



The Owl of Athena

CONTRATYRANNOS

The Natural Law Theory of Human Progress Website

EXCURSUS #24

One of a series of monographs that expands the discussion of important topics examined in *The Natural State of Medical Practice*.

MAN IS NOT A SOCIAL ANIMAL¹

ἐκ τούτων οὖν φανερόν ὅτι τῶν φύσει ἢ πόλις ἐστὶ,
καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει **πολιτικὸν ζῷον**, καὶ ὁ ἄπολις
διὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τύχην ἤτοι φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἢ κρείττων
ἢ ἄνθρωπος.
Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a

“Every family is ruled by the eldest, and therefore in the colonies of the family the kingly form of government prevailed because they were of the same blood. As Homer says: "Each one gives law to his children and to his wives." For they lived dispersedly, as was the manner in ancient times. Wherefore men say that the Gods have a king, because they themselves either are or were in ancient times under the rule of a king. For they imagine, not only the forms of the Gods, but their ways of life to be like their own. When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best. **Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity;** he is like the "Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one " whom Homer denounces - the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts.”²

¹ Supporting documentation for arguments presented herein are found in the four volumes of *The Natural State of Medical Practice*, published by Liberty Hill Press:

Vol. 1 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: An Isagorical Theory of Human Progress*

Vol. 2 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: Hippocratic Evidence*

Vol. 3 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: Escape from Egalitarianism*

Vol. 4 – *The Natural States of Medical Practice: Implications*

More information also is available on the contratyrannos.com website.

² This is a compacted form of Aristotle’s text from his *Politics*, 1253a, as translated by Benjamin Jowett.

Abstract: Aristotle’s statement on man as a πολιτικὸν ζῶον is popularly translated as “social animal.” A review of human socialization in prehistorical and historical times, however, does not support that interpretation. This can be attributed to autocratic morality that has governed the unprivileged populations of society since mankind’s first societies by restricting their freedom of conscience and choice, *i.e.*, their natural rights. Natural law morality, in contrast, resides in every individual’s conscience, protects natural rights, and promotes sociability by protecting us from each other. In the West, where natural rights have obtained a degree of legislative protection since the Protestant Reformation, the correlation between natural law morality and the social beneficence of human progress has been dramatically revealed. The argument proposed in this monograph, therefore, is that man may not be a particularly social animal, but given the opportunity he is a moral one.

The nature of man has long been a subject for introspection. In Aristotle’s *Politics*, the phrase πολιτικὸν ζῶον (*politikon zoon*) is translated by Benjamin Jowett as “man is by nature a political animal,” and the popular understanding of the phrase in sociological terms is “man is a social animal.”³ But from both dictionary definition and the context provided above, πολιτικὸν ζῶον refers to man properly being a law-abiding animal, for Aristotle’s sequence of family to tribe to self-sufficient tribal partnerships reveals a natural evolution and desired need for leadership and regulation in functioning of a society.⁴ Although the ultimate goal for citizens of an ideal city-state should be a good and happy life, for this to occur he identifies the importance of regulation and the absence of chaos in social interactions to achieve it.

But does social regulation contribute to sociability? The intent of this monograph is to show that Aristotle’s argued natural need and desire for social regulation is an insufficient description for the nature of man.

The prehistorical record provides much evidence that human societies remained small and clannish for tens of thousands of years despite evidence that human congregation was considered important under certain circumstances, such as a celebration or a religious/mystical rite. Paleolithic dwellings, although temporary or seasonal, were common. This was so in warm and cold regions, in glacial times and in the tropics, although humans preferred a warmer climate because nomadic hunter-gatherer societies had longer periods during which to move about.

It is frequently stated that with the end of the Late Glacial Period (*ca.* 10th millennium BC) and an improved climate, mankind adopted cultivation of crops. The newly sedentary man then promptly proceeded to form early cities to finally fulfill his destiny. This is incorrect. There were, indeed, a few 8th millennium BC “cities” such as Catalhoyuk, Jericho, and Gobekli

³ Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893): *The Politics of Aristotle*, Oxford, 1885.

⁴ See the definition of πολιτικός in the Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon, 7th rev. ed., 1889.

Tepe. But the latter was primarily a ceremonial center, Jericho fluctuated in population (sometimes as low as two hundred) and was abandoned after a few centuries, and even Catalhoyuk, over 2,000 years, was subdivided into neighborhoods probably based on kinship identity and remained primarily a hunter-gatherer society. Even the later cities of the eastern European Cucuteni-Trypillian culture (*ca.* 4000 BC, populations 10,000-30,000) were visited intermittently, a point proven by their virtual absence of commercial development and a physical separation of individual domiciles that permitted self-sufficient food production. And as recently as 2500 BC, the town of Durrington Walls, the only town in the British Isles with a population of 2,000, existed only to erect another monument near Stonehenge and lasted for less than a century. In the Orkney Islands north of Scotland the total human population about 3000 BC may have reached 6,000, but its dispersion of family units tended to be peripheral on each island with some distance between each settlement. China's earliest city is stated to be Erlitou, population 3,000 about 2,000 BC. In ancient Japan, the Jomon hunter-gatherer culture of 3000 BC had a total population estimated at 260,000, yet the largest and probably permanent settlement, Sannai Maruyama, held no more than 500 people, with most of the culture living in clusters of five or six pit-houses, each of which housed about five individuals.⁵ Throughout the entire area of the British Isles, 120,000 square miles, and for thousands of years up to the end of the Bronze Age (2000 BC), only two or three settlements have been described that can be considered small villages, a pattern found throughout northern and southeastern Europe for the same periods. To the argument that settlements remained small because technological immaturity could not support large ones, in some areas of England larger farmed acreage was not consistently associated with larger settlements.⁶

Thus, early humans were familiar with communal gatherings and transient domiciles for thousands of years but purposely declined to make them permanent. Despite the disappearance of glaciers, crowds were tolerated only temporarily and only when deemed necessary. Humans, from their first appearance, seemed to purposely spread in small bands and tribes to encompass the globe.

The primary reason for this could not have been to seek a more friendly physical environment. Potential sedentary sites were plentiful, given the population at the time. An estimate of global arable land (*i.e.*, readily cultivatable) is 10% of the earth's land area, or over five billion acres. The average global human population from 100,000 to 10,000 BC has been estimated at one million, indicating that there was approximately one person per 5,000 acres (eight square miles), and by 10,000 BC global dispersion had been completed but for some scattered oceanic islands.

The only reasonable explanation for this dispersion of kinship units was to avoid proximity of other tribes and clans. If humans delighted in one another's company, the earliest humans should have remained clustered in the region of north Africa and the Near East, then promptly becoming agricultural and organizing into expanding city-states that later partnered to extend a common frontier. Quite the opposite occurred. It is proposed herein that it is fear of being controlled by others (*i.e.*, loss of freedom) and threat of aggrandizement by other tribes that prompted tribal dispersion and migration.

⁵ See Koyama, S., *Prehistoric Japanese Populations: A Subsistence-Demographic Approach*, Senri Ethnological Studies, 4:187-198, 1992.

⁶ For much information in this paragraph see: Rathbone, S., *A Consideration of Villages in Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain and Ireland*, in *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 79:39-60, 2013.

It is notable that the dispersion of people in biblical history is attributed to God's intercession by inducing various languages in response building the Tower of Babel, for, if all spoke the same language, "now there would be nothing they might not try to do" (*Genesis* 11:6). What better way to promote a species' survival than to instill a reason to decentralize and let the individual units contend with the local environmental threats rather than with each other? The amanuensis of *Genesis* got the message.

But how could intertribal threats be managed? This is an important question because human progress on any scale would have been impossible in a world where there was no communication between small groups that viewed other groups as enemies. In those small groupings there surely were many discoveries and inventions that would have benefitted the species, but they would have been for local use or to increase local power, thus denying that knowledge to competing tribes, and ultimately that knowledge was lost. This would have been hastened by life expectancies approximating thirty years and children who rarely knew their grandparents.

Sometimes tribes could agree to embrace a common interest such as a defined border that would benefit both parties and avoid violence. Until recently this was commonly the situation with Australian aborigines. And clans could evolve over larger areas if there were to appear a familial leadership around which various tribes could agree to foster a common interest, the North American Iroquois Confederacy being an example. Nevertheless, tribal interests remained dominant, with the larger partnerships responsible for offensive and defensive actions. And joining a locus of increasing power would naturally appeal to smaller groups threatened with extinction by other groups. But individual freedom was not among the benefits. There was no power distribution for the unprivileged, or majority, members of tribes. The effect was to prevent or discourage novelty, and this in turn prevented progress. A measure of progress in North America during its early human habitation is readily displayed in the Figure. Over 14,000 years, and despite the occasional copper relic, garden of corn, and imported parrot from Mexico, progress, defined as "for a society, a social concept based on the awareness of improvability of the human condition; for the individual, a path with a goal of self-betterment," did not exist. Things could get bigger but not better. The enforced egalitarianism of tribe reigned, population centers remained essentially ceremonial, and tribal distinctions persisted.

It was commercial development that would weaken the hold of kinship. If excess of a particular product could be bartered as a means for improving the human condition, the desire for self-betterment under safe circumstances trumped the security of the kinship. A sedentary population could then enlist others to join in exploiting opportunity. New allegiances replaced traditional ones. And so, formed initially by partnering of settled agricultural interests, local markets evolved into marketing villages. Then, as concluded by Aristotle, the coalescing of the latter ultimately led to population centers that managed commerce and storage of products produced in peripheral villages. Distant trade developed. The city-state was born. The partnerships fostered by mutual self-interest finally overcame the suspicion of one's fellow man.

From the preceding there had been three obstacles preventing human progress. (1) Small tribes and clans had insufficient members to permit exercise of personal curiosity and motivation for self-betterment. The short life expectancies offered few years for mature wisdom to become generational. Specialization in crafts and trades could not develop as there was neither time nor



Figure: From the Museum of the American Indian in New York City: (Left) Two Clovis projectile points from Washington county, New York, dated to about 10,000 BC. Made from knapped flint, it is proposed that the technology spread across North America in but two or three centuries. (Right) A scepter of the Mississippian culture found in Le Flore county, Oklahoma, made from knapped flint about 1200 AD. In a little more than 11,000 years technological advances permitted things to get bigger but not better. Photographs by the author.

persons that could be spared to invent and provide a service and to attempt to improve it. (2) It has been shown that the egalitarianism of the tribe, along with the importance of tribal tradition, is very much autocratic, whether leadership is held by the strongest, the oldest, or shared. There are strict rules of conduct, for the social orientation is survival and benefit of the tribe. Duties were assigned. Freedom of expression would have been considered foolish and dangerous as survival of the kinship preempted individuality. (3) The lack of intertribal sociability discouraged leaving the egalitarian tribe, for survival after leaving the tribe was unlikely unless to join another tribe.

The solution required three remedies: (1) larger communities, (2) focus on self-betterment rather than betterment of the tribe or the powerful, and (3) security by consensus rather than imposition.

When the opportunity came to leave the tribe without undue risk, people left it readily. That is to say, their previous tribal affinity can be attributed not to social affinity and an appreciation of belonging but to fear of leaving. There were, of course, individual friendships, helpful small groupings, and familial love, but the overriding purpose for an individual's tribal existence was survival of the kinship unit. Now, however, within the larger marketing populations their ability to survive, whether as an individual or a family, was much less an issue. When opportunity knocked they gladly took advantage of it, not so much because they liked the new environment but because they disliked the former one. They didn't join the new commercial partnerships because they sought sociability. Their deficiency in sociability was

probably the same whether in tribe or community, but, if security was not an issue, it was preferable to partner voluntarily as a community in anticipation of future beneficence than to stay a cipher in the tribe.

The conclusion is that history shows that man is not a particularly social animal at all. From bacteria to geese and buffalo, aggregation of a species is commonplace. This is not the case with mankind. But the natural suspicion of man that is the consequence of ignorance and experience with antagonistic strangers and groups can be allayed. What is that remedy?

The answer is now known: natural rights protection by natural law.⁷ Using medicine as a gauge of a good (a good that would later encompass a longer life expectancy), it had transient historical expression in 3000-2000 BC in several primary city-states of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, and a more advanced and durable but still transient expression in 5th C BC Hippocratic Greece. Their venerated medical works were, respectively, *Treatise on Medical Diagnosis and Prognosis*, the *Ebers Papyrus*, the *Charaka Samhita*, the *Huang Ti Nei Ching Su Wen*, and the *Hippocratic Corpus*, and there is no question as to the ancient origins of their wisdom, probably during early urbanization of primary city-states. The sociologist's term for the commercialization phase of early urbanization is "settlement hierarchy," during which commercial development is naturally organized by a heterarchy of commercial interests prior to the rise of autocratic political power. It was not recognition of natural law by a governing autocracy that prompted nascent human progress in medicine to appear in those five civilizations. It was, instead, innate natural law emerging on its own as individuals leaving a kinship had the relative freedom to consult their individual consciences on their social interactions rather than being guided by the autocratic morality that unfortunately would ensue.

But the true magnitude of the importance of natural rights and natural law has been on display only for the past three centuries. Following the 16th C Protestant Reformation in the West, realization of the equality of leader and the led before God prompted 17th C democratic demands, 18th C legislation of natural rights, 19th C flourishing in the sciences, and their 20th C globalization.⁸ In the field of medicine, the proof is the tripling of life expectancy over the past two centuries that we now enjoy.

Only when natural law is obeyed can man be considered a social animal. It is not enough to be virtuous within one's clan and murderous to another. Aristotle himself was living in a society that, unwittingly, was obeying natural law to a limited extent. He and his privileged friends and colleagues had the freedom to express their opinions. Their freedoms were not enjoined even when they differed on many issues. This was because ancient Greek city-states tolerated within limits the usefulness of individual responsibility for self-betterment rather than merely bettering the few and the powerful as long as the city-state was a beneficiary.⁹ But there were profound limits on that freedom as demonstrated by the death of Socrates.

⁷ See Excursus 6, *Natural Law, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule Compared*, in vol. 4 of *The Natural State of Medical Practice*. The equating of natural law with our conscience and with the *Ten Commandments* is sanctioned by Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Pope Francis.

⁸ Volume 1 of *The Natural State of Medical Practice* describes the emergence of the released ingenuity of the common man and woman and the transient medical profession that thereby ensued in the early development of these five civilizations as well as the remarkable medical progress following the Protestant Reformation in the West that we enjoy today. Its argument is based on the repeated discovery or invention of the obvious and on the critical role of natural law in permitting the common man and woman to improve and propagate its beneficence.

⁹ For early recognition of this seldom-mentioned dark side of Athenian "democracy" see: Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to That of the Moderns* [De la Liberte des Anciene Comparee a Celle

Whether man is patently social in autocratic societies and autocratic morality is uncertain because we do not know the effects of enforced adaptations and restrictions on the consciences of their unprivileged populations, although we have seen the monstrous tragedies that can result. Aristotle made a generalization that avoids such distinctions. He simply concluded that a person who preferred no regulation was essentially an enemy because that person was inclined to harm the city-state. This is not logical, however, for such a person is unlikely to form his own society. The truly antisocial person might be unpleasant to be around and might on occasion pose a personal danger, but society as a whole is unlikely to be affected (although in an age of mass destruction this may no longer be valid). The real enemy was another society whose autocratic leaders disobeyed natural law and threatened, for whatever reason, his city-state's existence.

And from its earliest societies, humanity has suffered autocratic governance. It is only since the Protestant Reformation that we now can clearly see what was hinted at in mankind's early history: a natural law-based society protects the freedom for man to display his basic nature, ingenuity, and motivation. Individuals are free to act in their own self-interest and, by partnering rather than overpowering, not interfering with the self-interest of others. One can therefore consider Aristotle's position on the nature of man in the evolution of human society as displaying a vague appreciation of the existence of natural law. He was almost there in identifying an innate law-abiding sense in mankind, but he stops short of characterizing it, and that is critical.

As discussed elsewhere, natural law is equated with our conscience, is most succinctly stated in the *Ten Commandments* of the ancient Hebrews, and is "written on the heart" of every person.¹⁰ Human progress is inevitable if all parties agree to obey natural law and thereby protect our natural rights. Thus, man may not be a particularly social or political animal, but, even better, given the opportunity he is a moral one.

des Modernes], a speech given in Paris, 1819. Constant was of Huguenot descent and received his education in part from the University of Edinburgh.

¹⁰ *Deuteronomy* 30:14 – "The word is very near thee, in thy mouth, and in thine heart, and in thine hands to do it" (Brenton's *Septuagint* translation); *Romans* 2:15 – "which shows the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness,". And see Excursus 16, *Naming Our Civilization*, in vol. 4 of *The Natural State of Medical Practice*.