Genetic Argument in *Pol* I.2. In a little-known essay by Joseph Chan,⁶⁰ a distinction is drawn between the polis-type community and the various forms that the polis takes on. The polis type of community has basic natural or essential characteristics that have human nature as their inner source of change. These characteristics are present in all poleis and are peculiar to the polis as a type relative to other (more basic) types of community. For example, the polis exists for the sake of the good life and not merely for the sake of the basic physical needs of life. Also, in the polis, laws and offices exist in the context of the specific form of the polis. Related to this, the polis is identified by the nature of its constitution. There are other essential characteristics as well, and Chan provides ample textual evidence for all of them. The point is that all poleis regardless of their specific

⁵⁹ Miller (“Political Naturalism,” 215f.) provides one example that just might match it, viz. language.

Nature gives us the capacity for voice, and the use of language is a part of our nature. And it is something that is completed by art just as the polis is. But Miller never provides any evidence to show that Aristotle ever claims that language *exists* by nature. Moreover, by contrasting language and virtue, Miller concludes that Aristotle’s reason for claiming that such hybrids are either naturally or habitually generated is just that Aristotle wishes in such cases to emphasize one or the other’s role. This is particularly interesting, though it is a conclusion that is strangely omitted in his slightly revised reprint of the paper in *Nature, Justice, and Rights* (27-45).

⁶⁰ Chan, “Blunder.” Miller, Keyt, and Kraut do not acknowledge this essay. But Saunders does in his commentary (*Politics Books I and II*, 63) and Simpson notes it briefly (*Philosophical Commentary*, 25 n. 23).

form have these essential characteristics. But, the characteristics that define the specific form of the polis-type community are socio-economic and ideological. These characteristics are the ones for which the lawgiver and statesmen are responsible. It is an important tenet for Chan that human involvement in the polis does not wholly determine the nature and growth of the polis, but it wholly determines certain features of it. There are two levels of analysis at work here. We can say that the polis insofar as it is a type of community is a natural thing with essential characteristics grounded in human nature. But we can also say—at another level of analysis—that the polis insofar as it takes on various political forms is something over which the statesmen and lawgivers enjoy a high degree of control and responsibility. Chan also notices that the usual strategy for mitigating the nature-craft dilemma is neutral with respect to the level of analysis. Typical of many commentators, such a strategy involves saving the Naturalness Thesis by trying to demarcate naturally-caused features of the polis from conventional causes. But, accepting this strategy, we would do better to say that the polis is partly natural and partly artificial. Chan avoids this problem. His answer distributes appropriate weight to both the natural causes of the polis-type community and the importance of the craft of lawgivers and statesmen in determining higher-level aspects of the form of the polis. The basic structure of the polis is natural (i.e. wholly determined by nature), but its precise shape is determined by the art of politics.

Chan's answer to the nature-craft dilemma is compatible with my reading of the Genetic Argument and delivers the final blow to Keyt's accusation that Aristotle is blundering. I can discover nothing in Aristotle's Genetic Argument to suggest that

natural impulses are a sufficient condition for maximizing self-sufficiency. The nature or end of the polis according to *Pol* I.2 is autarky, but this suggests only that the fully developed polis qua community-type has the potential to satisfy our physical and moral needs most fully. Nowhere is it claimed that we actually are self-sufficient in the polis. The polis is fully developed in the same way that an adult is—its parts have finished growing. But an adult human is not in virtue of his adulthood happy. Happiness requires acting in accordance with the virtues. We are right to claim instead that virtue is only possible in adulthood. Upon reaching adulthood, however, one will need to acquire practical wisdom and external goods in order to be virtuous. Likewise, a polis that maximizes self-sufficiency will require the practical wisdom of its lawgivers and statesmen as well as ample resources in order to do so. Thus, Keyt's claim that Aristotle has good reason to reject the Naturalness Thesis neglects the level of analysis at which nature and craft respectively operate.

Conclusion

To be clear, the concerns I have with Keyt's accusations are not intended to downplay the importance of Keyt's exegetical work in that paper. The second chapter of *Pol* I is the longest and richest continuous stretch of philosophical argumentation in the treatise. Keyt has painstakingly mapped out each stated and tacit premise and supplied hundreds of cross-references to other works in the corpus. He has, moreover, done so clearly and audaciously. However, the fact that the three types of community are three developmental stages of the same thing is a salient point that demands recognition. Once

this point is recognized, it becomes clear that Keyt's objection to the Genetic Argument entails a blunder that rests not with Aristotle but instead with Keyt's version of the argument. Furthermore, the argument that a dilemma exists between artificial and natural causes giving Aristotle reason to abandon his Naturalness Thesis is countered if we distinguish between levels of analysis in which nature and art can be said to exercise influence. Finally, it is worth pointing out that a focus on the analysis of specific details of Aristotle's arguments risks neglecting some of the more general things present in the chapter. Clearly, one thing at work here is a normative claim about the intrinsic value of the polis. This rings almost Hegelian noting the telic path of the polis in coming to know its own reason for existing. Also, the sense that the fifth-century Sophists are lurking in the subtext is undeniable. There is much left to say about the *Politics*, but as to its blunders, I remain unconvinced.

Chapter Four

The Naturalness Thesis Expounded

In this chapter, I want to expand on the interpretation of *Pol* I.2 outlined in Chapter Three. There, I suggested that the household, village, and polis were three stages in the development of one thing, namely the polis. The polis is a fully developed thing, whereas the household is just the polis (i.e. the same thing) conceived in its “first growth and origin” (1252a24). The village is an intermediate stage, akin to adolescence. Household, village, and polis are three stages in the development of poleis. At each stage, the form is the same, since social arrangements are essentially concerned with and striving toward autarky, and this can only be fully achieved in the polis. The account Aristotle gives is thus sociobiological. The account is also historical: it is an account not only of the “first growth” but of the “origin” of the polis, and it alludes to other Classical accounts of prehistory. Finally, the account is normative; it ties ethics to politics and breaks down the distinction between νόμος and φύσις. These three aspects to the account given in *Pol* I.2 suggest an intricate foundation to Aristotle's political philosophy.

The Naturalness Thesis as Metaphor

Before unpacking the implications of Aristotle's account of the origin and growth of the polis, one objection will require a response. In an important and well-known paper, "Man as a Political Animal in Aristotle," Wolfgang Kullman argues that the biological connotations of the account are meant only metaphorically. Also, Kullman

thinks that the sequence from household to village to polis is not a historical one. Instead, he believes that the sequence is merely conceptual, and that for Aristotle there is no pre-political developmental stage in the history of civilization. In Kullman's opinion, Aristotle's account of the polis' development is merely *compared* to a natural development: “the theme of development enters into the discussion only in a subsidiary fashion.”⁶¹ If Kullman is correct, then my intention to elucidate the sociobiological and historical implications is mistaken from the start.

Kullman provides several reasons for the claim he makes, but in my opinion, only one of them merits discussion here. Kullman points out that if Aristotle's account is taken literally, the polis is a substance. I argue below that Aristotle does, in fact, intend this. But, Kullman is correct in finding much of the metaphysical terminology missing from the account. Such terminology should be present if Aristotle means that the polis is a substance, technically speaking. According to Kullman, however, Aristotle does not speak of the “form” or the “substance” of the polis, and never, in talking about the polis, does he speak of its “matter.” It is certainly problematic to my reading of the account that these terms are missing. Yet, I think we can make some guesses as to why the technical vocabulary is not there.

Kullman's point is not only that “form” and “substance” and “matter” are missing from the account in *Pol* I.2, but that they are absent from the *Politics* generally. It must be noted, contra Kullman, that “form” (εἶδος) is quite common throughout the *Politics*.⁶²

I am unsure what exactly Kullman means when he denies the appearance of εἶδος in

61 Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 100.

62 There are twenty-one references to εἶδος in Book IV alone. Wherever Aristotle speaks of the various “forms” or “kinds” of (non-ideal) constitutions, the word used is εἶδος.

the *Politics*,⁶³ but perhaps he means that there is no metaphysical discussion of the form in relation to the matter of the polis. This is true. Nevertheless, Aristotle uses the term to describe the various constitutional forms. Also, “matter” does show up in one place. In VII.4, describing his ideal polis, Aristotle compares the work of the statesman or legislator to that of a shipbuilder and weaver. The comparison concerns the fact that politicians, like artisans, need the proper material (ὕλην) for their work (1326a1). What follows (in VII.4-7) is a discussion of the prerequisites of the ideal polis: the proper population, territory, and climate and questions about trade and naval power. Kullman notes this appearance of the term, but decides that “Aristotle is not talking about the polis here at all, but rather about the prerequisites for political action.”⁶⁴ I hesitate to agree with Kullman here since the point of comparing artisans with politicians is that, in both cases, the matter with which they work is crucial to the product. The population and territory are the matter of the polis, just as wood is the matter of a ship. Yes, wood is a prerequisite for shipbuilding, but if we discuss the quantity of wood necessary for building a ship, we are talking about the ship. Likewise, if we discuss the demographics of a polis, we are talking about the polis.

More to the point, Aristotle's Book I as a whole concerns the matter of the polis, even if Aristotle's technical terminology is absent.⁶⁵ After *Pol* I.2, Book I follows a discussion of slave management (I.3-7), of microeconomics (I.10-11), and of house

63 Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 111.

64 Ibid.

65 Of course, Kullman will respond that Book I can be merely *construed* as concerning matter. That does not mean that Aristotle meant it so. In the previous chapter, however, I worked to establish basic social relations (master-slave, husband-wife, and parent-child) as the matter of the polis, and I will have more to say about it below. Under my reading then, Book I *does* concern the matter of the polis. Still, it might be more correct to say that it just *seems* to do so. I thank Steve Leighton for pointing this out to me.

management respecting wives and children (I.12-13). Since households are the basic parts of the polis, they are its matter, and it is fitting that a general discussion of the household should follow *Pol* I.2. Perhaps “matter” is left out of the discussion because of the ambiguity of the term itself. For Aristotle, the matter of living organisms is always an ambiguous notion.⁶⁶ The organs of an animal are its matter, but the organs themselves are made up of flesh. Flesh has elemental matter, and since even the elements change into one another, many believe Aristotle holds a theory of sub-elemental prime matter.⁶⁷ Technically speaking, then, the “matter” of a substance depends on the level of analysis being done. At one level, the matter of the polis is the household, but at another level it can be the individual citizen (or non-citizen inhabitant).

This is one way to respond to Kullman's point about the missing terminology. But we might also appeal to Aristotle's philosophical development. The majority of the *Politics* was written relatively early in Aristotle's life, before he developed his hylomorphic theory of substances.⁶⁸ This will not clear up Kullman's point respecting the account in *Pol* I.2, however, since good evidence suggests that Book I was one of the last things Aristotle wrote. The fact remains, in any case, that Aristotle never speaks directly of the polis as a “substance” and he never provides a metaphysical discussion of the form-matter relation in the polis. I think it would be best to concede Kullman's point and admit that this does pose a problem for my reading. Still, it does not convince me that a metaphorical reading is warranted. Moreover, there are reasons to adopt a literal reading

66 With regard to the inherent ambiguity in Aristotle's concept of matter in organisms and the debate thus far, see Gill, “Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Reconsidered,” 233-237.

67 Whether he does has become the subject of a vigorous debate. See esp. Charlton's “Prime Matter: a Rejoinder” to get a sense of it.

68 I discuss this in the next section.

that, in my opinion, outweigh the reasons not to.

The Sociobiology of the Natural Polis

The task remains to defend my reading of Aristotle's account as a (literally) sociobiological one where the polis is depicted as a developing “organism.” The account alludes to other historical narratives of prehistory and it is an account with normative implications central to Aristotle's political philosophy. I begin with the sociobiology of the polis.

By saying that the account is sociobiological I mean that it is both sociological and biological.⁶⁹ That is, the account (λόγος) is one that explains both the social units and how they interact (i.e. the sociology) as well as the “life” (βίος) of the polis qua compound whole (i.e. the biology). And like any Aristotelian biology, the biology of the polis is consistent with Aristotle's hylomorphic metaphysics. We can thus split the “sociobiology” of the polis into an account that concerns metaphysics, sociology, and biology.

The metaphysics of the polis parallels the metaphysics of other substances. Aristotle's metaphysics are complicated, and scholars disagree on even the most basic tenets. But, we might say this much: Concrete particulars are compounds of form and matter. They are *primary* substances because they can exist independently, whereas

⁶⁹ My diction here may not be entirely welcome. “Sociobiology” is a term with modern implications, and a case might be made to avoid using it in an Aristotelian context. However, I feel that it is the best way to identify exactly what is going on in *Pol I.2*. Aristotle offers a sociology of the polis; that is, he provides an account of the structure, development, and collective (inter-) actions of human communities. And he offers a biology—an account of the “life” of the polis. Moreover, he suggests an intricate link between the biology and sociology. That said, I do not wish to drag in any modern connotations (e.g. that the account is ecological or evolutionary) relating to the branch of science known as sociobiology.

existence for other entities means existence as a substratum or as an accident (or predicate) of a concrete substance.⁷⁰ In my view, the polis—that is, an individual (and actual) polis such as Athens—is a concrete particular. It is, therefore, a primary substance. The polis is the compound of matter and form. Its matter is the citizens and territory that compose it (*Pol* 1274b40). Its form is the constitution that defines it.⁷¹ Of course the citizens, insofar as they are individual humans, can exist independently. However, their existence qua citizens depends on the existence of the polis. This is the point of the argument for the priority of the polis in *Pol* I.2 (1253a18-39). In one sense, the matter of a polis continues to exist without the substantial whole just as the flesh and bone of a hand exists after being cut from the body. The (general) matter does not vanish; in fact, matter is eternal.⁷² But citizens cannot exist *as citizens* without the existence of the particular polis to which they belong.

The form of a substance is that which defines and organizes it. Aristotle defines the constitution as the arrangement of offices in a polis.⁷³ For example, where the offices are organized oligarchically, the polis is defined as an oligarchy. If, as the result of revolution, the oligarchy becomes a democracy, then the polis is no longer the same (1276b3). That polis is destroyed and a new polis emerges. By contrast, the matter of the polis is constantly changing. New citizens are born and old citizens die. Aristotle compares this phenomenon to the perpetual change in the matter of a river (1276a35). For Aristotle—*pace* Heraclitus—one can, in fact, step in the same river twice. The notion

70 For excellent and detailed introduction to Aristotle's metaphysics, see Graham, *Aristotle's Two Systems*, 1-83.

71 For Aristotle (at least, Aristotle's later metaphysics), definition is identical with form: *Met* VII.4.

72 Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, vol. I, 45.

73 *Pol* 1278b9 and 1290a7.

that matter is always changing is true of all biological organisms. Animals and plants are constantly shedding and regenerating new cellular tissue. So, substantial unity is not due to persistence of matter, but to the continuance of the form. It is also noteworthy that we can understand the polis in terms of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes. Its formal cause is the constitution; the material cause is its citizenry; the efficient cause is the unification of several villages; and the final cause is the good life.

Now, not every polis is a pure reflection of its political form; some oligarchies, for instance, have democratic institutions. Still, the point of politics is to show how the various constitutions ought to be organized.⁷⁴ And this is not peculiar to politics. Not every primary substance is able to actualize its end. (This is especially true for humans.) How the matter (or potentiality) of a thing is actually organized is not necessarily identical with the form of that thing. Luck and favourable conditions are always decisive factors for determining whether a substance will achieve its nature.⁷⁵ Likewise, Aristotle's ideal polis requires an abundance of resources and near-perfect conditions.⁷⁶ The ideal polis of *Pol VII* and *VIII* is ideal only because it maximizes the potential for humans to achieve their function; that is, it provides the maximum the number of humans with the external goods needed for eudaimonia.⁷⁷ But the basic formal structure of all poleis is the unification of several villages into a community large enough to permit the good life for at least some of its members (1252b28). Since the basic nature of the polis

74 Note that *Pol IV-VI* concerns the proper organization of non-ideal poleis.

75 See *Pol 1331b21-2* and *1332a30-1*.

76 Aristotle repeatedly refers to the ideal polis as the "Polis of our Prayers." On this: Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 192f. That the unlikeliness of the ideal polis ever actually existing supports the notion that Aristotle is actually a closet democrat (practically speaking): Keyt, "Aristotle's Theory of Distributive Justice."

77 On this point, see Keyt, "Aristotle's Theory of Distributive Justice," 247-260.

is autarky, a polis can be said to be matured once it has grown to that point. I shall call this the “basic form” of the polis. In this way, the form of all communities and all poleis is the same. The particular arrangement of the offices—what I will call the “political form”—will differ among various poleis, but basically we can say of any society that has achieved some level of autarky that it is a “polis.” It may be helpful to think of the various constitutional forms as similar to the variety of races. Each “race” is a member of the human species, but we can identify (or construct) differences among them. Also, just as there is an ambiguity in the English word “race”—we speak of the “human race” but we also distinguish between races of humans—there is an ambiguity in Aristotle’s use of εἶδος. There is a basic form of social arrangement that Aristotle calls the “polis.” The realization of this form is achieved in successful cooperative activity toward the achievement of autarky. Yet, Aristotle also distinguishes between political forms of constitutions. All poleis are members of the same species (viz., “polis”) but there are differences among them relating to how external goods are *distributed*.

It is in the distribution of external goods that we notice the sociology of the polis. In *Pol* I.2, we are told that master and slave have the same interest (1252a34). Mutual interest characterizes not only the master-slave relationship but the relationship between all members of a polis. Since humans have a natural impulse to live together (1278b19-21), it is natural and best when they do so. And because the polis is the only place in which humans can flourish (since civic virtue is impossible outside it), the particular social arrangement characterized by the polis is desirable. Conceptually, the desirability of the polis makes sense. A social arrangement that generates enough of a

food surplus to allow for a larger non-productive class can sustain a stronger military. Even those members who benefit least from the arrangement are better off under the protection and regulated taxings of the upper classes. A household or village is incapable of defending itself from organized bandits and pillagers. Moreover, as Aristotle tells us, the household and village can merely supply the basic needs (1252b15).⁷⁸ Shelter and food are necessary but not sufficient for autarky. Self-sufficiency means that at least some members of the community can live the “good life” (1252b29).

Politics is concerned with the distribution of political authority and external goods such as wealth and leisure necessary for the good life. Each political form is a kind of justice.⁷⁹ Under an oligarchy, justice means distributing political authority according to wealth (usually with a property qualification).⁸⁰ Under a democracy, political rights are a function of one's freedom. Under an aristocracy, distributive justice means divvying political power according to civic virtue. Indeed, Aristotle is ultimately concerned with maximal virtue in the polis.⁸¹ But his first concern is with stability. As I mentioned above, civil war and revolution threaten the very existence of the polis. Aristotle understood that the citizens of a polis divided as they are into rich and poor were in perpetual conflict. Rule by the poor—Aristotle's definition for democracy⁸²—is unstable

78 Aristotle writes that the village (i.e. the unity of several families) can provide “something more than the supply of daily needs” (1252b15) but he does not tell us exactly what that is. But, he soon after tells us that the polis is the first community that is “large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing” (1252b27). So, the village falls between a household, which can supply *daily* needs, and the polis, which is nearly self-sufficient. Probably, what is meant is that the village can supply basic needs with enough regularity to protect the group from wild animals' attacks on livestock, minor crop failings, unorganized looters and thieves, etc.

79 See *EE* 1241b14.

80 See Keyt, “Aristotle's Theory of Distributive Justice,” 245-247.

81 Q.v. n. 77 above.

82 See esp. 1279b34-1280a3, but also 1290b3. For a fascinating discussion of this, see Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 71-76.

because in an extreme democracy, the rich will have their property confiscated.⁸³ Likewise, oligarchy—or, rule by the rich (1280a1)—results in stasis. Thus, the more μέσοι (often translated “middle-class”) in a polis, the more stable it will be.⁸⁴ This is why Aristotle's ideal polis is a mixed constitution that minimizes both rich and poor and maximizes the middle-class.

But in the account of the growth of the polis in *Pol* I.2, the sociology is more basic. Families decide to enter into a pact with one another, establishing a community. “Community” (κοινωνία) is a frequently repeated notion in *Pol* I.2. A community is necessarily a group with common interests. Households form a community to negotiate basic daily needs. They band together as villages for protection, and this, according to Aristotle, is typically dynastic (1252b17). These “homogalactic” villages or clans are ruled monarchically just because they are qualitatively the same as the family unit. A large family, like a small one, is (naturally) monarchical. The polis emerges once these villages band together.

But Aristotle's sociology need not read diachronically. The sociology is consistent if we interpret the account synchronically as well, since when we look at the fully-formed polis, we see that it is made up of households and clans. These social units do not disappear upon uniting in the polis. Furthermore, within an existing polis we can observe household activity and its express concern with basic daily needs. Household microeconomics is acquisitional.⁸⁵ Outside the nuclear family, one remains tied to one's

83 See 1318a26. That this is unjust: 1281a14.

84 See *Pol* IV.11-12.

85 *Pol* I.10-11 speaks to the nature of household management; managing a household means administering to the acquisition of wealth.

relatives. They may be scattered across the polis,⁸⁶ but they are typically accommodating and clan-like. An integral part of one's identity is found in the extended family. Moreover, relatives can offer help and safety to a family and so exist for the sake of more than just the *daily* basic needs.⁸⁷ However, the good life exists outside the family. Not only does the polis provide the means for excellence, it provides the venue. Virtue, after all, is a public activity, found primarily in the ἀγορᾶ or on the battlefield. The implication is that the good life is not the life of a skilled household manager. Such talent is necessary and praiseworthy, but the better life is the one spent engaged in politics—the active life.⁸⁸ My point is just that the polis' sociology is both diachronic and synchronic. We can read the account in *Pol* I.2 as the explanation of how and why social units group together over time, and we can read it as demarcating the autarkic functions of these social units within the polis at any one time.

Finally, the account is biological. In claiming this, I do not mean that the polis is literally an organism, even though it is depicted as such. The polis is clearly something different from plants and animals. Nonetheless, the polis is certainly *like* an organism in the way it originates and operates. I will venture as far as to say that the polis is a living thing. The matter of the polis is alive, and the life of each citizen (qua citizen) depends on the “life” of the polis. The comparison Aristotle makes with the organs of the human

86 For the point that the households in a village live dispersedly, see *Pol* 1252b24.

87 Such claims are admittedly speculative. Aristotle does not discuss them. But, in my opinion, they are rooted in the very idea of a family, and since they conform with Aristotle's account, it is helpful (if risky) to offer a fresh perspective on what Aristotle *might* be suggesting. I have taken some liberty here and elsewhere in this chapter to push the boundaries typically imposed on philosophical texts by analytic rigour and mine the subtext in hopes of fully expounding the Naturalness Thesis.

88 I say “better” rather than “best” because according to *EN* X.7-8, the political life is second-best. The philosophical or contemplative life is the happiest. But, whether the contemplative life is reclusive or cultic or compatible with the active life or what is controversial, and the examination of this question, while important, will be inappropriate here.

body is important and appropriate. The human body is alive because its parts are animated yet dependent on the whole for their existence. The same is true of the polis. One distinction Aristotle makes between natural and artificial things is that the former have an internal source of motion. Motion can be spatial, quantitative, and qualitative (*Phy* 192b13-19). The polis can change its location (e.g. when Athens moved the Attic population to Salamis in 480); it can determine its size (e.g. Sparta's infamous population controls); and it can perceive (qualitative motion) insofar as its politicians and officials can think on behalf of the polis.⁸⁹ Moreover, there are several instances in the *Politics* where the polis is compared with the biology of animals. Aristotle parallels the various political forms with the variety of animal species (1290b21-37). The various political structures are set against the various animal species and distinguished according to the respective organization of their parts. There are several other places where the structure of the polis is compared with the structure of an organism,⁹⁰ but *Pol* I.2 explains why its structures are similar.⁹¹

I said that I do not think that the polis is literally a living organism. It would not make sense to explain it zoologically. The polis is something closer to an anthill or beehive, except we do not typically think of the polis as something separable from its inhabitants. Nor should we, reading Aristotle. The inhabitants of a polis are the real

89 The point is confirmed by Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems," 123.

90 See esp. 1277a5; 1291a23-26; 1302b35-1303a1; 1326a35-37.

91 Such are the reasons I have found in favour of the claim that, for Aristotle, the polis is a living thing. Needless to say, this notion is underdeveloped. However, I believe that I have exhausted the text for support of the claim. A further defense of this idea would of course be desirable. But, it is worth pointing out that the notion is not unpopular even today (see, e.g. Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of the Great American City* or Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Living City*). And since I find Kullman's reasons for a metaphorical reading problematic and Keyt's reasons for dismissing the account dubious, it may be acceptable to ask what reasons there are to deny the notion of a living polis.

matter of the polis. The buildings and roads and the location are also polis-material, but the inhabitants—and especially the citizens—are the vital matter. Only the people are alive; they are what gives the polis life. And more might be said on this question of a living polis. However, for now it should be sufficient to note that the polis is living, while not precisely speaking an organism. The Greek term itself is ambiguous since *πόλις* refers not only to the city as defined by its limits, but sometimes to the city and *χώρα* and other times just to the government.⁹² The more relevant point, though, is that the account given is, in fact, biological. At the very least, the polis is *like* an organism. It grows and exists according to nature. Its growth is teleologically driven. And its generation is identical to the embryonic generation of animals.

Scholars place Book I of the *Politics* among the very last of Aristotle's writings.⁹³ The majority of the *Politics* (at least Books II, III, VII, and VIII) was written relatively early in Aristotle's life, probably around the time he was living in Macedonia tutoring Alexander just before Philip's death in 336. Book I was added much later (as were some revisions, including III.6). What I find interesting is that the *Generation of Animals* must have been written either at the same time or just before Book I of the *Politics*.⁹⁴ I noted in Chapter Three that *GA* II.6 is applicable to the account of the generation of the polis. In the embryonic stage, Aristotle observed that the internal parts of an organism are fully developed prior to the organism itself. Like an organism, the polis comes together only after its parts are fully developed. Thus, when we consider the polis in its “first growth and origin” (1252a24) we are considering the development of its internal parts. The

92 On the ambiguity, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 167; and Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 109.

93 See Rist, *Mind of Aristotle*, 21f., 135-64; Jaeger, *Aristotle*, 259-75.

94 Rist, *Mind of Aristotle*, 163. Substantive connections: *ibid.*, 157.

household arises naturally and grows as time passes. The household is generated only after a couple can bear children and acquire slaves. The matter of the household (viz., the most basic of autarkically-driven relations) is political matter at its most basic level. But the household alone is like a child, its parts small and weak. The village is the “first society”(1252b15) much like an adolescent. It is not yet self-sufficient, but it is concerned with more than just the basic daily needs of life (it is concerned, for example, with how to protect itself over time). Moreover, villages, like adolescents, are capable of reproduction, as I noted in Chapter Three. Families can break away from the village and settle elsewhere forming new proto-poleis. A single (nuclear) family cannot reproduce itself (qua household with fully formed internal parts) without uniting with other households.⁹⁵ Only the adolescent polis (i.e. the village) and the fully formed polis are capable of reproduction. The implications of the account match Aristotle's biology seamlessly. But, even stepping back, the direct observances of *Pol* I.2 should be sufficient to suggest that the account is biological. The polis exists by nature; it is the “creation of nature” (1253a2), and natural generation is biological. The account spells out exactly how that political generation occurs. The language used refers repeatedly to nature and the process clearly parallels organic generation.

The History of the Natural Polis

A sociobiological reading of the account Aristotle provides in support of the

95 We might note that Aristotle thinks of the “most natural” village as a community related by blood (1252b16). Interestingly, it follows that the natural village cannot reproduce itself without incest—something contrary to nature (*Pol* II.3). Aristotle also thinks that it is unnatural for adolescents to reproduce (*Pol* VII.5 claims that men should be at least 55 and women at least 37 before procreating). If the analogy sticks, only a polis that has had enough time to achieve an excellent constitution should attempt to reproduce itself.

Naturalness Thesis is, in my opinion, the most important. However, I want to briefly add two further aspects to the account that I think are pertinent. First, the account is compatible with other extant accounts of pre-history, and it can be interpreted historically. In the *Republic*, Socrates' City in Speech (λόγος) comes to be “because people need many things” (369b). But, the first city described is not desirable to Socrates' interlocutors. They call it a “city for pigs” (372d). Socrates seems content with this classless and basic social arrangement as the manifestation of political justice (372e), but at the behest of Glaucon, he agrees to discuss the possibility of justice in a “luxurious city.” It seems likely that Aristotle would agree with Glaucon and Adeimantus that the city of pigs is incomplete. For Aristotle, the polis is something that exists for the sake of the good life, a life that demands copious leisure-time and adequate wealth. Also, the Republic is a polis that grounds justice in the proper division of labour.⁹⁶ Aristotle's justice is grounded in the unity of the virtues and the proper allocation of political authority. But, in both the *Republic* and the *Politics*, the city arises first from the basic needs of life. Moreover, both accounts (as well as the myths in the *Statesmen* and the *Timaeus*) stress the methodological point that the analysis of the polis is a means for making the polis more *visible*. The peculiar language of sight is employed to stress that the accounts are meant to visually clarify the subject, and the presence of this language in the *Politics* (1252a25) testifies to the claim that Aristotle has Plato in mind.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ See Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, 28-31.

⁹⁷ In Kullman's article, “Man as a Political Animal,” this language is relevant to understanding the *Politics*. Kullman thinks that the emphasis on the accounts as means to some other end suggests that the accounts are merely a means to the end of understanding something else: justice in the soul in the *Republic*; the best laws in the *Laws*; and the polis in the *Politics*. And thus Kullman believes that it is a mistake to read these accounts too literally. They are more like thought experiments. However, I find Kullman's reasons for claiming this unpersuasive. Nonetheless, Kullman is right to notice that the language of sight in these accounts should be recognized, and he provides an interesting comparison of

The account in Book III of Plato's *Laws* is even closer to Aristotle's. The Athenian provides an account of the various stages in the development of the polis. The first stage involves humanity living sporadically in separate households where the eldest member rules dynastically (680d-e). The Athenian continues: "The next stage is when several families amalgamate and form larger communities" (680e). So far, this matches Aristotle's account exactly. The Athenian then explains that as these "tiny communities" (681a) grow, the need for unified legislation arises from the fact that each family's eldest believes that his particular laws are best. This conflict creates the need to amalgamate the laws. Thus, the eldest members of each family are deemed lawmakers and the polis is founded with their cooperative work as legislators. This aspect to the account in the *Laws* differs somewhat from Aristotle's. Still, there is some vagueness in Aristotle's move from the village to the polis. And in one place, he does hint at a similar idea. Describing the monarchic form of rule in village life, Aristotle adds somewhat strangely that the villagers "imagine, not only the forms of the Gods, but their *ways of life* to be like their own" (1252b26, emphasis mine). Exactly what this means is unclear, but the depiction of primitive religion as modeled on village culture suggests that Aristotle is hinting at the presence of conflicting conceptions of divine justice. We should also note that the account in the *Laws* describes a cyclical history of repeated catastrophes: "the human race has been repeatedly annihilated by floods and plagues and many other causes, so that only a small fraction of it survived" (677a). Now, Aristotle believes that the humans and the world exist eternally.⁹⁸ And there is strong evidence to suggest that

the accounts.

98 *Phy* 206a25-27: humans are infinitely generated; *GA* II.1.732b35: humans are eternal; *DC* I.10 and *DC* I.12.282b3: the world is eternal.

Aristotle endorses the *Laws*' doctrine that civilization undergoes periodic catastrophes and a cyclic development.⁹⁹ If endorsed by Aristotle, the account Aristotle provides in support of the Naturalness Thesis becomes important to understanding his conception of history. The repeated rise of the polis must be explained.¹⁰⁰ It cannot be a fluke. Aristotle's account explains why poleis always have emerged and will continue to emerge in the future. Aristotle is stressing that the polis is a tendency in nature, not something accidental. And Aristotle's account is further compatible with Solon's purported story offered by Critias in the *Timaeus* (21b- 25d). There too, the “numerous disasters that have destroyed human life” (22c) are noted. Once more, the rise of the polis is the product of a scattered and uncultured households banding together for mutual benefit (23b).

Protagoras' myth (*Prot* 320d-322d) is alluded to as well. The cycle is familiar: humans begin in scattered isolation (322b); they are driven to band together for protection;¹⁰¹ they attempt to form poleis, but because they lack the art of politics, the poleis fail (322c). Only after they have a capacity for “justice and a sense of shame” (322c) are they able unite politically. Of course, this capacity is uniquely human, and it is possessed by all humans: “all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these [a sense of justice and shame]” (322d). This point should be

99 See Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 241. There is an abundance of textual evidence to support the view that Aristotle does in fact hold this doctrine: see esp. *Met* 981b13-25, I.2.982b22-24: that there is a tendency after each catastrophe for communities to develop in a certain way; *Pol* 1329b25ff: that this tendency is a specific pattern repeated eternally. Though not all scholars agree: cf. Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 116.

100We also know that the lost dialogue, *On Philosophy* contained a genetic account of the polis similar to the *Politics*.

101In both the *Laws* and the *Protagoras*, this is specifically protection from “wild beasts.” Aristotle does not mention wild beasts, but the exact reason for banding together is never provided in the *Politics*.

compared both to the thesis that man is political by nature as well as to the Linguistic Argument: “it is a characteristic of man that he alone has a sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state” (*Pol* 1253a15-17).¹⁰²

Thus, the details of Aristotle's account supporting the Naturalness Thesis suggest that he is alluding to these other stories respecting the origin of civilization. And if Aristotle holds to the doctrine of a cyclical pattern of destruction and regeneration, then he agrees with his predecessors that the current record only reports history since the last catastrophe, and that the current civilization is doomed to collapse and begin anew. In an almost Sisyphean way, the human race will be repeatedly reduced to a few scattered households. But, they will band together for protection, and the polis will emerge out of a natural impulse toward autarky. Thus, much like Plato's Republic, Aristotle's ideal polis is not permanent. It is doomed to be destroyed. As such, the polis is like any other living sublunary thing; it must eventually die. Thus, Aristotle's theory of history is a further implication of the account in *Pol* I.2. The similarities it shares with the other accounts support a historical reading, but as we have seen this is but one aspect of the account.

The Normativity of the Natural Polis

Finally, I want to point to an important but often neglected implication to the

¹⁰²And we might also appeal to at least one non-Platonic accounts: Democritus' account of the origin of culture (as presented in Hippocrates' *On Ancient Medicine*) is quite similar in many respects. However, there is evidence to suggest that Democritus' account is not his own—and that the account is pre-Atomistic (on this, see Vlastos, “On the Pre-History in Diodorus”). Once this fact is taken into consideration, the connection to Democritus' account is weakened, and the argument that Aristotle is alluding to the Democritus is dubious. For this reason, I have chosen not to include a discussion of it here.

Naturalness Thesis. Aristotle's thesis is nothing short of an attempt to break down the antithetical distinction between νόμος and φύσις. While this distinction is found even among the Presocratics,¹⁰³ the terms become antithetical only in the fifth century. The Sophists famously held that justice and law were conventions or artificial contrivances (merely common opinion) and distinguishable from what is true and natural.¹⁰⁴ But, the ethical implications most likely originated in philosophy. Archelaus is said to have held that “living creatures first arose from slime, and that justice and baseness exist not naturally but by convention.”¹⁰⁵ In any case, “νόμος” gets used to denote both the customs traditionally held to be right or true as well as the authoritative laws formally passed.¹⁰⁶ The opinion that νόμος and φύσις are polarized was prevalent when Aristotle was writing. Hence, Aristotle is not merely responding to the Sophists.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Aristotle himself tells us that all of the ancients considered φύσις and νόμος antithetical (*Soph El 173a7ff.*).¹⁰⁸ For my purposes, I will stick with Plato's presentation of the problem; the *phusis-nomos* debate comes centre-stage in the Platonic characters, Thrasymachus and Callicles. The extent to which Plato correctly articulates their actual views is not especially important to my argument.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, a great deal of excellent scholarship on the Sophists is available.¹¹⁰ What is relevant here is that the positions

103Heraclitus, fr. 114; Hesiod, *Erga*, 276. Both passages note the universality of human laws.

104For an excellent discussion of the most radical extant version of this, Antiphon's *On Truth*, see Moulton, “Antiphon the Sophist.”

105Archelaus, A1-2 D-K.

106See Guthrie, *Sophists*, 56.

107Some scholars think his opponents were primarily Socratics, including Aristippus and the Cynics: see Kullman, “Man as a Political Animal,” 107 n. 43.

108This is noted by Lord, *Essays*, 52.

109Whereas Thrasymachus was certainly a real person, we know nothing about a historical Callicles.

110Guthrie's *Sophists* and Kerferd's *Sophistic Movement* remain the best general treatment of the Sophists. Both books provide detailed discussion of the *nomos-phusis* debate: pp. 55-134 and pp. 111-30 respectively. But see also (re the *nomos-phusis* debate), McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*,

articulated by Thrasymachus and Callicles represent a recurring and important problem for Classical political thought, and they represent (to some degree) the actual beliefs of many of the Sophists and other elites. And, as I will argue, Aristotle's Naturalness Thesis is a response to this problem.

Thrasymachus should be read as appealing to a radically different conception of “justice.” After reluctantly conceding Socrates' argument that rulers-qua-craftsmen must serve the interests of their subjects, Thrasymachus proceeds to insult Socrates (claiming he needs a wet-nurse) and offers a new counter-example involving shepherds (*Rep* 342e-343b). This section marks the transition to the discussion concerning whether injustice is more profitable than justice. Thrasymachus submits that the art of sheep-herding is not exactly for the sake of the sheep, and he adds that rulers treat their subjects in the same way—like sheep. He then tries to revive his argument that justice is the advantage of the stronger and he remarks that justice is harmful to those who obey (343c). Plato is writing this after democracy was restored (in 403) from the oligarchy of the Thirty, and his audience would understand this as an objection to what was commonly seen as democratic justice. To them, it would be plain that might is not right, at least according to conventional laws. Even though Plato leaves it an open question just what the foundations are for this Thrasymachean justice, the conception is doubtless at odds with the conception endorsed by the Athenian masses. Nevertheless, Thrasymachus is defending justice (strictly speaking), even though it is justice in a radically different sense.

Callicles offers yet another conception of justice, and his is equally, if not more,

challenging and audacious. In the so-called Long Speech, Callicles argues that popular morality is conventional and that it is used by the weak to enslave the strong (*Gor* 482c-486d). Natural justice is here opposed to conventional morality. Callicles explains his intriguing theory in a few lines that are worth repeating:

I believe that these [superior] men do these things [i.e. campaign to rule over inferiors] in accordance with the nature of what's just—yes, by Zeus, in accordance with the law of nature, and presumably not with the one we institute. We mold the best and the most powerful among us, taking them while they're still young, like lion cubs, and with charms and incantations we subdue them into slavery, telling them that one is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that's what's admirable and just. But surely, if a man whose nature is equal to it arises, he will shake off, tear apart, and escape all this, he will trample underfoot our documents, our tricks and charms, and all our laws that violate nature. He, the slave, will rise up and be revealed as our master. (483e-484a)

For Callicles, there are two tables of virtues: one natural and one conventional. The latter is a fraud on nature, and those who abide by it are acting immorally. He is thus a kind of naturalist in the sense that he derives (selfish) ethical norms out of nature, but his position is unique since it denies the natural basis for (conventional) morality. Callicles is optimistic that nature will produce someone who can “shake off” the “tricks and charms” of conventional morality and return things to their natural state.

The Naturalness Thesis answers to both positions. By grounding the polis in nature, Aristotle fuses νόμος with φύσις. As something that exists by nature, the polis exists for the sake of natural ends, which are necessarily good. The laws and customs of a polis are naturally just—provided that they are consistent with the natural political form of the (non-corrupt) constitution—and they are right and good from the fact that the polis itself is natural. Thrasymachus' sheep-herding analogy is mistaken, on Aristotle's view,

because unlike sheep, humans—or at least Greeks—are political animals with a natural impulse to rule. Justice is the end of politics, and that end exists for the sake of the good life. Justice is in the interest of everyone concerned. Ideally, everyone who is not a natural slave should participate (at some point in their lives) in politics. And even for the disenfranchised, justice is not harmful. Those naturally incapable of participating in politics are suited to live under the guidance of someone who is capable of ruling: thus, we are told that the master is the *source* of excellence in the slave (1260b4). The ruler-ruled relationship is mutually advantageous: it maximizes excellence. And likewise, Aristotle is able to avoid agreeing with Thrasymachus' diatribe on democratic justice. Aristotle tolerates non-ideal conceptions of justice provided that they are conducive to the maintenance and stability of the polis. This is the central idea at work in Aristotle's practical (and reformist) politics. It is only because we have a sense of justice that we are even capable of living together in a polis (1253a17-18), and that in itself desirable. A political community is a social arrangement more natural than any non-political community.

Calliclean justice can be similarly dismissed under Aristotle's Naturalness Thesis. The reply is simply that Callicles does not get nature right. The conventional table of virtues cannot be a fraud on nature. On the contrary, the virtues advance the aims of nature. Civic virtue facilitates the good life, a life that is possible only in the polis. Moreover, by collapsing νόμος and φύσις, Aristotle is able to ground the laws and customs that protect the natural polis. That which threatens the very existence of the polis (i.e. civil war and revolution) must be contrary to nature once the polis is shown to

be a natural entity. This is precisely how Aristotle grounds political science. The political life, and even the political life spent reforming non-ideal constitutions, is praiseworthy because it always works in accordance with the natural ends of the polis. The existence of the polis is necessary for humans to achieve their natural ends. Laws and conventional morality, insofar as they ensure political stability, can be justified on that basis. The νόμοι that guide a polis closer to its nature (that is, closer to autarky) are from that fact grounded in φύσις. In this way, the lawmaker and politician—correctly instructed and trained in political science—are acting virtuously and in accordance with nature. Political science, then, is truly a “science”: it is an investigation of the natural world, and it is a laudable pursuit both practically and theoretically.

Conclusion

Hopefully my attempt to expound the Naturalness Thesis by approaching it from a number of perspectives has amplified its importance and sanctioned its placement at the beginning of the *Politics*. It is the bedrock on which Aristotle's political thought rests. I have tried to show that the account given in *Pol* I.2 is significantly more than a flimsy Genetic Argument. Not only is the account a careful and logical argument consistent with Aristotle's extended political theory, it is an attempt to bridge politics with metaphysics and natural science, and with ethics.

Above, I noted that the sociobiology of the polis is the most prominent feature of the account. Literally a natural thing, the polis can be studied and explained scientifically. It is a living (and dying) thing—a thing that grows and whose parts

generate and operate organically. Politics is, in this way, a science like any other. And an understanding of how the polis operates and originates sociobiologically is fundamental to political science. Furthermore, the respective sciences show us their objects' purpose or function. Political science is no exception. The polis is revealed to have a purpose, one that is especially relevant to the human species: it provides the opportunity (and even the place) for realizing our human nature. Politics is unlike the other natural sciences, however, in that it has practical import—as an art. Politicians who understand the various political forms can learn how to stabilize the polis and prevent revolution (the polis' death). In this way, politics is like the art of medicine: its practice requires a solid understanding of the proper natural form for a long and healthy life.

There is still more to take from the account. Aristotle is revealing a great deal about his ideas about the history of civilization. I have argued that Aristotle endorses a cyclical theory of history that is consistent with and alluding to a number of other Classical accounts of prehistory. Implied by this doctrine is that no polis, not even an ideal one, can be permanent. The polis is a product of nature, but it also faces inevitable death and rebirth; it is subordinate to the larger forces of nature.

Finally, the account shows us that politics is rooted in ethics. Aristotle works to break down the distinction between νόμος and φύσις and answer to Sophistic pseudo-conceptions of natural justice. For Aristotle, the polis is the expression of justice and the Naturalness Thesis grounds its laws and its constitution in nature. Aristotle's political philosophy is thus protected from arguments endorsing a kind of selfish political opportunism. Laws do not nor should they exist to serve the interests of one group at the

expense of another. And true justice and natural law are reconcilable with constitutional politics. The practice of politics done in the right way as described in the *Politics* serves to cultivate the good life, an active life lived in accordance with virtue. This is the ultimate goal of Aristotle's political philosophy as grounded in his political naturalism. And this goal is found in the very nature of the natural polis itself.

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