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Keyt, David. *Nature and justice: studies in the ethical and political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. Aristote, traductions et etudes, 38. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2017. xiv, 292 p. € 84.00. ISBN 9789042933828.

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For the last four decades, David Keyt has devoted substantial scholarly energy to the reconstruction of political and ethical arguments in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and to a lesser degree the same in Plato's *Republic*. Although Keyt's translation of and commentary on *Politics* Books V and VI in the Aristotle Clarendon series (1999), to my mind, is his most substantial contribution to ancient philosophy scholarship, close competitors are his scholarly articles which seek to reconstruct the philosophical positions of Aristotle (and to a lesser extent Plato) with pain-staking logical and philological care. *Nature and Justice* contains eleven such articles, eight previously published and three appearing for the first time. (Titles are listed at the end of the review.) Several of the articles are landmark works of Aristotle scholarship both for the scholarly controversies which they have sparked and for the methodological approach they exhibit.

The eleven articles cluster into several groups. Two previously published chapters focus on justice in Plato's *Republic*. Two chapters provide general overviews: one, written specifically for this volume, examines the place of the *nomos-phusis* antithesis in Plato and Aristotle and the other, previously published, introduces Aristotle's political philosophy. Two previously published chapters contest interpretations of the highest good in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Three previously published chapters examine aspects of nature and justice in Aristotle's *Politics*. Finally, two newly written chapters consider objections to Aristotle's political philosophy and his exclusion of artisans, slaves, and women from political participation. [[1]]

Most of the previously published articles will be quite familiar to scholars of ancient philosophy. "Intellectualism in Aristotle" and "The Meaning of *Bios* in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics" took John Cooper to task for his (subsequently abandoned) exclusivist interpretation of Aristotle's highest good. "Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle's *Politics*" argued that the claim that the polis exists by nature "is a blunder at the very root of Aristotle's political philosophy" (111), a thesis to which all Aristotle scholars have been forced to respond. "Aristotle and the Ancient Roots of Anarchism" and "The Good Man and the Upright Citizen" specify what Keyt takes to be Aristotle's ideal constitution and its relationship to the modern question of why citizens should obey the law. Although the overview of justice in Plato's *Republic* and that of Aristotle's political philosophy as a whole are thorough and comprehensive rather than ground-breaking, Keyt's "Plato and the Ship of State" is a perceptive and detailed analysis of Plato's image, which Keyt correctly notes has received far less scrutiny than images such as the divided line or the cave.

Bringing these essays together in a single volume puts into focus three re-occurring aspects or claims which lie at the heart of Keyt's interpretation of classical political philosophy (especially in the case of Aristotle), each of which I would like to focus upon at greater length. First, Keyt practices an interpretative methodology that might be called analytical or philosophical reconstruction. Keyt describes his method as follows in the case of his analysis of *Politics* I.2, the account of the naturalness of the city:

The arguments that Aristotle advances in *Politics* I.2 for his three theorems suffer from all the shortcomings characteristic of informal arguments. It is not always clear where in the text a particular argument begins or ends. Nor is it always clear what a particular argument is meant to establish. Important premises are presupposed. Those that are furnished are at crucial spots loosely expressed. The order of steps is often unclear. In this situation it is unlikely that our understanding of I.2 can be much advanced by a summary of its contents. What is needed is expansion rather than contraction. We need a formal statement of each of Aristotle's arguments where all tacit premises are supplied and all steps displayed. But any such formal reconstruction is certain to be underdetermined by the text of I.2. There are bound to be alternative reconstructions. (123)

For many Anglophone interpreters of Aristotle (perhaps especially those in philosophy departments), such an interpretive strategy seems uncontroversial and indeed some may wonder if there are any serious alternatives to such analytical reconstruction. But a glance at earlier commentators on the *Politics* such as Newman, Barker, or Mulgan shows that what Keyt practices in 1987 in important ways is surprisingly novel and not uncontroversial. Any non-argumentative features of Aristotle's text (e.g., rhetorical flourishes, aporetic considerations of alternative positions, polyphonic interludes) are very difficult to capture in a series of enumerated premises and sub-premises. Indeed, the fact that Aristotle, one of the first philosophers to give a comprehensive account of formal argumentation, chose to write his political teachings as informal arguments appears entirely inexplicable and perhaps even wrong-headed from the perspective of Keyt's interpretive methodology. Interpretation of ancient philosophy texts without argument reconstruction is, of course, impossible; but it does not follow that the sum or even the central focus of interpretation consists in formal argument reconstruction.

A second general aspect of Keyt's interpretation, as the title of the volume accurately reflects, is his view that Plato and Aristotle embrace positions about natural and justice which in Aristotle's case Keyt labels as "political naturalism" (172). In "Nature and Justice" (one of the previously unpublished chapters), Keyt maps out how he believes Plato and Aristotle articulated notions of justice in opposition (each in his own way) to the "conventionalism" of Protagoras, which viewed justice as being solely "by convention" (or by *nomos*). For Aristotle, according to Keyt, political naturalism consists in the belief that there exists an ideal constitution (i.e., one which exists "by nature") which is truly just and thus a standard by means of which to evaluate all other constitutions and laws (15-16, 144-146, 170-172, 186-187, 207-208). Keyt is all too accurate when he points out that Aristotle's remarks about the *nomos-thesis* antithesis are "scattered around" (1). In Aristotle's case, such scattered remarks predominate in the first book of the

Politics (wherein he considers natural slavery and natural limits upon acquisition) and in a single rather enigmatic chapter in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, namely EN 5.7. In the *Politics* Aristotle applies the *nomos-phusis* distinction *only once* to constitutions, when he parenthetically notes that tyranny and the other deviant constitutions are contrary to nature (*para phusin* [3.17.1287b37-39]). That Aristotle in the *Politics* never refers to a constitution as being in accord with nature and that the concept of nature is at best used peripherally outside of the first book of the *Politics* seem to undermine at least the emphasis that Keyt places upon nature in understanding Aristotle's political philosophy. [[5]] Clearly Aristotle is aware of the 5th century debate about nature and convention that one finds in say Sophocles' *Antigone* or Thucydides' Melian dialogue; but it seems anachronistic to think that that debate serves as the foundation of his own 4th century political philosophy.

A third and final claim that runs through several of the previously unpublished chapters is Keyt's belief "that Aristotle's political philosophy, once shorn of some excrescences that are inconsistent with its basic principles, is easily updateable to the twenty-first century" (ix). The chapters "Aristotle and the Joy of Working" and "Aristotle contra Aristotle" critique first Aristotle's exclusion of artisans from his ideal constitution and secondly his account of natural slavery and the exclusion of women from political participation. The former chapter claims that some forms of artisan work involve deliberative reasoning that Aristotle should have recognized as consistent with the account of good human functioning in EN 1.7 and thus worthy of a claim of active citizenship even in the ideal constitution. The latter chapter analyses what Keyt takes to be the inconsistencies in his account of natural slavery and the subordination of women. Although Keyt acknowledges the complexity of these topics—and concedes that the issue of Aristotle's treatment of women requires a book-length analysis—the final chapter's six page length is not the most robust defense Aristotle has ever received. Keyt thinks that Aristotle is very good at articulating the basic principles of his practical philosophy (e.g. his account of the human good or political naturalism) but far less good at applying them. Thus, Keyt defends Aristotle's political philosophy by claiming that his treatment of the *banausoi*, slaves, and women is inconsistent with the general principles of his own philosophy. Keyt's rehabilitation of Aristotle's illiberal political claims is unlikely to sway those who reject the Stagirite's aristocratic sentiments (although his analysis of the worker question is far more detailed and persuasive than his treatments of the slavery and women questions).

However much I disagree with Keyt's interpretation of Aristotle's alleged "natural political justice" or think his analytical reconstruction requires contextualization, many of these chapters remain important contributions that scholars of ancient philosophy will need to challenge and engage. Scholars should be grateful to Peeters for bringing these pieces, along with the previously unpublished contributions, together in one place.

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Notes

[[1]] Keyt omits republication of his seminal "Aristotle's theory of distributive justice," *Topoi* 4 (1985): 23-45. Parts of its analysis appear in the chapter "Aristotle's Political Philosophy."

[[2]] Keyt's exegesis of "the three theses" of *Politics* I.2 (that the polis is natural, that humans are political animals, and that the polis is prior to its individuals) may be guilty of just such a problem. *Politics* I.1 1252a17-23 (a text which Keyt never analyzes) claims that the investigation of the parts of the city in I.2 is intended to resolve the problem of differentiating kinds of ruling, not that it is supposed to establish a doctrine of "political naturalism."

[[3]] Keyt offers a similar description of how this methodology works in the case of reading Plato in his chapter on justice in the *Republic* (22). Keyt elaborates upon this interpretive methodology in S. Marc Cohen and D. Keyt, "Analysing Plato's Arguments: Plato and Platonism," in J.C. Klagge and N. D. Smith, eds., *Methods of Interpreting Plato* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 173-200.

[[4]] Keyt's interpretive methodology hardly originated in a vacuum, and one can certainly detect the influence of scholars such as Gregory Vlastos and G.E.L. Owen on his approach. Nonetheless, Keyt remains the first scholar to apply rigorously such a methodology to the study of Aristotle's *Politics*.

[[5]] The latter is a point made long ago by M. Schofield, "Philosophy and Ideology in Aristotle's Theory of Slavery," in G. Patzig, ed., *Aristoteles' "Politik"* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), pp. 1-31. Keyt adduces numerous passages from the *Politics* to ground what he calls a "positive principle," which links the just and the natural, and a "negative principle" which links the unjust and the unnatural (144-146). Several of the passages he adduces report endoxa which it is unclear whether Aristotle endorses, viz. that some people believe it is contrary to nature to be a master or king over others (1.3.1253b20-23, 1.5.1254a17-20, 3.1.1287a9-18). Several of the passages report Aristotle's own position, viz. that slavery is just for natural slaves (1.5.1255a1-3), that it is just to distinguish ruler and ruled in the best constitution on the basis of a natural characteristic, viz. age (7.9.1329a13-17), and that unlimited acquisition is unnatural and unjust (1.10.1258a40-b2). EN 5.7.1135a5 asserts that there is "one constitution which is best by nature everywhere"; it goes beyond my review to engage in debate over the meaning of that line, but it is telling that its seven words is the only text in Aristotle's corpus which ascribes anything like "natural justice" to a form of constitution.