Introduction

The Historical Contest of Nature and Reason

Political life has always needed to justify itself, not simply by giving reasons that particular laws and institutions are worth following, but by giving reasons other than force for people to follow law and to live within political institutions at all. Since Thrasymachus's charge that mastery over others is better than the communal life of equals, philosophers have responded with arguments that affirm that community contributes to human thriving or security. Those efforts at justification have resorted to varying configurations of nature and reason to give legitimacy to politics, which lead to the various conceptions of political life that we have inherited from the received readings of the ancients and from modern social contract theory. These accounts that rely on oppositional or hierarchical configurations of nature to reason, broadly construed as convention, law, or craft, result, I maintain, in communities that understand themselves in terms of what they exclude.

Political philosophers before and after Aristotle have opposed or subordinated nature to reason by making nature into the material that reason or soul forms and uses. Aristotle himself was concerned that nature was identified with primary instincts and primitive impulses.[1] In Plato's *Laws*, nature is only fundamental if and when it is related to soul or mind. Plato has the Athenian Stranger describe the soul as a force external to nature, in effect robbing nature of any ground of its own.[2] Many centuries after Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas explains nature as a ground that can be understood because a being outside of nature has planted

[1] Ernest Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), xlvii.
[2] Plato, *Laws* 899b4–7, 900c2.

reason within us.[3] Because both nature and reason are created by this Supreme Being, there is a symmetry between them that permits us to glean from nature a model for living.[4] Hume challenges such a position by denying any passage between what is natural and what is artificial (including human action) and between the laws of one part of nature and another.[5]

Modern social contract theorists argue that nature is given and must be manipulated, organized, and controlled so that social life – life among other people – might be stabilized. Because the order of the cosmos must be interpreted as imposed on political life, and human beings differ in their interpretations of that order, and because human reason appears to compromise the naturalness of political life, modern social contract theory finds nature an inadequate ground. Social contract theory turns instead to human reason and will as more adequate grounds for political life. Hobbes maintains that community cannot come about naturally, that is, without human design, because though we may want community by nature we are not fit for it.[6] As Hobbes explains, the law of nature is the dictates of right reason, but natural right or anything that might arise from nature is not formed by reason but discovered by it. Because the fundamental rule of nature is self-preservation, and each person determines the means and ends of self-preservation individually, natural right cannot be known by each, which means that natural right in the state of nature is akin to no right at all. We can only share in a common judgment over what we commonly create from human artifice. Hobbes maintains that we can only reach agreement through the human formation of common power, which is to say, the sovereign.

Nature cannot legitimate political life for Rousseau because the right of the strongest, which is the only right of nature, cannot be a political right – submission to this right is an act of necessity, not of will. Like Hobbes, Rousseau agrees that legitimate right can only follow from legitimate society. Rousseau opposes reason to nature and establishes the legitimacy of will against the illegitimacy of force. In so doing, he

[3] Aquinas and Alfred J. Freddoso, *Treatise on Law: The Complete Text* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2009).

[4] See Jacques Maritain's rehearsal of Aquinas in *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Gordian Press, 1943) and Martha Craven Nussbaum's consideration of both in *De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 168–9.

[5] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Parts II and VII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, first printed 1779).

[6] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* I.2, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

maintains that there is a pre-political life from which we propel ourselves into political life. Rousseau implies that some people, by failing to will, fail to enter legitimate society and remain in a state of war with it.

As different as these theorists from Plato to Rousseau are, they agree that nature cannot be otherwise than it is. For social contract theory, this is because nature is what is original and this originality gives it authority. For the Plato of the *Laws* and for Aquinas, it is because nature is sanctioned by soul or a creator God. For Aquinas, our knowledge of natural law follows from our affinity with God, who plants knowledge of his creation in us to incline us to the natural law. For social contract theorists and for Hume, nature offers us no direct knowledge of itself and so recourse to it is difficult. The products of reason, by contrast, can be otherwise than they are in part because they are not original. Hence, the things of reason – the *polis* among them – are conventional. This opposition between nature and reason forces us to choose between a metaphysical justification for community – that it ought to exist and have authority over its citizens (the argument from nature) – and a justification from human will that grants a significant and continued role for human responsibility within the community (the argument from reason). The result of this opposition between nature and reason shows nature either to be a mere servant of reason (for example, in the form of God) or to require repression by reason for there to be community (as in Hobbes and, later, Freud).[7] As the servant of reason, nature loses its power as ground because it is dependent on an external and transcendent source. Yet as directly opposed to reason, nature is denied the role of ground of the *polis* because it is exactly what must be overcome for there to be community.

The Resources of Aristotle's *Politics*

In his famous claim that the political community is natural, Aristotle enables the thinking of the unity of nature and reason and, as a consequence, casts the human as political by nature. In so doing, Aristotle implies that the political community is open to all human beings. The received reading of Aristotle's *Politics* espouses the view that political life is made possible only on the basis of drawing a distinction between those who meet the definition of the human and those who do not, resulting

[7] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005, first published 1930).

in an original exclusion of some pre-political or apolitical element (the household, slaves, and women). But this reading eclipses the pertinence of Aristotle's political theory for our time, in which equality and universality are at least the announced principles of political life.[8] Critics of humanism are right to take issue with this interpretation of Aristotle, which draws him much closer to social contract theory insofar as it supposes that there is some more natural life that must be overcome to accomplish the freedom and equality that define political life.

Readings that result in opposing nature to reason in Aristotle occlude the important contribution Aristotle makes not only to the history of political thought but also to contemporary concerns prompted by the figure of the stateless and the refugee.[9] In the twentieth century, the stateless and the refugee appeared as those with no recourse to citizen rights because no government would recognize them. Denied citizen rights, they seemed unable to appeal to human rights, because even these supposedly universal rights require a sovereign power willing to enforce such rights and recognize these persons. Contemporary political theorists have maintained that this situation is the logical consequence of the nation-state, which, following social contract theory, defines itself in terms of what it excludes. Such exclusions are formed around the opposition between nature and reason where political life is a rational overcoming of natural life.

Remarkably, some contemporary readers of Aristotle take a Lockean tack, bemoaning Aristotle's lack of a theory of universal human nature because it means Aristotle lacks a state of nature, thus no original act of appropriation of property is possible and thus no natural rights ensue.[10]

[8] Jill Frank diagnoses this same problem of reading nature in Aristotle's practical work in terms of aligning nature with necessity in "Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature," *American Political Science Review* 98 (2004): 91–104, and *Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 17–53. While Frank acknowledges that nature must be understood as an internal principle of movement, she argues that nature should be considered between accident and necessity and can finally be recognized only in its activity. For the view that nature is necessity in Aristotle's practical work, see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Judith A. Swanson, "Aristotle on Nature, Human Nature, and Justice," in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 225–47.

[9] See Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson, (Boston, MA and London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 110–19; and Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees," trans. Michael Rocke, *Symposium* 49 (1995): 114–19.

[10] Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's* Politics*: Living Well and Living Together* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 29.

This position ignores the profound problems with positing a state of nature within which rational beings give rise to political life that Carole Pateman so carefully analyzes in *The Sexual Contract*. The law of reason enables those who have reason in the state of nature to work on their world to make what is naturally unbounded their own and to determine for themselves how best to acquire and preserve their property so as to preserve themselves. By defining reason in terms of the capacity to appropriate land by giving it a boundary, self-preservation becomes the privilege of those capable of bordering the land to make it their own, and by extension, capable of giving borders to themselves because labor and property are extensions of the person. Those who are not so privileged, incapable of determining the line between themselves and others by virtue of lacking reason, require this work of preservation be done for them so that they may be preserved. This division between those who are judged capable of self-preservation based on their ability to manipulate the state of nature and so to leave it and those who cannot manage nature and so cannot leave that state results in a fundamentally exclusive form of political life. On these terms, Locke is exemplary of conceptions of political life that are exclusionary precisely because of the way they configure reason in relation to nature.

There appear to be few or no historical resources for developing a conception of political community that is not based on the logic of exclusion. Aristotle's political theory as a potential resource for casting a more effective relation of nature to reason in order to escape the logic of exclusion has been obscured by both his critics and friends whose reading of nature in the *Politics* has made Aristotle a part of the problem rather than a solution to it. Fred D. Miller, Jr., for example, in an effort to renew interest in Aristotelian political theory, maintains that the *polis* is indeed natural, but that nature must be understood teleologically.[11] Miller thereby turns the *polis* into an instrument for the fulfillment of the human being, resulting in a view of political life that seems always subordinate to individual ends. On the other hand, scholars such as David Keyt and Jonathan Barnes argue respectively that Aristotle's claim that the *polis* is natural is either incoherent or totalitarian.[12] These thinkers

[11] Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Rights and Justice in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[12] David Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle's Politics," in David Keyt and Fred D. Miller, Jr., eds. *A Companion to Aristotle's* Politics (Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 118–41; Jonathan Barnes, "Aristotle and Political Liberty," in *Aristoteles'* Politik: *Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. G. Patzig (Götingen: Van der Hoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), 249–63.

reject the interpretation that Aristotle's claim that the *polis* is natural can best be understood according to the interpretation of nature whereby nature is what has the source within itself to achieve its end. The argument of these thinkers is that this reading does not work because the *polis* has no nature of its own.

This book returns to this debate over what nature means in Aristotle's *Politics* and defends the claim that the internal cause interpretation is the best way to read nature. This interpretation of nature shows Aristotle's *Politics* to be the resource that it is for thinking about political life beyond the opposition or hierarchy of nature and reason. I argue that Aristotle enables us to justify political life with an appeal to nature without resorting to exclusionary thinking. Aristotle's notion of nature is not akin to pre-political or merely material life that must be overcome, but is instead joined to the work of reason in the human being and the *polis*. As the internal cause of all natural things, the nature of a thing is what motivates it from within to fulfill itself. Aristotle can say that the nature of the human being is reason because reason forms us as human beings to achieve our end from within ourselves. This "within ourselves" is crucial for understanding that nature and reason are coeval in the human and in the *polis*. Neither nature nor reason precedes the other and so nature is not overcome or ruled by reason in a way that would lead to the exclusion of those "more natural" elements for the sake of rational political life. The *polis* can be read as having an internal source from within itself that drives it toward its fulfillment, the end of living well. Following this account of nature, I maintain that the *polis* does have a nature of its own when we conceive of the *polis*, as Aristotle does, in terms of its activity. What follows from this reading is a political community always at work on itself, always concerned with itself, always putting the achievement of its end at the center of its pursuits. I argue that the convergence of political activity with human activity does not prioritize one over the other, but shows them both (human beings and political communities) to fulfill themselves in the same activity.

This reading of Aristotle challenges the claim of those who would argue that the history of political philosophy in toto requires a founding exclusion and that it offers an articulation of the relation between nature and reason that does not result in an exclusionary conception of political community. Giorgio Agamben articulates exclusion in political life in terms of the problem of the logic of the sovereign, a logic, he argues, that is based on the included exclusion of *zoē*, bare life,

from politics for the sake of *bios*, the good life.[13] Yet Aristotle's account of the human as political, based on the capacity for *logos*, denies that any human life can be reduced to mere *zoē*. His definition of the citizen as the one who, in *logos*, takes up the question of how to live well, shows that all human beings, as they are the beings who consider what it means to live well, are included in political life. Certainly, persons are excluded, but this is precisely where politics contests that exclusion in its continued concern for preserving the *polis* to accomplish its end. I make this argument through a study of *Politics* I.2 and III.1–4, where Aristotle articulates the political nature of the human and the definition of the city and the citizen. Aristotle aims to replace despotism (the rule of the master) with political rule (the rule of whoever makes the claim to be included). Such a replacement requires that every part have a stake in rule. I show through an examination of *Politics* IV and V how Aristotle aims to include as many as possible in political life in order to achieve the stability of political life.

These concerns can be addressed through the development of a notion of nature as found in Aristotle that does not set the human being outside of nature just by being rational nor the *polis* outside of nature just because it is formed in the rational activity of citizens. Nature, *physis*, in Aristotle is not necessity, but a principle of movement from an *archē*, a principle or source, within a thing to achieve an end from within the thing itself. So the ground of the *polis* is internal to it, which makes it a continued concern and not a finished justification. In the same way that having and living according to *logos* is the natural fulfillment of what it means to be human, the living well of the community is its natural fulfillment as well as the fulfillment of human beings.

Aristotle neither opposes nature to reason nor privileges one over the other in the realm of political and ethical life. Defined as the internal source of movement, nature can have the authority to ground without being merely "the way things are."[14] Such a view of nature illuminates how reason can be at work in human existence and political life without

[13] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–11.

[14] *Contra* Bernard Williams, who finds in Aristotle's account of nature an account external to human judgment and therefore not capable of serving as an ethical ground in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 52, and "Hylomorphism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1986): 189–99. Cf. Nussbaum's critique of Williams, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, eds. J. E. J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131.

making these things artificial. Nature is not necessity and reason is not convention for Aristotle, and therefore the *polis* can change and grow while continuing to move toward an aim set by those who comprise it. Nature serves as a ground or justification, but not in opposition to what is made by human reason. In this way, the *polis* is grounded, but internally so, such that the ground of the *polis* is a continued concern for it, a situation that makes political life dynamic rather than static.

In this book, I have three aims. First, I show how the internal cause interpretation of *physis* renders coherent Aristotle's account of political life in the *Politics*. Second, I read the *Politics* with a commitment to Aristotelian interpretations of the individual, of reason, of political life, and of nature to indicate the originality of Aristotle's political theory unencumbered by modern importations. Third, I offer an alternative in Aristotle's political theory to the conceptions of political life that have been shown to necessitate exclusion.

Difficulties with Reading Aristotle

It must be acknowledged that Aristotle is the thinker who appears to justify natural slavery, exclude women, and limit citizenship to those who have leisure. To many, Aristotle's *Politics* seems like a collection of specific recommendations for a legislator that does not appear to fit together to make a philosophical argument or support a philosophical claim. The text seems to contradict itself and its accompanying text, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, at important points. Most importantly, Aristotle claims in the *Politics* that human beings are by nature political, but then in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that ultimately the best life for human beings is philosophical.

Aristotle himself presents arguments and evidence against these positions with which he is often saddled. He argues that we cannot judge someone by the body or the soul.[15] He explains that bloodlines are insufficient criteria for determining citizenship. He encourages those communities that wish to be stable to include all the parts that contribute to the end of the *polis*, even the part that contributes only number, the part that Jacques Rancière dubs the "part that has no part."[16] In *Politics* VII, he makes a case for political life being as worthy a candidate for the best life as philosophical life. Anyone who wants to understand

[15] *Pol.* 1255a1.
[16] Jacques Rancière, *Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Aristotle's political philosophy is faced with the task of justifying these conflicting positions. A careful reader, as I hope to be in what follows, will avoid hasty conclusions or straw-man characterizations. Such a reading requires paying attention to the context of the argument, including the broader context that allows us to situate Aristotle's concerns in terms of the questions and sophistic threats to political life posed by Antiphon and Thrasymachus that both Plato and Aristotle address. What Aristotle offers is a defense of political life and within that defense an account of what political life is that challenges the views of his contemporaries. One would be wise then to distinguish between Athenian and Greek city-state politics as they occurred and as they get taken up as *endoxa* in Aristotle's account and, on the other hand, Aristotle's view of what politics should be and what it can be.

My argument shows how Aristotle's view of the human as natural and rational defines being human in terms of a certain kind of activity rather than a certain kind of body or even soul, both of which human beings have, though neither of which we can use to judge the essence of another, as Aristotle explains in *Politics* I.4.[17] If the activity of a being makes it what it is, then deliberating, acting according to *logos*, is what shows a being to be human. It is true that Aristotle says that the male is superior to the female[18] and that slaves are those who do not deliberate.[19] We can assume from the definition of the human as rational that this means that the free man is more rational, and hence, more human, than the woman or the slave, whose being appears to be more closely associated with their bodies. Yet as Aristotle then says, we cannot judge someone by the body, but only by what someone does, an argument that Aristotle then takes over to his definition of the citizen in *Politics* III.1. I address Aristotle's treatment of slaves and women in the final chapter. By working through Aristotle's arguments about slaves and women in conjunction with the definition of nature found in *Physics* II.1 and by taking seriously the idea that a thing is determined in the activity that fulfills its being, we can challenge the view that Aristotle's political theory requires gender and racial subordination. I argue that for Aristotle, proximity to nature for the human being is proximity to reason.

Perhaps it is not so obvious that the project of renaturalization (as Hasana Sharp calls her own effort to reinvigorate the conceptual force

[17] *Pol.* 1254b32–1255a1.
[18] *Pol.*1254b13–14.
[19] *Pol.* 1254b22–23.

of nature for thinking about liberatory politics through her work on Spinoza) is the best approach given the discriminatory role nature has played in the history of political thought, particularly as noted by critical race and feminist theory.[20] Constructions of race in terms of a shared nature unified the Germans as a race against their enemies at the turn of the eighteenth century even as the idea of the naturalness of race unified the international aristocracy beginning in France against the lower classes.[21] To justify slavery and colonialism, conceptions of nature drawn from the "science" of phrenology have been used to argue that Asians, Africans, and American Indians were not as evolutionarily developed as Europeans.[22] Feminist theory has long resisted efforts from multiple corners to essentialize women according to various conceptions of nature.[23] What is notable is that the responses to oppressive constructions of nature from Marx to Butler have been to cast off the mantle of nature instead of resisting restrictive articulations that lead to these political exclusions. Yet, as Sharp notes, what those who resist the concept of nature are in fact resisting is the notion that subordination and oppression are natural. What they wish to expose are the historical and violent roots of the oppression that the recourse to nature furthers by covering over the contingency of that oppression.[24] Instead of acknowledging and addressing the historical oppressions that have subordinated women and people of color and the colonized populations of the Global South, defenders of

[20] Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2011).

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Inc.), 162–70.

[22] On France, see Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race and Empire, 1815–1848* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); on Germany, see Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Layater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004). Less than twenty years ago, Richard J. Hernnstein and Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1996), notable for its arguments from nature to explain inequality. Though Stephen Jay Gould's classic *The Mismeasure of Man* was published fifteen years earlier, it can be read as an answer to Hernnstein and Murray (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

[23] See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Diane Fuss examines the debate between those like Monique Wittig and Butler against Luce Irigaray and others who argue for a kind of essentialism in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1989). Jane Wong addresses the debate over essentialism in legal circles in "The Anti-Essentialism vs. Essentialism Debate in Feminist Legal Theory: The Debate and Beyond," *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 5 (1999): 272–96. Charlotte Witt argues for a strategic return to essentialism in *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[24] Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 6.